



Collection FIVE

August, 2011

The April Reader

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Preface:

This issue marks the fifth release of The April Reader. After five successful releases, continuing support from authors and readers, a constant rate of creative works, and an increasing readership, now is the time for this publication to start thinking of the future.

There are many potential areas in which TAR could expand. In order to accomplish this, we will be making use of twitter (@TheAprilReader) in providing links to works and updates regarding releases. Additionally, there will be expanded marketing of TAR across the web. Beside the monthly releases, our other concern is the creation of a special best-of-2011 edition for past works and the implementation of author prizes for future TAR issues.

To help fund prizes and other pursuits, TAR humbly asks our readers to consider donating to the publication. Donations can be made via the PayPal link found on the official TAR website. The financial statements of The April Reader will always be open and published regularly.

To those readers who may still be unfamiliar with the TAR effort, the publication invites you to visit the Afterword found at the end of this release.

Updates:

- Joebob has lost his editor status due to absence
- A pre-reader group has been formed for spell-checking purposes

Our IRC Channel:

Server: irc.freenode.net

Channel: #TAR

Our Distribution Page:

www.theaprilreader.org

Submit your writing, comments, and whatever else to:

theaprilreader@gmail.com

FICTION

Pillage

-Behemoth

Gassy gasps rumbled inside his intestines. Marble counter-tops and steel faucets gleamed under mirrors free of spots. The stall's door didn't even squeak when it opened. Its stainless steel handle and deadbolt were free of rust, dirt, and sweaty smudges of fingerprints.

And no first flush needed. This stall's cleanliness, the absence of marks of others before him, soothed him. The white toilet stood ready. Hastily unbuckled belt, furtively unzipped zipper, pants quickly crumpled down onto the shoes. He squatted. His head bent down to the tile. Soft brown and black diamonds lay in neat patterns against the larger off-white squares.

His struggle began. So often a struggle, with grunts and groans signifying each victory or defeat in the campaign against his troubled digestive tract.

Little bubbles of sweat broke to the surface of his face. Pale knuckles clutched at his pants.

The barely-audible swish of the door announces someone coming in. His torso relaxes, his thighs tighten. A tiny spot of shame blooms in his chest. He is not alone, and they must smell the two pitifully small wet farts he just forced out.

A long, quiet moment passes. He straightens up some on his seat. The silence has a feeling to it. There are no footfalls approaching the urinals. No shuffling pants legs. No trickle of urine splashes against porcelain.

A whisper of sliding metal is punctuated by a quiet click. It sounds like the visitor has locked the bathroom door.

He cocks his head to the side. His bottom lip curls up and his eyebrows press down. Fear changes the lighting. The soft orange hues glow seedy.

Now he hears the distinctive squeak of sneakers on tile. They appear directly in front of his stall, red with black stripes. He leans back to dubiously eye the cross trainers and jeans.

A knock sounds against the door. His belly clenches. His face goes slack. The sound reaches the mind after a long journey through the ears.

"Hi," the voice says.

"Uh."

"I need your phone."

"Uhh?"

"C'mon. I only need it a sec, gimme your phone man," it pleads.

"What?" He yelps. "What the hell do you think you're--"

The bash against the door bursts in the tiny space like a small apocalypse. The door quivers from the blow, and a harsh vibrato hum echoes in the stall. Another slam shakes the frame and side panels. He jerks upright and he almost falls into the water beneath him. His arms swing wildly to catch himself.

"Gimme your phone!" Frustrated and hungry.

"Why are you doing this!?" Howling resentment.

Again the door leaps inward and the sound shatters the air around him.

"Gimme your fucking phone!"

Whimpering, he reaches into a pocket. Wrong pocket, only his wallet and keys. And another crash. He snatches his cell phone out and flings it under the door. It smacks against the wall and lies untouched.

Fists begin drumming along the wall, moving with the feet to the side of the stall.

He presses his hands to his temples and his face scrunches up. A sob and a scream battle inside his chest to escape and come out together.

"Now your wallet," the voice commands over the fists pounding.

His hand pressed to his mouth in horror, he shakes his head repeatedly. The drumming thrums to a crescendo and ends.

"Your wallet, asshole!"

He can see one foot rise this time and knows the kick is coming. The wall booms, the stall rattles. He tightens into a ball, pressing his torso to his knees.

A long pause. The still calm chews on his nerves. He simmers in his own sweat.

The knife leaps in and out of the stall from the gap in between floor and black panel. Before it's even made sense in his mind the steel has slipped through his khakis and into his shin.

"Jesus christ!" He screams as his legs jig to avoid the blade jabbing at his calves.

"Gimme your fucking wallet! Just gimme your money, you dumbfuck!"

"Nooooo!" He cries out as tears cascade down his cheeks.

He lifts his legs higher and the weapon follows in manic lunges upward. Snatching his pants legs up to his thighs, the man digs his wallet out of the back pocket. He hurls it at the feet of his assailant.

The knife is gone.

In the gap he sees a hand reach down to grab the leather. The sneakers disappear.

"Thanks! Have a good one." The voice quips from the front of the restroom.

He hears the lock click back and the door swish open

He looks down. The rim of the toilet is smeared with feces, and he can feel it glazed across his asscheeks. His hands have shit on them, which he had transferred in the struggle to his pants and their pockets. Weeping, he reaches for the toilet paper.

Nil

-Dunn

"So, I understand your project's name is Sophia. That correct?"

"That's what MySpace said."

Two men were sitting in a small restaurant. This greasy joint was nestled in a not so hip, blue collar neighborhood in a large generic American city of little importance. One of these men was named John Thompson, and he was conducting an interview with a seclusive musician who went under the pseudonym Pan. They had scheduled this meeting on the pretense of increasing awareness about Sophia, Pan's solo project. This was the first interview that Pan had given to anyone in the blogosphere, and John had felt the pressure increase tenfold on him as soon as he'd sat down. He could sense the unseen eyes of fans in the scene staring at him, demanding he do his damned best. John Thompson did not like pressure.

"Great, just making sure. Are you ready?"

Pan stretched. "Ready as I'll ever be."

John turned on the recorder.

"So, your project name is, as I said, is Sophia. Can you tell me why that is?"

"Well, it's quite simple," Pan said. "Sophia is a name meaning wisdom. Read it in a book of names I found at a book sale in a library."

“So does this name have any particular significance to you?”

“Should it?”

John coughed. He already was getting dominated. *Don't let the interviewee take control.* That was what a forum he'd gone to for advice had told him. He took a deep breath and regained his composure.

“Well, often times when a musician picks a name like that, they intend to send a message. The name is generally deeper than the surface indicates, from what I've seen.” He relaxed. There we go, a little better.

Pan recognized his effort and smiled a little. The young man could respond half decently after all. “Well, I like to think that my music sends an message to people. Sure, I compose instrumental music, as you are aware I'm certain, but every title I decide on is meant to make the listener dwell on, and how the music goes hand in hand with it.”

“Ah. Hmm, hang on a sec.” John pulled out his notebook from his back pocket and flipped to a page. “One of your song titles is '2+2=58'. Why is that? Clearly, it's wrong.”

Pan bent his fingers back. “Of course it's wrong, any six year old can tell you that. All that means is to question what you see, question what society has established as fact, consider that what you have long thought was right may well be wrong. And as far as the music part goes, you've heard the song, right?”

John had not. “Of course.”

“Well,' Pan continued, “you'd notice how I used different time

signatures outside the generic four-four beat that we've all grown so accustomed to on the radio. I also used different sounds for it, sounds not typically found in an average electronic song, like recordings of subway trains and gunfire and all that jazz. And in another song, I used a recording of that shooter. I honestly can't think of his name, but you know who I'm referring to, right? He was in the news, and that's really all that mattered for my purposes.”

Pan was referring to Cho Seung-hui, the man that had killed 32 Virginia Tech students in 2007. John had a friend who's brother had died during his rampage. *Not important*, the journalist thought reflexively.

“Right. So you draw on a variety of soundscapes to compose your message. Alright.” John's pen flew like greased lightning. He could have pressed the issue further, but he chose not to. “So, can you tell me what musicians or bands have influenced you?”

“No, because I hate listing off bands. It's pointless and a waste of my time, your time, and whoever will hear this interview later. I will say I enjoy black metal. Suppose that's not what typical composers of electronic enjoy in their spare time, but I'm one of them, and that's had a heavy influence on the atmosphere I strive to create. Now, can I ask you a question?”

“Certainly,” John said.

“Why are you interviewing me?”

“Er-”

“Be honest.” Pan leaned in and looked directly into

John's eyes.

“W-Well,” John stuttered, “I am interviewing you because you're an interesting man. One that never speaks to the media. I run a small blog, and I figured that it would be great to get the message out about Sophia, raise awareness, and well, people want to know what you have to say.”

“And you want more page hits. You want more exposure. You want your name associated with mine.” Pan had an intense, hungry look in his dark eyes.

“Well, that's one of the upsides to it,” John reasoned. “but I do enjoy your music a great deal, too. You might not be a favorite, but I've ordered your upcoming album.”

“Which is called?”

“Requiem.”

“Correct. So if I'm correct, what you have done is heard praise about my work, figure that since we're from the same town that you could get a hold of me, interview me armed only with what you've gleaned from MySpace, and post on your blog about how you got a hold of the mastermind behind Sophia.” *The hunter has become the hunted*, John thought. Then he began to feel some anger at this boisterous man that was certainly a hypocrite.

“Even if such is the case,” came John's slightly raised voice, “all that would demonstrate is that everyone with a name in the public arena has an ego. All of us.”

Pan stared at the young man again, word on tongue ready to be fired, then retreated. “All right, I'll give you that. I'm glad you admitted your fault, at least. I think that this demands a break and a

meal. What do you think?”

“Sure, I guess,” John replied. He felt that it was rather early for a break, but he also wanted to respect the man (*I'm on his time, not mine*, he thought) and was hungry anyway. He turned off the recorder and picked up a menu. Just about everything on the menu, he noticed, involved pork in all its myriad presentations: pork chops, ham steak, rib tips, sandwiches, and rack ribs. There was a comparatively tiny section on the bottom detailing the side orders, which were limited to coleslaw, potato salad and French fries. Each could be drenched in barbeque sauce on request. Pan signaled for the waitress. She was a plump 30-something year old woman, about the same age as the musician himself. “Hello, sweethearts, welcome to Pork. How may I help you?”

Pan put down the menu. “I'd like a salad and a cup of coffee.”

The waitress flashed a smile. “Oh sir, we don't serve salad. I'm sorry. Can I interest you in a pulled pork barbeque sandwich? It's tasty and a magazine recently voted it one of the best in the city.”

The man's smile was thin as loose leaf paper. “No, dear, I would really like a salad. Are you sure you don't serve any? I think you should go check to make sure.”

John quickly bet himself that that the waitress' thoughts were along the lines of *What a dick*; had he been able to read minds, he would have been correct and would have owed himself a dollar. Nonetheless, the waitress gave a considerably less sincere smile and said, “I'll be right with you.” She half walked, half stomped her way to the kitchen.

Pan turned to John. "See, if you're still in journalist mode, note this. People like that? Nice people, but their dreams get crushed in the end. They fail for whatever reason they have, and they spend their lives in shit jobs like this, dealing with shitty people and hating themselves until they die."

John frowned. "So why did you contribute to it? You basically kicked her while she was down, going by that logic."

"Yep. But look at it this way: I'm not really hurting her anymore than anyone else has. Heck, I know these people. That waitress? She was in the restaurant when it got robbed by some hoodlums two months ago. Whatever pride she's had left died that day. Really, imagine that. Are you imagining this?"

"Yes." John grunted.

"Good," replied Pan. "Why are you angry, anyway? This is the world, modern society through my lens. What happened to neutrality?"

"Do you get kicks out of being a jerk?"

"No, not in particular. Any kicks I get is only because I myself am trapped in the system. Everyone deals with the stress of modern life in their own way. Tell you what. How old are you?"

"20," John said. "Why?"

"I see you're at an age where the spirit is alive and well. I'm, well, older. You know what I wanted to be when I was your age? A doctor. I wanted to help people. But you know what? I saw all these would be doctors, and they were motivated by profit. Almost all of them cared more about money than actually doing their jobs. And it just struck me as so pointless. That industry is exploitative.

Everyone wants something, whether it be money, or pride, or ego, or whatnot. There's no such thing as a selfless person."

John was about to the reply when the waitress returned. She seemed to have aged five years, and her previous smile had died and had been replaced with a flawlessly thin mouth neither happy nor frowning. The fire in her eyes seemed to indicate her wish to tear Pan asunder.

"Sir, we don't have any salad in the back. The best we can do is to suggest that you try our coleslaw. It's made with love," she noted dryly.

"I'll take that then, just go easy on the mayo. Sorry for being such a fuss."

"It's not a problem." John detected a glint of triumph in her eyes as she walked away. Before John realized that his order still hadn't been taken, Pan continued speaking.

"Now did you see that? Just to continue on with what I was saying before, people have shitty lives. See, me saying sorry was probably the highlight of her day. It's a damn shame, but that's how it is in this society."

"You know," John said, "why are you so cynical?"

Pan cleared his throat. "Because, quite frankly, this is how I see the world. There are haves and have-nots. People who are the worst end up on top of the food chain, while people who are either indifferent or genuinely nice end up on the bottom. Then they rule on top while the bottom deals with all the dangers. Take those hoodlums for instance. Why are they hoodlums? Because their lives suck, because they were pressured by other hoodlums, etc. It's all circumstance. We're

dirt, and they live like kings. But the system is just so complex that we don't see it that way, and they're not so easy to hate, especially when they give pittances towards education and all sorts of random things to appease the people. They're all corrupt, monarchs in their castles looking down at the peasantry.”

“So if a gangbanger came up to you with a gun and demanded all your money, you wouldn't be angry at him,” John said, “but rather the powers that be that created the circumstances leading to him becoming a hoodlum?”

“No,” replied Pan. “I'd be angry, and would shoot him if I had a gun.”

“Exactly. So isn't your anger misdirected? They could have chosen not to rob you, yet did otherwise.”

“Yes, but are they really the cause? Think of it this way. Some philosopher once gave an example of a soldier that was given a rifle and ordered by his commander to fire at an innocent civilian. The soldier knew that to refuse would mean a severe reprimand, and likely a court martial. Yet the soldier does not have to listen to his commander. He can just drop the rifle or shoot the commander instead. He could have done anything, really, other than listen. Same thing happened in Vietnam: the soldiers take their orders, then people are surprised when a few villages get napalmed.”

“I'm sorry, but that just sounds like an excuse. But you know, that's just my opinion. I'm sure you know where I'm coming from, right?” John stopped to furiously wave at the waitress, who had almost passed him by.

“Yeah?”

“You never took my order, ma'am.”

“Oh. I'm sorry, dear,” the waitress replied. “What did you want?”

“I'd like a pound of rib tips with extra barbeque sauce. I'd like a basket of French fries as well.”

“Alright,” she said. “Would you like a drink?”

“Yes,” John said. “I'd like a large Diet Coke.”

“So,” Pan said as the waitress left to gather other dishes, “you're one of those people.”

“What's wrong with that? I just don't like the taste of regular Coke.”

“It's not so that you can feel better about myself? No offense, but I can't stand people who will go to a McDonald's, get a big meal full of a lot of fat, then get a Diet Coke, as if it'll make everything alright. At that point, you should just go all the way, you know?”

“No, I don't. I do what I want, and if you're such an advocate of individuality, then surely you can respect that, no?”

“But the problem is that it's not a matter of individuality. It's a case of someone following the mob, a single sheep among the flock herded by the shepherd.”

“Yes. That's how you see it. You. Not me, you.”

Pan leaned in. “And what's wrong with that?”

John sighed. “Nothing at all, except that you're incredibly condescending.”

“What?” Pan had expected John to say many things, but this word was not on his mental list.

“Have you ever looked in the mirror? It's people such as you that end up becoming the very monarchs, capitalists, and whatever word you want to substitute for the 'haves' that you so eloquently loathe.”

“No!” Pan's icy demeanor had melted away and replaced with red rushing into his pale skin. “People like me are what society needs. So many people out there are leeches, vampires sucking away our identities into some maelstrom of conformity. You're a dress up journalist, surely even you have an inkling at what I'm getting at.”

“I perfectly understand. However, your judgmental behavior is ridiculous. Look, everyone wants to be accepted on some level or another. Even the lowliest worker at a grocery store, or a hipster that only listens to music no one's heard of, or even reclusive musicians want some sort of acknowledgment. Maybe a hug, press, pat on the back, or just a nod of the head. So don't tell me about how you're a lone wolf, because even you want attention, don't you?”

Pan leaned back in his chair. There was a long silence.

The waitress returned with the food. The two ate without comment.

Eventually, the barbeque pork and coleslaw had faded into smears of red and white. Pan swallowed the rest of his water and addressed John.

“You have won my respect. There were some interesting points you made. I guess I'm not used to talking to people with, well, any sort of intellect.”

“Yeah, seems that way on my end, too. So shall we just agree to disagree?”

“Indeed. By the way,” he said as he pointed at the recorder, “your device is off. I think it's been off this entire time.”

“Seriously?” John checked the sweat-soaked device. The power light was not on. “Oh f-”

“Want to do this again?”

“Yes. That would be excellent. Thanks.”

Pan took a deep breath. “Okay, ready when you are.”

John turned on the recorder again.

“So, Pan, let's talk about your true identity, the man behind the masquerade...”

The Son Also Dances

-Jon

Melissa inhaled deeply on her Pall Mall baseline cigarette, smoke sending prayers up into the air and drifting down the street.

Despite the darkness of the early morning, she hid her eyes behind sunglasses, so the vomit covered homeless man on the bench meters away didn't see her staring at him as she looked for signs he might unleash on her. She couldn't see any bags of glue or spray cans - just an old crumpled eight percent Woodstock and a slowly spreading stain on his pants.

She relaxed her grip on the knife she kept in her purse and checked her phone- Six Thirty. No texts. He wasn't coming. Another day, another let down.

An early morning cleaner whizzed down the road towards her, jets of water blasting the vomit off the pavement, washing it down to feed the fishes. She sighed and slung the heels from her feet, curling her toes in the cool air, feeling the bruise start forming on her back. Getting too old for the 360 triple curl , she told herself, an unwilling grin spreading across her face as she began the trudge home.

Tip-toeing through shards of glass the drive by cleaning had failed to budge, she looked through the window of an all-night Chinese restaurant. Undecipherable symbols stared back at her, tracing patterns over the always present faces which were just as unreadable. She wondered what their stories were, these people who seemed to need no sleep, didn't rely on the crutch of the weekend boozep like everyone she knew. They stared back, chopsticks raised to their mouth.

She reached the top of Queen Street, gazing back down the

valley of death, the death of dreams. It gazed back at her, the streetlights blinking out as the sun rose in a grey haze.

A group of men, boys really, surged out of an all hour club, expensive shoes tore to shreds and covered in mistakenly bought hot dogs, taking home a fresh load of STD's and hangovers, stories to comfort each other with as they shivered their way through a week of work, chained to a desk playing with their parents money.

She realized her feet hurt, a headache was coming on, the bags beneath her eyes were getting heavier, and the walk was just too much. Hailing a taxi, she relaxed into the seat and directed him to her apartment above the Edinburgh Castle Tavern.

They arrived at her building, she paid the driver and got out. Looking up at her apartment, she could see the light was on. He was home. Anger took over her, anger mixed with a feeling of resignation, the knowledge that this was the way things would always be. At least until the operation, the life changing, life saving operation, which could fix everything.

She pushed through the doors of the all hours bar, calling a quick hello to Mavis behind the bar, who gave her a crooked smile, before turning her attention back to the horse racing on the big screen.

Michelle pushed open the door to her room, and stopped in disbelief. The room was full of paper, the scent of glue filled her nostrils and Dave was nowhere to be seen.

She stepped into the room, pulling at one of the long tendrils of paper that hung from the ceiling. What the ... a bus ticket, dated from 2008. She pushed through the mass of

ringlets that tugged at her , a feeling of disbelief taking over all the anger she had earlier felt.. A hand shot out and pulled at her leg, and she screamed as she fell to the floor. She turned to face whoever it was, and there he was. Dave. A smile crossed his face as he put his finger to his lips and pulled her close. “It’s like being underneath a tree” he whispered, pointing upwards at the ceiling. As she surveyed the room, all she could manage was a wordless gasp. Drops of glue fell from the ceiling, thousands of paper curls stretching out to her.

Without another word, she crossed the room and fell into her bed, wrapping herself deep into the sheets as she died a tiny death, gratefully drifting out of reality and into blankness. Dave giggled, stretching his fingers out to touch the strands, as the sunlight streamed into the room.

Hours later she awoke to an acrid smell of smoke. Without opening her eyes, she yelled at Dave , telling him the toast was burning. When he didn’t reply, she sighed and rolled out of bed. And screamed. The ceiling was bare of paper, and in the corner of the room Dave rocked himself back and forth over the fire, twisting a pipe this way and that as he tried to inhale the smoke. She ran to the fire , stomping it as she screamed at him. Makeup streamed down her face as he gasped up at her. First in shock, then in annoyance. “That’s a hundred dollar bus ticket collection your ruining!” he yelled, pushing her aside and scraping up the ashes.

Her eyes glazed over, her heart hardening as she realized why he hadn’t picked her up, why he had spent hours gluing paper to the ceiling, why he had spent a hundred dollars of her money on a bus ticket collection. De-thylo-metho-hydroxine, a research chemical that had only recently been synthesized, causing the user to experience hallucinations, delusions and visions of grandeur, along with (undiscovered as yet) brain loss, sensory deprivation, and eventual bone wasting properties. She knew she wouldn’t be able to talk to him properly for days.

So she reached down and gave him a kiss, before settling back into bed. She reached under the base and pulled out the jar of money he knew not to touch, no matter how far gone he was. Putting in the take from last night, she sighed as she crossed out the last total – 4800, and wrote down – 5400. Still thousands to go, thousands to be paid, thousands of hours of being ogled and touched by lonely strangers, thousands of mistakes to be made before she could be whole again. Before the operation could finally be paid for, the once subsidized, much needed operation.

She looked over at Dave, her boyfriend of god knows how many years, the one who had stuck by her through it all. Yet she knew, deep down inside, it was really her who had stuck by him. She paid the rent, she paid the bills for his addictions – both money and physical. Yet she needed company, and he was the only one who understood. Pulling her sleep mask over her eyes, she blocked out the noise of the road outside her window and fell back asleep.

Another night. Back on stage, star spangled banner covering her last sacred place, while young boys and old men stared at her with a strange mixture of shock and superiority, weakness and strength. They passed before her eyes through the nights, this mixture of humans. From girls who stared at her wondering, to foreigners who gazed in amazement, regulars who feigned friendliness, to drunk horny professionals who had to be restrained as they treated her like all the other women in their minds. None of it mattered. None of it fazed her. All that floated in front of her was the operation. A haze of drinks, cigarettes, fake conversations, fake intimacy, fake friends, money, money, money, flesh, and always a constant beat, a constant jukebox of sex blaring out.

And then he came in. No different at first glance, she thought she had him pegged. A friend of a stag party or something, uncomfortable in this place, well dressed, possibly gay. She danced over to him anyway, flashing a pseudo smile. And he surprised her by smiling back a heart stopping smile. A heart breaking smile. A smile that cut through the gloom, a smile that cut through the champagne fog. And he spoke to her, words that don't stay in the brain, words that lose their meaning in the sound of the voice. And he paid for a lap dance and didn't try to touch her, didn't make any crude comments, just bought a drink and talked. She tried to harden herself, ignore her heart but there was something - within him. Something that called to her. And when he asked for her number, and asked if she wanted to go to lunch with her sometime, she broke the rules, and she told him. She told him about the operation, she told him about Dave, she told him everything.. All he did was talk, hold her hand, and when the night was done she had a date later that day, a phone number, and hope in her heart. Not just hope set on one thing, but hope for a whole new life.

When she got home, Mavis was slumped on the bar, snoring, as a Somalian reached over the bar to fill up his jug. Michelle smiled at him as she walked past, before bounding up the stairs. She pushed the door open cautiously, wondering what Dave was up to. But the room was deserted, the window open, curtains flapping in the wind. Surveying the room, a grin spread across her face. Glue drops on the ceiling. Mouse traps all over the room. Plastic plates surrounding the room in a bizarre parody of the tiled outlay her parents had. She knew she wouldn't miss this place, and Dave? Dave had to come to an end. She scribbled out a note, letting him know she was leaving, and put enough money for two weeks rent on top of it. Packing her bags quickly - two suitcases full of shoes and another one for her makeup, she was ready in half an hour. As she left the room, she glanced at it one final time, before closing the door on her life.

She was at Il Forno, having dropped off her bags at a friend's, waiting for him to arrive. She sipped at the foaming latte, the heart shaped art an omen of good things to come. And there he was, framed in the doorway by sunlight, a tailored suit accentuating his cut figure. She smiled at him as she rose to greet him, then the smile froze. Behind him was Dave, face twisted into a pitbull snarl. He jerked his head, and whirled her new man around, forcing him into the beat up 1990 Mazda 323. She followed him, voice catching in her throat as she pleaded with him. He responded by pushing the door open, and she got in.

Michael Laws was on the radio, prattling on about sterilization of the under class. She tried to speak to Dave, to plead with him, but he stared blankly ahead. She turned to speak to the future she saw rapidly disappearing in front of her eyes, and saw blood dripping out the front of his shirt. His eyes pleaded with her, face frozen in a strange still alive rigor mortis, and she recognized straight away the gaze of De-thylo-metho-hydroxine, and knew another word wouldn't come out of his mouth, unless she could get him to a hospital. She turned back to Dave, forming a plot in her mind to get him to pull over. But as she opened her mouth, he smacked her over the head and she slumped into her seat, head falling over the seatbelt.

She awoke, head swimming, and gazed blankly at her surroundings. Six foot weeds surrounded her, drooping over the car. She remembered what had happened and spun in her seat, but no one was there, just a gigantic blood stain on the back seat. Fearing the worst, Melissa grabbed her purse, checking the knife was still in there as she clambered out the car. Calling out for Dave, she peered through the bushes. And there he was, patting the final dirt into a hole. Screaming, she ran at him, tears welling in her eyes. He grinned at her and held up a fistful

of notes. "Don't worry babe, I've got enough money for the operation ! We can be happy together again!"

She slowed to a walk as she neared him, a grin plastered on her face as she grasped the knife. She gazed into his eyes as his manic grin twitched in his face, then drew out the knife, watching the look of joy on his face turn to horror as she slowly drew it across his throat. He collapsed to the ground with a gurgle, and she quickly picked up the notes before they were covered in blood.

Later that night, she let herself back into her room. The room that only hours before she had walked out of for what she thought was the last time. But she had what she needed . The money. She placed it in the jar, crossing out the 5800, and writing down 20,000. There it was, written in cold hard ink. She stood in front of the mirror, stripping herself down. Revealing her finely sculpted arms, well shaped breasts. Her legs, like a gazelles. And finally, the penis which would soon be removed. She gazed at it for a minute, thinking about the two deaths it had caused, the heartache it had bought her. With a smile playing on her lips, she picked up the phone and dialed her doctor, booking herself in for a beautiful future.

Demise

-Jonas Harper <http://jonasharper.tumblr.com/>

The fluids of Fat Davey's brain continued to seep out the hole in the back of his head as his body sat up against the wall in the abandoned dime store, his eyes gazing listlessly through the roof. The scene was quiet, as the two bandits hugged low to a long-empty display case. I was across the dusted street in a separate store, reloading and counting the bullets I had left. The pair had seen what I did to their friend, made them hesitant to jump up and be greeted by shots cracking through the air. I had chased these three for four days out of Fort Trume, and they were aware of it. They kept running further west into the deserts of New Mexico, until they stumbled upon the ricketing shambles of Renstown. I had visited this place years before when ore still slept in the mine, silver waiting to be plucked from slumber. Now it was empty save for three gunmen and one dead man.

After a few minutes, the first screams came through the air, the sounds coming from a man desperate to cling to life. "Please sir!" he said, "We'll give the money back! Just let us ride outta here!" He was begging to not end up like his friend Davey. Parsons, I thought, the new kid of the gang. I heard him get reprimanded by his friend who could still breathe, too far to make out but loud enough to notice. "Look, I'm comin' out with the bags!" Parsons yelled across the way. I heard his footsteps as he crept towards the doorway. I sat myself up from behind the counter, sent him a few bullets, one through his right eye. I heard the agony of a child scraping across a wooden floor, crying for his mother. The quiet resumed after a few minutes.

"He was just a damned kid Stenson," Tucks said to me.

Remorse riddled his words, regret of brining a child to a land of men.

"Should've known better than," I replied. Silence came back to us, the last two. Wind accompanied it, blowing the sand through the open doorways and broken windows. I could hear the supports creek and rusted store signs sway.

"How long are we gonna do this Stenson?"

"I dunno. How long's it been now?"

"Almost two years I reckon. First time was outside of the Desert Rat I think."

I smiled. "Was it that so long ago?" I asked, remembering back to that day.

I walked into the Rat to fill my glass after another bounty. Killing had been my trade during and after the war. As I walked through the swinging doors and the smell of whores and whiskey rolled into me, a piece of lead shot through the window on my right.

"Stenson!" the man behind me said. I turned. That was the first time Tucks and I met. The man I had just cashed in on my bounty was his younger brother. Understandably he sought to handle matters in his own way, reconciliation, and after coarse and improper words were traded we were in the street staring one another down.

Have you ever had the opportunity to end the life of a fellow man? By this time in my life I had killed dozens, but the tenseness that overcomes me in a duel never left. In the wild, one does not have the time for moral contemplations when the other party seeks your untimely demise. But in a duel, with two men looking at one another, my heart still raced as I considered my actions. I saw men die needlessly in the war; didn't have to be another I figured. Perhaps

it was this humanity of mine that saved Tucks that day, and drove me to remove a couple of fingers from his right hand rather than end his life. The stupid man had barely retrieved his gun from its holster before I crippled him.

Looking back, I maybe should've finished it right there. He had been wounded, his gun lying in the dirt, and I had all the advantage over him. I walked up to him afterwards, the barrel pointing and an inch from his skull ready to fire. But as I looked at that scruffy and scarred face I could not help but feel some level of pity. The man had lost kin, a loss I know. He looked into my eyes, and with them I spoke of this being his second chance at the mistake he just made, a look that told him not to waste it. I holstered my gun and walked away, leaving Tucks to become a bandit like his younger sibling and end up with over a dozen dead men attached to his name.

Back in Renstown I yelled to him. "How's your right hand doing anyhow?"

He laughed. "Aside from missing my ring and pinky fingers, works jus' fine." A pause. "Actually had to learn to shoot with my left thanks to you."

"Could've just gone home after that. Didn't need to have me chase you down like this" I struck a match and lit a cigarette.

"And do what? Tell my family I let the man who killed my kin get away? That wouldn't sit right with them."

"So you mean to say they'd rather have someone else to be the bandit of the Mitchel family?"
Another pause.

"He was eighteen you know." I thought I heard Tucks struggling through tears but I couldn't tell for sure.

"So were a lot of boys in the war," I said with the cigarette between my coarse lips. "You stop worrying about the age of a man when he has a gun pointed at you though."

"Parsons didn't have a gun though, so why him?"

Now it was my turn to ponder words. I didn't have an answer, I deflected the question. "What're you being sentimental for? Having two corpses for pals starting to get to you?"

"They ain't the first of my friends you made holes in Stenson. You should know, eight months ago out at the Nichols Ranch, in Alabama."

The smoke cloud in front of my eyes began to take the shapes of that evening as I dug up the memory Tucks spoke of. It was a cold night, odd for August. The ranch had been raided by bandits some nights for the past week and sought protection. I happened to be nearby and took to protecting the old man who still lived there. It had been a slow day of preparation, followed by a calm in the barn before the sounds of horses would begin.

Nichols, some sixty-odd in his years, had seen many bandit parties throughout his life. He had been able to fend them off in his youth, but as he got older his eyesight failed and his hands wavered. We watched from the upper window of the barn waiting for the sounds of howling and the look of men in need of a lesson in property rights. We had been there a while though, and the old man took to conversing.

"What did you do in the war?" he asked.

I pulled a cigarette from my lips and thought. "I was a soldier, a fighting man," I replied.

"Weren't you all?" He snickered. "Where'd you serve at?"

"A lot of places." A silence took over. "What about you sir?"

"No. Too old, watched my farm while my boys left. Signed up with the Confederacy." A sigh. "Not one of them came home." Another pause. "Your accent don't sound distinct Stenson. Did you fight for the North, for Lincoln and his boys?"

"I fought for the side that won, sir." I had meant that as a neutral statement, but it came more protective than I expected.

He laughed. "It makes no difference son. For all I know you could've been the man who killed my boys, but tonight we're only worried about robbers."

And that was that. A few hours passed and the bandits showed up, six total, their yelps soaring through the air accompanied by hooves. I waited until they got close. They dismounted and walked up to bang on the front door of the house. One yelled asking for the old-timer to come up with the goods, laughing as he did. I thought I recognized that voice. I would later find out it was Tucks, but for now it was just another body in need of hurting.

Pressure on the trigger, the closest man fell down without a chance to yell. Before his friends could react, another bullet, this one colliding with a man's arm. He yelled. They scrambled, shouting at one another to move and hurry, to find

out where the bullets were coming from. They moved fast, I'll give them that. Nichols couldn't hit worth a damn but I had some trouble. I'm good, but not the best. I heard stories of one man out there who bore an Apache burn mark on the right side of his face who never missed. If he was here, I doubt any of these men would have made it back to their horses. They didn't anyway. The poor animals had run off before they could get back to them, fear taking over after the sounds of gunshots.

"The barn!" the same voice said to his companions. They rushed to hide into the house, breaking the lock and taking refuge inside.

Nichols pondered. "Should we chase 'em or-" he began to ask, but I was already heading down the ladder. Walked through the smaller barn doors, rifle reloaded and ready. I heard them clamor in the house, searching for places to hide. One just happened to walk in front of a window I could see, and was dumb enough to stand there for a moment. Bullet, brain, floor. Two down, three if you count the man clutching his arm outside the front.

"Keep an eye on that one," I told Nichols, waving towards the yell. I sidled up against the doorway, and kicked it in from the side. Someone fell for it, emptying their revolver in the process. I pulled my own from beneath my duster from its tucked spot against my rib, and traded him three bullets. He fell down the stairs, staining the wood red. "That's four," I said creeping into the house. "Who'd like to go first?" My words became quiet as I spoke, my footsteps silent as I took my time easing into the kitchen. No one there. I listened for breathing, but nothing reached my ears.

I picked up a piece of fruit and threw it into the next room. Reflex betrayed the man with the Colt. "Shit," he whispered, and his loud stomps told me he was heading for the next room.

I turned the corner. "Too slow." Two bullets. "Too stupid." He hit the ground. I smirked, all too soon as I heard the click of a hammer on the back of my head.

"Yes, you are. Drop the pistol." The weight hit the floor. "Now hands up, turn around slowly," the man said. I did so, and found myself looking right at Tucks. He smiled, but fear took over his eyes. "Well ain't this just ironic? You let me live and now here I am about ready to spread your brains on the wall." He had the gun in his left hand, keeping it steady with his right; two fingers were missing on that one. We stared at each other for a moment. I was the first to talk.

"Seems you found yourself some nice friends."

"Yeah, did. Past tense, seeing as the most of them aren-" I didn't let him finish. His nerves had given him away, the surprise in his eyes. I swatted the gun in his hand and charged with my shoulder at him. He pulled the trigger and fired into the floor. We wrestled and struggled up against the wall for control of the gun. I punched him a few times, him back at me. We leveled the gun back up towards and through the kitchen doorway, another bullet fired, this time at the sink. We had it pointed up at the ceiling when a shot from a different gun, a rifle, rang out and hit something. Nichols had come in to save the day. Tucks dropped to the floor, silent.

"Heh, I was wondering when-"

"Hold it right there city boy," he told me, gun raised. Aw hell, I thought. Damned fool is aiming to kill me too. "I don't right know where you served, but I won't be having any Union boys in this house called friend, understand?" The gun was shaking, I could tell he was nervous. Our eyes fixed on one another, my hands raised and his ready to pull a piece of iron to

kill me.

"Is that what this is about?" I asked. "It's been five years since the war Nichols."

"Five years without any of my sons! Without my family!" He yelled back at me with a passionate hatred. "Five years," he sounded to calm, but I could taste the anger. Still there, still strong. "I wake up each day knowing my sons are never coming home. You got to go home though, Union boy, to your home and celebrate takin' away lives and ruinin' others. That's all the government's ever done for us, try to take away how we live. Killin' you won't bring my boys back, but at least you-" The crack of a pistol. Nichols stopped, and began to bleed as a piece of lead whizzed through his neck. He fell to the ground in the kitchen, noises not of speech coming from his throat.

Tucks had fired. He was lying on the ground, still alive but struggling. He had pointed the gun at the old-timer, and now had it back on me as he struggled to get himself back up. The pain was evident in the way he sweated, but a leg wound is hardly a shot to kill a man.

"If you wouldn't mind," I told him as he rose, "I'm getting tired of having to hold my arms up."

He didn't smile. "Where's your horse?"

"Out by the barn." He requested I take him there, to which I obliged. He kept his gun on me as he sat up on the black mare. My arms were getting quite sore by then.

"Listen Stenson," he said with some pain, evident by his face, "you let me live those few months ago, a humbling experience." A grunt. "And now I'm returning the favor." His tone became

steady and coarse now. "But if I see you again, I will kill you." He rode off with his pistol still pointed at me. After a few minutes when he faded into the dark of night, I walked back and collected my things. The man I had Nichols in charge to watch had a hole in his head. The old man had probably fired a shot when I was preoccupied in the house. There was nothing of value found from scavenging. I took the bodies out and tossed them into some shallow graves. Every man deserves a place to rest his head. I rested mine in the house, and headed out the next day.

"Now that I remember," I told Tucks as we traded words in Renfield, "I think you repaid the favor when you didn't let Nichols kill me." His short laugh told me he agreed. "You didn't even kill me when we were out in Kansas, at the Ridge." I put the cigarette out in the floor.

"It's a little hard to shoot someone when you're as piss-drunk as I was. What were you doing out there at that mine anyway?"

"I was actually looking for one of the workers. Apparently he had earned a price after some mischief he committed in Creek Pines, of the robbing and raping nature. What about you?"

"Visiting an old friend actually, one you happened to not bury a bullet in."

I recalled the acrid smell of gun smoke as I chased Tucks through the mine that day. It was close to high noon, the day just beginning, and I was already looking to kill somebody. It was more a conflict of interest for past meetings, but still I chased him through the underground hallways. My bounty that day had already been taken care of. The owner, who considered

himself a man of upstanding and religious character, had assisted me in apprehending him. It wasn't until after the man's feet stopped shaking and his neck had snapped from the pressure of a noose that I saw Tucks.

He saw me first though, but in his drunkenness missed cleanly and the shot buried into the hanged man. At that point, in any given town, a high level of anarchy would've erupted, but the foreman prohibited workers from holding firearms. He and I both sent bullets to Tucks, but he was much too far away for an easy shot, and was by then darting towards the mine shaft.

I gave chase across the quarry, staining my boots with mud and dirt. I followed him down. If I had been more observant I would've seen the word ABANDONED brazened across a board in the entranceway. "Been a few months, hasn't it Tucks?" I yelled out. No reply came but I heard the mutterings of curses as he stumbled upon rocks in the darkness. Lanterns strung throughout the cavern, but I noticed one amiss, one Tucks had grabbed. "We can keep this clean if you just come on out here." I continued walking, into an eerie silence. It stayed like that for seconds, which turned into minutes. Then Tucks made his next mistake; jumping at the touch of a critter, a spider, he gave himself away. I heard the shot fire a few yards ahead. Hiding behind an indent in the wall, he noticed I heard him and shot towards me, missing again. I took cover up against another indent, and the sound of shots filled the cavern. He continued to miss. I had time to wait for his gun to run out I figured. "Damn Tucks, how drunk are you?" That's when his bottle hit my shoe. It had more sting to it than I expected, which Tucks noticed when I grunted, giving myself away. But he failed to count his bullets, and the gun clicked empty when he tried to take a shot. In desperation he threw his pistol at me. Normally this would've been fine, but seeing as I had the misfortune to turn around at just the right moment to get stung in the face, I ended up taking care of the blood dripping into my left eye and missing my shots. I tried to chase him

further but he was gone.

I emerged from the shaft without Tucks, to the dismay of the foreman. He told me the mineshaft went on for miles with exits all over the hills, long abandoned before he even arrived. Tucks would be gone by the time they showed up.

"How long did you end up wandering those tunnels Tucks?" I asked as he still hid behind that display case in Renfield.

He thought. "Only a few hours. I was lucky. Followed the wind drafts out."

"I tell you, luck seems to be your best friend." The sun was setting further down to sleep under the desert, light illuminating the town's west-faced main street.

"No, luck favors us both Stenson. Both my own and your stupidity have saved us from each other on many an occasion." He spoke of a few days ago now, before this current mess started. "I found it funny you stumbled out in Fort Trume only seconds after you could've had the perfect shot."

The sheriff of the fort told me what had transpired while I was working off my initial hangover, and he was kind enough to do it during the rest of said hangover while he had me sitting in a chair at his desk as he walked around me, fairly intimidating-like. Tucks and Co. had rode into town in a classic style: horses, bandito masks across their jaws, and strode right up to the bank with guns blazing.

A shotgun shell burst through the ceiling as Fat Davey had yelled, "Money! Now!" the whiskers of his beard twitching with the wild look of his eyes. The citizens of Trume, being as

upstanding as they are, took to obliging the gang. Davey watched the door as Tucks, 'Sandman' Slims, and the new kid Parsons filed in to collect the cash in bags. It went smoothly, no one itching to play hero. They had re-mounted and were heading out into the desert when they encountered first resistance from the law. They made it out fine though, except for the bullet I lodged into the back of Sandman as he lagged behind.

"You took your damn fine time showing up I see," I told the sheriff, sitting at his desk.

"I don't have as many friends as I'd like out here Stenson," he said. He sighed and took another breathe from his cigarette. "And I can't afford to let any of my men go. Redskins, bandits, I get no end of this shit out here. I want you to go out and take care of Tucks and his boys."

"I sympathize sheriff, but it doesn't sit right with me to go out and kill a man to no benefit, unless he decides to take a shot at me first."

"I'll give you \$500, apiece. I don't need them alive." I was out the door and gone in the hour. I had chased them for the next four days, before where we wound up where this story began, the deserted Renstown. I had caught to them just as they arrived and dismounted. Shots were fired quick and inaccurate, as they dodged towards the dime store. I rode around the side of town into a store on the opposite side.

The way I figure it, Davey was watching the back while Tucks and Parsons hid safely in the storefront. I crept quiet and low into the long abandoned post office, dust filing into my nostrils as I crawled and breathed. I sidled up to a counter, listening and waiting.

Davey was an idiot. Loud, brash. Known to make a fool of

himself. It was no surprise to me when he came stumbling from the back of the dime store yelling, "I think it's clear! We best head out this way!" In exchange for his words of wisdom, I traded three bullets, one hitting him square in the forehead to lean him up against the back wall while his brain flowed out. Parsons was next. You know where we are now.

And so the tale of myself and Tucks comes full circle, with perhaps a few details amiss that I have intended or not to leave out. Night had begun to fall, sunset making the sky a reddened canvas to complement the dark remains of Renstown. We had arrived late, and our traded words passed about an hour. I had a feeling of what was going to transpire soon.

"Stenson," Tucks called out. "Let's end this like we started it, like we should've of."

"You saying I should've killed you two years ago?"

"I'm saying you never should've had to chase me around for so long."

I laughed. "Wasn't chasing you. Just so happened you liked to go where I was." I breathed in deep, the fresh memories of our coincidental and twisted history, a tale of two separate men brought together through tragedy and circumstance. "Fine. Let's have it." I got up to enter the street. Tucks did likewise. We moved uneasily out of the doorframes across the way, watching one another for any sudden movement. When our stares connected... well, not sure what happened. Whether feelings of remorse, hate, or what have you were there I could not say. But here I was, a man who had killed his kin, that he had spared and we had found ourselves in the same way when we first met. But time had worn on us both. I did not see the shade of disgust in Tucks when we first met. It

was something else.

Silence came back to Renstown, hanging around the dusted, empty streets and alleys. Wind followed with as she scattered the sand and bent the aging wood. My duster trailed behind me to expose my pistol. Tucks was without a coat on this odd cold evening, and instead his poncho waved about. We looked at one another for an age, a look at one another that spoke of our shared tragedies and time. Readied hands hovered near tools of demise, waiting to take breath.

He was faster than before, his hand on his gun as I came to my own. The determination on his face was strong, as the creases tensed and he looked to send me to an early death. But I had met too many men who wished the same, too many with similar, unmet goals. A look of surprise and acceptance came over Tucks as he fell to the ground.

I don't ponder the death of men anymore. The nerves still hit in a duel, but afterwards one man is as dead as any other in a shallow grave. All that ever seems to be truly planned, by others or ourselves, is our untimely demise.

The Accent

-Malavox

I'm in a very strange predicament. It doesn't make an incredible amount of sense, so bear with me when I try to explain this. Well, I guess the best place to start is the beginning, no? People describe me as a bit of a hot shot. I've never been short on friends, and my achievements in the bedroom are nothing to scoff at. Back in High School I had at least twelve different girlfriends, all of which were from the cream of the crop, the "ten out of ten"s. I suppose that's the root of my problem right now. I'm used to getting about any girl I want without a hassle. I can walk into the most exclusive clubs and leave with a pocketful of napkins, on which are drunkenly scrawled the phone numbers of the hottest women. It's like a game to me, and i'm good at it. But like anything that comes easy to you, after a while you begin to get bored.

It's not enough to simply bed the easy ones and call it a night anymore. Well, last night that need for a challenge got me into trouble. I had went out for the night with my buddy Dave to his favorite bar, and I noticed a particularly gorgeous blonde at a table alone in the corner. I turned to my friend and asked if he'd seen her around before as this was his haunt and he knew most everyone inside. "Yeah, don't get too excited though. She's a crazy bitch." he said. Excited at the prospect of a challenge, I dug deeper: "Oh yeah? How's that?" I asked. "Don't bother man, she's crazy. She comes here every night and sulks in the corner. She'll only talk to you if you've got a British accent." "You've gotta be shitting me." I replied.

Dave stood up from the bar and motioned for me to watch. He made his way through a maze of chairs and tables and eventually reached the mysterious woman. "Hey, I noticed you sitting alone here and thought you might like some company." Dave quipped in the most friendly voice he could muster. "Yeah, piss off. You sound like a fucking barbarian." she said. Defeated, though not at all surprised, Dave made his way back to the bar. "Ouch. Tough luck kid. Looks like you weren't shitting me." I said to him. He shrugged. "Well Dave, how much you wanna bet I can get with her?" "Didn't you just see that train wreck bro, theres no way." "Name your price." "I'll put down 10." he said as he slapped a ten dollar bill on the pseudo-wood surface of the bar. "Deal." I said throwing a ten down as I rose from my stool. I had this all planned out in my head. I'd have to employ some impromptu acting if I was going to win that bet (and get that gorgeous girl).

I made my way through the dimly lit bar, approaching this mysterious yet beautiful blonde's lonely table. "Ess'cuse me darling, is this seat taken?" I inquired in the best attempt of a Ricky Gervais impression I could manage. "No..." she said surprised as she looked up from stirring her drink "...not at all." Her eyes were an almost unreal shade of blue, they twinkled when she smiled. I hadn't thought i'd get this far, so at this point I was mildly set back. "Uh, well if you wouldn't mind, i'd certainly love to join you." I said, once again sporting my best British accent. "Sure." she said with a smile. As I sat I looked across the bar at Dave, he was pretending to hit his head against the bar.

Before I could even get comfortable in my seat, she began asking questions. "You have a lovely accent, where are you from?" My thoughts raced at a million miles (or kilometers in this situation) a minute. I desperately searched my mind for the name of somewhere in England that wasn't London. Luckily it was at this

point the flat screen TV on the wall just behind the head of the mysterious blonde woman flashed a clip of a soccer match. "MANCHESTER." I said with a bit of urgency. "Oh, Manchester. Yes i've heard of there. I'm not terribly familiar though i'm afraid." she replied. I was in the clear. I spent a good portion of the next hour telling tales of my "childhood in Manchester". I told of foggy mornings in the fields with my favorite "lads", and tea time with grandmother on Sunday afternoons. She ate it up. From there on out the game was easy. I just had to do what I did best. After maybe an hour of chit chat and a few more drinks it was obvious where this was going. "Would you like to join me back at my place for the evening?" she asked while batting her bright blue eyes. "I'd be delighted, love." I said shooting her a smile. I handed her her purse and pushed in her chair as she stood up, and told her i'd meet her outside, that i'd needed to cover the tab. I walked over to the bar where Dave had his head in his arms. I took the twenty dollars, and gave him a pat on the back.

We met outside and she led me to her car. She drove a black Mini Cooper. It was fairly new, and the interior was beautiful. On the way to her place she listened to the Rolling Stones. When we had gotten in, the house was dark. "Here. Take my hand." she whispered "We can't turn on any lights or it'll wake my roommate.". "Yes of course, darling." I whispered back. We traversed the dark staircase up to her room, and she flung me on the bed. What happened from then on you can probably work out for yourself, its what I awoke to that is where my problem lies. You see, I have this bad habit of talking in my sleep if i'm worn out. I'll go to the gym late in the evening, come home and crash on the sofa, and my roommate will tell me I had a full fledged conversation with myself about the Redwings game in the morning. Well as i'm sure you can imagine, a night of rigorous play with a beautiful young blonde

is quite the workout. However despite my success keeping my accent in line throughout the night, its not quite as easy to fake an accent when you talk in your sleep. I probably should have thought that through.

The sun had come up, and I could feel its rays shine through the blinds of her window onto my face. I slowly regained consciousness after a night of hard work. It was as I went to rub my eyes that I realized I was screwed. She had bound me in my sleep. I was now stretched out, limbs tied by rope to her bedposts. "Fuck." I thought. I lifted my head to take a look around her room when I saw her sitting there. Dressed in a bathrobe and mudmask, legs crossed, sitting crosslegged on a metal folding chair holding a knife. "Fuck! fuck! fuck!" I screamed, realizing the gravity of how badly I was fucked. "Oh relax sweetheart. You have nothing to worry about..." she said in a cheeky voice that implied otherwise "we're just going to have some fun!". "There is nothing fun, about FUCKING KNIVES!" I yelled. She was right at my bedside now. "There's nothing fun about being lied to either now is there?" she whispered as she leaned in over my face. Now was my chance I thought. I could make a move, or die here with this psychotic blonde over my naked body. My mind raced as I thought of how I could get out of here alive. "Headbutt!" I thought before slamming my head into her "too close for comfort" mudmasked face. She fell to the ground with a thud. "Out cold" I thought. Now I just needed to find a way out of these ropes.

I took a second look around the room. The scenery was unnerving. Everywhere you looked there was a Union Jack. There were portraits of the queen, an extensive collection of Princess Diana memorabilia, and a small replica of Tower Bridge. "My God." I said to myself out loud. I decided to try and slip my way out of the ropes. For about a half an hour I struggled until I finally managed to free my right arm. Using my now free arm I undid the rest of my restraints, and quickly sprang from the bed. I looked down at the bedside to see the blonde girl, face pressed up against the hardwood

floor, mudmask smeared everywhere. She was out cold, I had time to get dressed. I went about the room looking for the clothes I had flung off last night, when I heard the girl begin to stir. "Dammit!" I said, quickening my pace to find at least my pants. They were just under the bed, and I leaned down quickly to get them. Upon standing I was greeted by the sight of a now even more pissed off blonde girl regaining her footing and rubbing her eyes. She looked in my direction. "YOU!" she screamed, pointing angrily.

I dropped the jeans and bolted. Running into the hallway, I was greeted by a cardboard cutout of Prince William dancing with Kate Middleton. There was little issue plowing through that to get to the stairs. At this point I was running faster than I've ever run before. Front door in sight, I knew I couldn't slow down now. I reached and unlocked the front door, only to find it had been barricaded in ahead of time. I could hear the psycho woman descending the stairs, I was out of time. I noticed a trap door in the floor that led to what I suspected was the basement. Seeing as how this was my only hope for survival, I opened it up and dropped in. Pulling the door behind me, I locked it with every lock on it. "OPEN THIS DOOR" She screamed as she pounded with her feet on the floor. I remained silent.

Groping around the walls to the basement, I found a lightswitch. The room illuminated and I was greeted by a freakshow of a collection of all things British. I'd had more than enough of this. Frantically, I looked for any sign of an exit. No luck. I was screwed. I slouched in a corner and began to weep. Here I was, a young, intelligent, handsome man, waiting to be murdered by some crazy bitch with a terrifying obsession with Great Britain. I sat for what had to be at least 3 hours and just thought. I eventually resigned to the fact that I

was done, it was all over. Seeing as how there wasn't anything I could do anymore, I thought i'd look through this mess of creepily collected British junk. She had seemingly everything. Coins, cards, die cast cars, dolls, plates, bowls, promotional materials, if it had something from Britain on it, she had it. While sifting through her collection though, I noticed something that restored my hope. A laptop. Made exclusively for a sweepstakes for fans of Manchester United, the computer featured their logo embossed on the front. I was elated. I powered it on, and logged in (The password was Elizabeth. Shocker.) and I suppose that leads me to right now. Anyone in the Dallas Fort Worth area care to come help me out, or at least call the cops? I'd really appreciate it. The address is....fuck. Too late.

POETRY

Assimilation

-Anonymous

The natives called a truce on Sunday,
And left their battlements
Unarmed
To pray to Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ answered,
Unambiguously,
With shrapnel shards and musket smoke.

And so the nigger warriors and nigger children alike,
Ascended their savage natures,
To become stars
On an epaulet.

Justin

-Anonymous

The beach of my childhood where:
The sky turns blue,
Then orange,
Then night.

Burning silhouettes, two children,
A boy,
A girl,
Hunt crabs on the rocks
Where the effluence used to run.

By the rocks where I surfed with my father,
Where,
I asked him what he would do,
And he just shrugged.
Caught the next wave in,
Disappeared behind the rollers,
Walked up the beach and retired,
All while I looked out to the sea and the new set.

The beach of my childhood.
Where a boy steadies his sister on the rocks.
Where the sand is cold.

Inorganic

-Anonymous

Cut into ten thousand pieces,
My life, my organic work,
Then cello-taped back together.
Very nice and pretty.

I submit to you,
My organic heart,
My organic soul,
Augmented and flourished,
A new, shiny whole.

For some of us

-Anonymous

For some of us...
In this world, a chasm of echoing whispers-
There is nothing sacred.

We can hear it so clearly.
The music is scattered, lost within the cracks of an illegitimate
reality.
But we Hear it, seeking out every note, every rest,
Every measure of Truth that deems itself hidden.

Art is no religion. It is breath, it is life.
To us, the painters of the Valley,
Creativity will come and go.
But the Truth will always look the same.
Sound the same.
Feeling, and flowing,
The caress of a lover's breathe

Will hold the same sweet taste in any instance. There are no
faces to us. Only shadows.
Our greatest comfort in life, then, is vision into the night.
Can there be love within darkness?

If not, then another heart shard is cast off, and progress is
made.
Another song is heard, another picture taken,
Another fruit of our soul bears itself up.

Another cycle begins, and we learn how to feel our way
through the void.
We learn to seek out our own favor.
How must we gain the attention of another?

By gaining the attention of the self. Imbibe the darkness.

Embrace the unknown. Only by recognizing the emptiness of your spirit,
Can you truly enjoy its contents, and joke about it.
The Upward spiral will shine through.

We wade into the chasm, for we are the choir of the Valley.
The Valley of the Shadow.

We understand the death of our brother, and journey into the world,
knowing no pain.
Knowing no direction, no obstacles, no fear or joy.
We fall into knowledge and undo what cannot be undone.
We raise children from the infertile hearts of men.

Life is no religion. We worship not the ways of this world.
Observation of the dead, is the observation of the living.
In either case, both gain glory.

But what is glorification to the starving body?
What is money, to the empty stomach of the desert?

To us, nothing is sacred.
Fighting is not honor. It is not violence.
The Portrait is not beautiful, nor ugly.
Sex is not Love. It is not Procreation.

We are the ones who find every facet of existence,
Within every facet of art. To take anything seriously,
Is pointless.
To take anything as a joke is ignorance.

To know something as fact
Is to doubt yourself, wholly.

And without doubt, nothing would be sure.
Without sacrilege, nothing would be sacred.

By wandering aimlessly, we Deify the Path.
For we are the Poets of the Valley.
In Death, we are naught but Dust and Shadows.

The Beaten Path

-Allan Head

I feel with my hands
The path on which millions walk upon each day
Then I realize, that my hands don't belong on the path,
That I don't belong on the path.
That every individual in the mob of individuals that walked this
path might've felt like I do.
That not a single person in the massive shit ridden horde of
assholes that walked upon this ground
would have ever feel like I do.
Each of us is alone on this little planet.
And though I might ponder on the opinions of strangers that
walked down this path,
My thoughts won't change theirs.
Not that I knew what they thought in the first place.
I'll withdraw my thoughts on those who've walked this beaten
path,
As I will, one day, withdraw myself from this little planet.
One day after I realized that I do belong on this path,
One day after I've realized it's best not to belong on this path,
One day after I've walked the path one million times.
All I can hope is that some poor dumb youth would ponder
on my thoughts,
As I pondered on the lives of those who had walked before me.

Blazing red afternoons spent

-Allan Head

Blazing red afternoons spent
Laying on balmy beaches.
Ocean blue buckles hold back each hand.
The sun tanning me away,
The warm ultraviolet glow penetrates my mind
While the seas churn themselves out
They'd tanned for an eternity,
Their buckles had melted away long ago.
Yet, they still lay there on the balmy beach.
In the blazing red afternoon, next to me.

What I've Learned

-Allan Head

There's this bump on my head,
And this scab on my knee,
There's a scar on my arm,
And a blister on my thumb.
All these things remain
As reminders of my stupidity,
They mark the lessons I've learned.
Yet, I wish I'd never learned of my stupidity.
I wish I'd remained without the pain and reminders.
I wish I was ignorant of my ignorance.
Some thing just can't be helped I guess.

Everyone is an Addict

-Cornwallis

Everybody is an addict
The front of my brain is numb
I'm hard to change
Fast to react
Spend a lot of time on a light
Slings white into my pupil
It dilates my feelings
Until I can't feel anything at all
Grounded forever
Don't want to take off
If I take off, I will perish
I cannot collapse inward
Because the supporting beams are strong
Stronger than hate, the ties that form
To keep me on my feet
I know what is a junkie
I'm a junkie
But I never got on my knees

EXTRA

Editors note: During advertising for TAR V, we received an email directing us to the following. Cryptically, All the message stated was “do with it as you please. I only care about people considering a solution to the problems of the world”

The following is a 219 page graphic novel created with the HL2 engine, much too large for serialization in TAR, but likewise too curious to ignore. We hope that our readers find interest in this oddity.

Paradigm Shift



Buzby X

[\[Download Paradigm Shift\]](#)

TAR guarantees no assurances of quality or content

Afterword

The best way to think of the community that TAR wishes to inspire may possibly be achieved through the visualization of salon culture of 18th and 19th Century Europe. These salons were essentially gatherings at a private residence or place of business. The gatherings were attended by individuals wishing to amuse each other, refine their tastes of art/food/drink, and to increase the knowledge of participants through conversation.

This culture inspired the creative genius of people such as Proust, Debussy, and -- even into the 20th Century -- Cocteau. The existence of the salon, unfortunately, seems to have mostly disappeared as a place of creative inspiration and sharing of knowledge. In the 21st Century, one could argue, it will be very unlikely that the next Schopenhauer or Goethe will be a product of salon culture.

Yet the introduction to such a conversation involving the implications of the disappearance of salon culture would not be complete without mentioning the possibility of a counter argument, chiefly: Yes, the salon culture of past centuries has certainly disappeared in the form it was known, but in this contemporary age we may be seeing the very beginning of a growth of a completely new, yet not altogether entirely dissimilar, culture.

Could such a culture succeed by any given standard? It is beyond the scope of this introduction to contemplate such a question, yet there is one thing for certain: Success of this nature can only be achieved by the want and participation of all of us.

Credits & Information

Submit your writing, comments, and whatever else to:
theaprilreader@gmail.com

Website: <http://theaprilreader.org>

IRC: #TAR on irc.freenode.net

Editors:

Nipplelesshorse

Prole !XDERDXUpqQ

Wildweasal !FvTu.n1ohA

Special Thanks to the Anonymous artist who designed our logo, Behemoth, Joseph, Rangah, THRILLHOUSE, our Authors, and everyone who took the time to download TAR

And now for an informative word from Wildweasal on

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