



Collection SIX

*Table of Contents:*

**Fiction**

A Place of One's Own ..... 4  
*-Anthony*

Asking Son ..... 6  
*-Cullom McCormick*

Jesus at the Airport ..... 7  
*-Cullom McCormick*

Crematorium ..... 9  
*-Johnson*

"That Explains Everything." ..... 13  
*-!LAq2Tifo22*

The Bandits and the Spider ..... 15  
*-Matthew S. Vodicka*

Bathroom ..... 22  
*-Nolan*

The Gate ..... 23  
*-Pointman*

Mirages in the dark ..... 23  
*-Pointman*

**Poetry**

Empty Black Russian ..... 24  
*-Anonymous*

Her ..... 25  
*-Anonymous*

The Nape of your Neck is softer than love ..... 25  
*-Anonymous*

Through the TV ..... 25  
*-Milam*

Out of reach ..... 26  
*-Malavox*

The Wall ..... 26  
*-Malavox*

Words ..... 27  
*-Malavox*

North ..... 27  
*-Pointman*

**Credits & Information** ..... 28

## *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:*

As you may have noticed upon download of this month's issue, there now exists advertisements on the official website of The April Reader.

The positioning of these ads---at the bottom of each page---has been placed to assure minimal interruption of your attention from what you are interested in: TAR.

So, you may ask, what are advertisements doing on the website of a non-profit effort in the first place?

The answer is that, while the current cycle of webhosting is already paid for, these ads will help to assure that hosting and release of future issues of TAR will extend past the termination of this current cycle.

Depending upon the amount of revenue that these advertisements are able to generate, there are also other fronts on which TAR would like to expand. Please see the *Afterword* of this issue for further discussion of this.

For these reasons, we encourage website visitors to not hesitate in clicking on ads which are of their interest.

Enjoy your reading---we will see you on the other side and, as always, we look forward to your comments and contributions.

Our IRC Channel:

Server: irc.freenode.net

Channel: #TAR

*Our Distribution Page:*

[www.theaprilreader.org](http://www.theaprilreader.org)

Submit your writing, comments, and whatever else to:

**[theaprilreader@gmail.com](mailto:theaprilreader@gmail.com)**

## FICTION

### **A Place of One's Own**

*-Anthony*

John Sheever: 40-year-old salary man. John Sheever: A man full of ambition to this day. John Sheever: A man dedicated to his entry level position in his company of 18 years. These are all faces of John Sheever, a man who finds himself unable to escape out of his 3rd level washroom stall.

From his seat, John Sheever stares at his surroundings: three gray walls, a “door” super imposed on the one directly opposite to him, and a tiled backing behind him. He stares at the just-used toilet paper dispenser to his right, and the graffiti right above it.

"That's old news." He grumbles to himself. If he had the courage, and a black felt pen he would have been able to write in great letters "HE WILL NOT!", but he only had a black felt pen. With a whimper he stares at his feet, watching the space between the locked door, and the tiled floor in his peripheral vision.

If only he didn't embarrass his new boss, he wouldn't have to spend his last hour of his last day trying to hide himself in the stall. It wasn't his fault! The kid was just out of his big school, he couldn't know anything, so wasn't it his job as a "senior" in the business to correct him during the initial briefing after all- he continues to rationalize it to himself. It is the only thing he can do. He tries jiggling the turn lock on the door, it doesn't move at all. For a moment he finds it a bit silly, and it gives him a little bit of happiness. Even if everything would come, and go to worst, he would at least have something to smile about.

Pretty soon the wife would call him down to "have a chat" with him, and in front of the kid too! Why did she have to always blow up in his face? Wasn't a man allowed to make mistakes in his life? It seemed unfair that she could demand such things from him while she did nothing at all. She didn't cook, or clean, and the baby sitting fees always looked higher than they were before. He had regretted marrying her, and wondered what he saw in her in the first place. Though he knew that they would leave him -it was just a matter of time for both, after all- he, himself wouldn't leave them; he had wanted them both in the past, and it gave him strength to know that he had something. Though it wasn't something he would admit being proud of outside of a washroom stall.

He runs his hand down the tiled wall around him, and stares out at the tinted window. The toilet paper holder beside him was empty, but that was alright, he didn't need to go anyways. In a far off distance he can hear someone yell, but he can't tell who. He takes a look at the graffiti above the toilet paper dispenser again, wishing he had his marker, so that he too could say he was "here".

He hears someone enter the stall beside him. The person lets his seat drop, and with a sigh he sits. A cold sweat rolls down John Sheever's temple, he tries to wipe it off with his handcuffed hands. After a brief moment, the voice speaks "Hurry up Sheever, the interrogation isn't over. Call me when you're done." Swallowing his saliva, John Sheever replies in a cracked throat "Officer, I think the door's jammed, I can't unlock it." The officer doesn't reply, simply muttering "Well, that's a new one."

Sheever rolls his thumbs over one another, trying to make sense of his situation. How did things escalate from here? What did he do wrong? The day had begun normally, and apart from this whole fiasco he did nothing different. Now he was waiting in his washroom stall for his lawyer to tell him what to say. The court assigned attorney told him that he was going to help him, but they

both they there was nothing he could do. If only the door wasn't locked, maybe then he could mount a heroic escape. Then he could go home, and find new work.

He shakes his head in dismissal, knowing that he no longer had a home to go back to, and that no could hire an escaped convict. Besides, there were bars everywhere, and no way out. The prison was guarded around the clock, and even if he managed to get out, town was 50 miles away, and it wasn't a trek someone could make on foot. And he wouldn't be here for so long in any case; his execution was coming up in a few weeks time. In the meantime he would spend his last days reflecting on the previous year; the months he spent unemployed, and how quickly the money began to run out, while it took so long to save up. How none of his friends, or relatives ever picked up his calls, and how he was behind mortgage payments.

Two pairs of footsteps entered within earshot. One voice speaks: "We've come to get you Sheever, you've been in there for hours now."

"Who sent you?! It doesn't matter... the door's jammed! I can't push the door out!"

"No it's not! Stop resisting Mr. Sheever!"

"I'm not! The door's jammed! It always has been!"

"Damn it! Mr. Sheever, we can see your hands! Stop pulling back on the door!"

\*\*\*

## Asking Son

*-Cullom McCormick*

Perhaps the most jarring thing was that she asked my opinion. We stood in the bathroom, adjusting our Sunday best. She played with her earring, evaluating different bracelets she laid out on the counter. Fumbling with the collar, my seven-year-old hands struggled with a button-up. The fight from earlier that morning muted the household. After a while, my mother started to talk.

“Your dad should really stop smoking,” she said. “It’s why we don’t talk as much at dinner.” Registering this, I slowed. Dad said he hadn’t smoked in months. My sister had told me it was always a lie when dad said he stopped smoking; she saw him outside in the field at night lighting up.

Mom’s face was neutral, yet sincere. The mirror on the wall showed the scene back to us. She smoothed the wrinkles in her dress. The beige bathroom was open behind her. I knew that, if she said anything too uncomfortable, it would be my break from the conversation. I wasn’t old enough to understand such tension regarding the family’s dysfunction, so I would usually leave the room if mom and dad worried me. There were several meals I never finished.

“Don’t worry about us not talking,” she went on. “It’s perfectly normal, and it’s not your fault.” This puzzled me. I didn’t know why it would be my fault, and they’d talked that morning. Well, yelled.

I felt I had to say something or ask a question, but I didn’t know what. So I repeated something my sister told me. “You and dad do talk,” I said. “You’re just mad at each other when you do.”

I instantly regretted saying it. Mom stopped brushing her hair and looked at my reflection. Morbid curiosity kept my wide eyes open on the tableau in the mirror. Watching the same thing play back in

front of us gave a creeping perspective. I wanted to stop what she might say by going to the bathroom, but I couldn’t bring myself to. Silence suffocated us for several minutes.

She fixed her jewelry for a time. “I’m sorry for the fight, honey,” She said after selecting a ring, her eyes still trained on her now gaunt face in the mirror.

The strange woman in the mirror surveyed the room. Her breathing quickened.

The talk wasn’t over. But the promise of getting away was too great for me, turning and stepping on a floor that felt so fragile it might have creaked and broken. She saw the attempt and straightened up, her brown eyes dashing over to me.

“Do you think,” she said. The room stopped. “Do you think I should divorce him?”

The question sank in over the next minute. I knew nothing about what divorce meant at that age, and she knew that. I couldn’t breathe. I turned, facing my mother again. I guessed an answer.

“No,” I said. “No.”

Her face was unchanged.

“I suppose you’re right,” she said. She gazed into the mirror at herself. “Forget what I said. Go to the kitchen and I’ll be down in a minute.”

The house was sterile and distant for the rest of the morning.

\*\*\*

## Jesus at the Airport

-Cullom McCormick

People flowed through the airport, tugging children and dragging luggage. I sat outside my assigned gate with a woman who escorted underage children like me, a fourteen-year-old boy waiting for the flight from Atlanta to San Francisco. A large black lady wearing a blue jumpsuit and bright orange vest accompanied me. Thick gold hoop earrings dangled around her dark neck and somehow matched the streaks of grey through her short hair. Resting in her arm was a Televangelist magazine. We didn't talk for a while. Everyone standing was too busy to notice each other. Everyone sitting was too preoccupied to talk to each other. The screens listed flights, the stores sold entertainment, and the restaurants monopolized food, killing my wallet within an hour or so. Grey clouds clumped outside the full-wall windows streaked by rain.

The escort and I didn't talk for a while. My books were at home, so I didn't have an excuse for the awkward silence. Glancing from her lap to the magazine a few times, she likely tried to decide between small talk about the handsome reverend on the cover and small talk about saving my soul.

"So," she finally said, "what do you want to be when you grow up?"

I couldn't say I was surprised by the question. "An author, I guess."

This seemed to please her. "That's really good. Y'know, I had one girl who said she wanted to be a lawyer to help the innocent people in trials."

"Heh. That'll help them more than my job."

"Oh no," she said. Her eyes lit up. "Y'all authors help people from the outside. Books can change the world."

And so can helping your local library, kids, I thought.

"You have a point, I guess."

She put the magazine down in her lap, seeming satisfied with herself for finding a way to relate saving my soul into my career choices.

"This magazine helps all kinds a people," she said. "They're some good writers in here. Like this article," she flipped the pages until the magazine opened to an article with particularly wholesome family pictures, "on how to preserve the Faith in your children."

At this point, I had to pause and rethink the situation. First of all, I wouldn't have been having one of the most uncomfortable one-sided conversations of my life if my parents had trusted me on my own. Second of all, the notion that she thought I loved children made it clear that this lady *did not know me very well*.

Well, okay, I could work with this. The poor lady's own kids had probably grown up and made her lonely. She could have been (though I hated to imagine her as a stereotype) a poor single black mother. All right. Now I'd sufficiently guilted myself into staying and agreeing with everything she said.

"It says here that the Lord..." She meandered about the topic for a while. I tuned in and out. It wasn't that I didn't believe in God or Jesus. It wasn't that I disliked people who were more religious than me. It was just that I had no idea how to deal with the situation.

"See, the family is supposed to pray together every

morning and night,” she went on. “Does your family do that?”

I couldn’t remember the last time my family had prayed together, but I felt like a better person (without having to do any of the work) by saying yes.

“And the grandchildren play a role too,” she said, turning the page and revealing a sheet of notebook paper with scribbles all over it. Yes, definitely lonely without the kids. “Though, if you ask me—and here’s my only problem with this picture, that girl’s too young to have children—grand kids come too early these days.”

I weighed the pros and cons of a birth control joke I’d heard from my father. On the one hand, the joke made me chuckle inside. On the other hand, the lady wore a rosary. Did Televangelists even wear rosaries? Surely she wasn’t Catholic—this was Georgia, after all. Man this was hard.

After more spiritual ramblings, I began drifting off. She noticed this after reading aloud the paragraph about the effects of regular family worship on infants.

“Sugar, you’re tired,” she said. I jolted and awaited a blessing. “We need to get some food in your belly.”

Getting up was a hassle for her. Instead of leading me to one of the health food racks, she stood me in line at the nearest TCBY and got out her wallet. I liked her better already.

“The menu’s up there,” she said. “What would you like?”

I knew my favorite order at TCBY by heart, but resolved to sound unsure and modest. “Um, thank you... I guess I’ll have a large raspberry smoothie with extra whipped cream, please.”

“Ha. I like you, child. You like sweets and you got a bright future.” A few gold teeth shone in her smile. “I got a son who used to be just like that.” Her wallet was fat as she took bills from it (she

might not have been poor, but she was definitely still lonely). After she gave me the smoothie, my flight’s boarding was announced. “You be good and have a safe trip, sugar. It was nice meeting you. And before I forget”—taking the Televangelist magazine in her hands, rushing through it and picking out all the notes across several sections—“you should take this. It’ll do you good. Always remember to spread the Good Word.” I hesitated, then took the magazine with a free hand.

“Thanks,” I said. The boarding line crawled and allowed no less than three awkward goodbye waves with the lady. After my ticket was checked and I saw her leave, I stopped, thinking of tossing the magazine in the trashcan by the entrance. I’d never read it. A man bemoaned the delayed line. I couldn’t bring myself to throw it away and boarded the plane feeling better and worse about myself for the interaction.

\*\*\*



# The Crematorium

-Johnson

Crematorium. I hate that word. But that's basically what the Bosio 5 is: a great, big wood drying oven. About three weeks ago I was accepted into my first job in Harem Downs, at the local hardware store. Hell, I didn't even know how to use a hammer, but with \$18 an hour and double pay to operate the Bosio after midnight, who was gonna say no, huh?

Though I guess that's where it started for me – blinded by money and ignorance I decided to operate the machine on Tuesday afternoons and Friday nights. It wasn't a hard job: load the wood off the truck, drink a soda, load the wood into the oven, set the timer, drink a soda, come back in 3 hours, load the wood out of the oven, and drink a soda. By the end of the week I was \$270 richer and burping my way home.

The Bosio, or "The Boss," as I like to playfully call him, is a big monster as well. It's about as big as my apartment; hell, it's probably bigger than that. The walls are made of thick, reinforced steel, and the door is so damn heavy it actually has to use hydraulics to open and close.

About an hour and fifteen minutes ago, I had just finished packing the wood and was setting the timer when I noticed something shining out of the corner of my eye. My watch had fallen off while I'd been moving the wood. I had inherited it from my grandpa after he thought it'd be a good idea to swan dive into the local river and not come up for air. At least he wasn't wearing the watch at the time.

I rushed back in there to pick it up, just thinking about how pissed my mom would be if I broke her father's favourite watch. It's

funny how things can seem so important just for a second, and then become your lowest priority in the next. As I bent down to pick up Grandpa's watch I heard a slamming sound and what sounded like the hissing of a pissed-off carpet snake.

My mind turns to panic, and I stub my toe on a rogue piece of lumber as I rush towards the exit. But a part of me already knows: once you set the timer and hit that magical start button, the door closes after 10 seconds and the drying cycle begins.

I placed my hand on the cold door. There's no handle or knob; it's a ton of pressed steel. There is no way a man, or a car for that matter, would be able to open the freaking thing. But that didn't stop me from banging the living hell out of it. I hit the door over and over, screaming for help. I hit it so many times that the sides of my hand turned purple and my palms now have four neat little crescent moon shapes from where I dug my nails into them.

I was so scared; hell, I'm still scared now. The Boss takes about an hour and a bit to warm up its heaters. At about the hour and a half mark he blasts the room with air so hot that, in the words of my employer, Mr Daniels, "It would skin the hide from Satan himself!" In reality it's about 160 degrees Celsius of compressed air that gets blasted into the room, but, personally, I find Mr. Daniels's description much, much more terrifying.

I stood there, screaming at the door, for maybe 30 minutes, but it was pointless. Even if it wasn't sound-proofed, it was a Friday night and no one would come until about 9am the next morning. I was officially on my own and royally screwed.

I went to go sit down on a stacked pile of wood. I hadn't really noticed over my screaming, but there was a slight chugging sound from the heaters warming up. The Boss was laughing at me.

Then it occurred to me: something that I felt so stupid for not thinking of earlier. I reached into my pocket and pulled out my phone. I looked at the reception – no bars. The inner me was screaming with frustration, but the outer me's voice was way too sore to do that. I kicked the pine wood out of frustration, and I let out a pathetic yelp when my foot made contact with it. The foot which I had stubbed my toe was throbbing in pain, and I had been too thick and scared to notice it.

Mum had always told me that my ignorance would be the death of me. Congratulation's, ma! You were right, and now I'm about to be baked like one of your awful, awful casseroles!

I held my foot tightly in my hand and I looked around the room. Four vents were placed evenly along the roof. Maybe it was just the heat, or the pain from my foot, but I still think they look like eyes, watching to see what I would do next. I stood up and limped until I was directly under one. I figured there was probably a way to reach it if I stacked the wood high enough. It was too small for me to fit through, but I could probably get some reception through them. I climbed as high as I could without shifting the wood and then took out my phone. No bars.

The room was getting noticeably warm now, and was probably sitting at about 35 degrees Celsius. I tried to shift some of the wood, but without my forklift it was like trying to move a stubborn elephant. No wonder it wasn't moving – the wood was wet. Wet wood equals heavy wood; wet wood equals friction; wet wood equals no climbing up the wood, Jack!

I held the phone high above my head – no bars. I stood on one foot and lifted myself a few centimetres high on my good toes. A

small little bar hit the corner of the phone and a wave of ecstasy blew through me. I dialled Mr Daniels, only he would know how to get the door open. Imagine if I'd rung the police, they would've turned up and been able to do jack shit to open the door. I waited a few seconds for the phone to connect and start ringing.

It rang once. My heart was beating so loud I could hear it in my ears. Sweat was dripping from nearly every part of my body and I had to keep flipping my hair to keep it out of my eyes. What if he didn't answer?

It rang again. The heat was worse now; I could feel my clothes sticking to my body and the heat of the air moving around my skin. My toes were getting sore from holding the phone up but I couldn't let them drop. What if he didn't answer?

It rang once more. I coughed to try and get the hoarse lump out of my throat. I shifted my weight on my toes to try and get more comfortable. It didn't work. *Oh god he's not going to answer.*

The phone clicked; "Hello?" a croaky voice answered. He had obviously been roused from his slumber, and the non-freaking out part of me felt slightly guilty for doing so.

"Th-," I tried to start talking but my throat was a lot dryer than I expected and it was hard to push the words out. "Thank god! Sir! It's Jack, Jack Sullivan! I've been locked in the wood oven! Sir!? You need to come do-"

"Jack, you're going to have to speak louder son, I can't hear you," he said, sounding slightly impatient.

“YOU NEED TO COME DOWN HERE AND HELP ME!” I screamed as loud as my throat would let me.

“Jack? Can you hear me? Speak louder boy!”

I let out a blood curdling scream. It was liberating, getting all the frustration out of my system: the anger; the shock. I screamed so loud I felt my face vibrate and my cheeks swell with blood. It was then that I lost my balance.

I landed hard on my bad foot and yelped like a hurt dog. I dropped the phone off the wooden plank I was walking and watched it tumble and hit the floor. I also watched the pieces scatter along the floor. I still watched even after everything had stopped moving and all I could hear was my heartbeat and The Boss laughing at me.

“You’re baked, Jack! Baked!” I heard my mum say to me from the outer limits of my sanity. I reached into my pockets to look for something to help me, and all I found was my wallet and keys. The red pen in my front pocket had exploded and my shirt looked like it had been bludgeoned half to death.

I put my head into my hands and sighed. I felt stupid and cheated at the same time. Even though practically everything that had happened was indirectly my fault I still felt I needed to blame someone else. I wasn’t going to sit here and be roasted alive feeling sorry for myself. Only Goths and Christians would do that, and I was neither depressed nor religious. I did, however, recognize the irony of being burned alive for my sins of stupidity.

I looked at the watch that had betrayed me for the time. I had been trapped for nearly an hour. It’s true what they say: time really flies when you’re trapped in a gigantic oven.

I slowly climbed down the wood and onto the floor, limping pathetically as I tried to ignore the broken pieces of phone scattered

everywhere.

I surveyed the room trying to figure out where the compressed air is fired from. Looking towards the roof I could see small grills with squares no bigger than my pinkie finger lined up like soldiers. They ran along every wall and pointed in every direction making sure that each piece of wood, and now one trapped pig, was nicely cooked and dried.

It occurred to me that, if I piled some of the smaller pieces of wood around me to act as a moist barricade and sit to face the corner, I could maybe minimize the damage done to my skin.

I limped towards the lumber I was moving not less than an hour and 5 minutes ago to the door and started stacking them on top of each other. The pieces were a lot smaller and not all evenly cut so it was like playing Tetris.

A shotgun of nostalgia blew through me and brought me back to when I was no older than 5, when I would build forts in the back garden with bricks and rocks. My mum would always tell me “Be careful, Jacky! You never know when it might collapse and crush you.” She would then face my dad and say “Isn’t that right, Steve?” to which my dad would grunt, enter the fridge and pull out his 7th beer of the day.

One warm day the fort did in fact collapse and several very heavy rocks crushed my leg. I wouldn’t know until a few days later but it had been broken in two places, and I wouldn’t walk normally for a very long time. What I did hear though, before I started crying, was my dad. He was laughing, drunk off his nut as usual. He thought it was funny as hell that his son was hurt and he doubled over and slapped his knee like a redneck. I’ll never forget that laughter.

I snapped back into reality and out of my cozy day dream. I had assembled the barrier against the corner, and I would be lying if I didn't say I was a little proud. I had one large square piece of wood left I was going to use to cover the top once I was inside. I wiped my moist hands on my jeans and tried to get a good grip on the wood.

I proceeded to lift the wood as high as I could above my head. I stepped into the wooden box gingerly, like I was getting into a hot bath. I lowered myself slowly and placed the wood neatly on top. The light suddenly disappeared and I was sucked into complete blackness. I had never been afraid of the dark, but if there was ever a time to start, that exact moment would be it. The Boss wasn't laughing anymore; he sounded more as if he was snickering childishly to himself. I sat in the humid, dark box and started to reflect on how I had brought myself here.

\*\*\*

That brings me to now: I'm still sitting here, helpless in my little wooden sarcophagus, surrounded by my steel tomb. The wet wood and my heavy breathing has made the air humid and almost unbearable. My clothes are soaked through and I'm sitting in a puddle of what I hope is steaming sweat.

I wonder if Mr Daniels decided if it was in his best interest to get out of his warm bed and come see what was wrong? To come see why I screamed into the phone so suddenly and why it was cut off even faster. His house is less than ten minutes away and I called him, 10-? No, I can't remember how long ago. I can just see my watch, and it has been roughly an hour and 25 minutes.

I wonder if this wood will protect me at all? Maybe, if I'm lucky, I'll escape with third degree burns and a new haircut. Though even if I do survive the blast I'll still have to sit here for another hour

and a half while The Boss runs its cooling cycle.

"You're Baked Jack!" The Boss tells me. I try to ignore him and listen out for Mr Daniel's heavy approaching footsteps. I hear a slight whirring sound come from inside the room and a far off clicking from one of my boss's; I can't tell which.

I blink a few times and feel tears of sweat rolling down my face. I close my eyes and picture myself in my backyard, playing Army Man and building my bunker. My mum calls me in for a cold glass of lemonade and puts on a rerun of Star Trek; she stands towering over me and pats my head. I turn my head upwards to face her and smile; she smiles back and slowly walks back into the kitchen.

The whirring of the heater has stopped. The Boss isn't laughing anymore. Maybe it isn't funny, maybe he's found something more interesting to do.

Maybe he's waiting for the show to begin...

\*\*\*

## "That explains everything"

-!LAq2Tifo22

Nigel was a day laborer in an agricultural country on a planet exactly like Earth, existing in a separate universe from our own. Well, as nearly to exactly as can be expected of alternate realities; there was one slight anatomical variance in the humans of Nigel's sort, but it was not at all easily discernible under normal conditions. It was a dusty, dry evening in the late summer as Nigel came into the workman's quarters on the southern end of his employer's estate. The building, one of three such, was adequately structured and comfortable for the some fifteen or twenty men residing. Foodstuffs were provided by the House and, after some time, Nigel and his fellows set about to drinking and card playing over supper. As the night wore on, Nigel was of the last to lie down to bed. He did so shrewdly, for though he was neither shy nor thin-skinned the jeering of the others, should he be discovered, was both unpleasant and unnecessary. He lay languidly in his shoddy bunk until the air filled with snores. Presently, his hand slid between the bed post and the wall, moving slowly so that the rustling of pages might not arouse the attentions of those still awake.

The women inside were familiar and worn, but as yet still desirable to Nigel, whose hand rest coaxingly on his lower abdomen after choosing his doxy. The magazine was gentlemanly and quite tame, though there were some pictures of women in as little as a tight gossamer belt around the midsection. It was such a photograph that was his favorite; the model's dark hair and eyes, looking straight into the camera, and her hands folded discretely between her legs were enough to occupy his fantasies throughout an entire day. However, tonight he satisfied himself with the much less provocative pose of a light brunette six pages before. Relaxed, he dropped the magazine carelessly back in its place and fell into a deep sleep.

He awoke unexpectedly on a boardwalk in L.A. in mid-afternoon, where he had been sleeping upright on a bench for many hours. He had taken the place of a vacationing Harvard pre-law student, who would never return and who would be missed very much by his friends and family. Nigel walked dreamily through the streams of pedestrians, dressed in the khaki shorts and touristic Hawaiian shirt of the pre-law student, quite uncomprehending. He continued on in that fashion for many hours, never panicking and indeed calmly and almost accurately surmising that he was in Los Angeles, California. Of course, he assumed it was his own California when in fact it was not. Nigel had slipped through a small waver in the fabric of reality, and though such things will eventually loop back on themselves, safely removing whatever scattered belongings to their rightful positions, it is impossible to say when such a thing will occur, be it in a moment or many centuries past the fall of mankind. This did not trouble Nigel for he did not know, and he was at that moment considering how extraordinarily generous providence had been to him.

He had heard that the women of metropolis were more sexually liberal than those to which he was accustomed, but he had never imagined anything so audacious as the scene presented to him. Strolling along, casually chatting with one another, literally everywhere he looked, tens of women exposed their slim, tanned stomachs to him. His cheeks flushed lustily and he quickened his pace, hoping to find a less populated area where he might quell his erection. Soon, he found himself on Skid Row. As he slowed his pace, admiring the whores and no longer ashamed, he formed a plan. He had reached the conclusion that he must be having a waking dream, which his bunk-mate Shelly had often professed to have and discussed at great length, much to the chagrin of his cabin-fellows. Therefore he was not at all concerned, being where he was and planning what he was planning. And he was not

surprised when he reached into the pocket of his trousers to find nearly one hundred dollars, because he had wanted it to be there. He had wanted it very much.

Leaning against the wall of a building, not ten yards ahead of him, was a 40-year-old prostitute. Her face was turned away, but from the thick, dark hair and the gossamer top through which he saw her tired breasts, Nigel knew it was she. He thought it funny that she should be older, but it didn't bother him. She was a bit heavier as well, though mostly around the ass and thighs; her face and arms were still slender, and the skin on her stomach was tight. She was facing him now and, noticing his obvious interest, turned her body towards him as well. He looked her over without a trace of self-consciousness; he could have trembled with satisfaction. Her eyes were like black diamonds under the tacky red eye shadow. Nigel handed her the money right away, and she took it after only a moment's hesitation. Leading him down an alley, her walk was strong and inflexible.

She had been a prostitute for more than twenty years, and had taken, without suffering, every indignity one can imagine. It is a rare woman, made of stone and quite imperturbable. She was neither squeamish nor slatternly, and had many loyal customers. She was thusly successful in her profession, willing to do anything and everything because she felt she could not be caught off guard. And it had been true for a long time, while she kept up a great deal of traffic for herself, even as her looks began to fade and the years staked up on her body. Nigel posed no threat to her, she supposed quite incorrectly.

She stood expectantly before him. Nigel grasped her hips firmly and dropped to his knees, pressing his face to her stomach. It was somewhat unusual for men to go down on her, though not enough to pique her interest. At first, he kissed her all over the abdomen, breathing the scent of cheap soap and sweat from her skin

almost religiously. Then he began to tongue her navel, probing and licking it attentively. She ran her red-clawed fingers through his hair and urged him downward with a subdued pressing. But he made no motion to cease. She could have smiled - it was as though he had confused it for her cunt. She sighed in mock pleasure, thinking sardonically of the fetishes she had encountered before. Nigel took this as a cue and rose to his feet. Lifting his shirt, he penetrated her. She was sick with disbelief as he thrust abandonedly into her. The erection protruding in place of his navel was little more than an inch and so it did not hurt, but the horror she felt at this new violation was overwhelming. She began to cry, and her broken sobs aroused him. He groaned and filled her belly button with ejaculate. It was a dream, he need not be mindful of pregnancy. She slumped to the ground in despair as he became flaccid.

In the next moment Nigel found himself lying again in his bed. He started, attracting the eye of Shelly, who was eating breakfast with the other men. "Ey! There you are; how'd you get in here without us seein' it? We been lookin' all 'round for you! Was you out on a midnight rendezvous?" He winked. Another man said, "Could'na been, Shel. I heard 'im last night same as every night. Wouldn'a had nothin' to give no girl!" The men laughed. Nigel sat up. His head swam. "I thought I was dreamin'..." He wearily explained what had happened. Most of the men weren't very interested, but Shelly was. "You musta got snatched 'way through some rip ina fabric a space-time," he said knowledgeably. "Lucky you ain't dead er stuck there!" Nigel's head felt stuffed with wet cotton. "Oh," he said.

\*\*\*

## The Bandits and the Spider

-Matthew S. Vodička ([www.msvodicka.com](http://www.msvodicka.com))

Even the most altruistic bond between bandits will falter and erode in the situation of a great haul. Their jackpot had just occurred, and they were now making off with it. The two men stepped hastily along a largely unknown path in the woods, both slouching on fitfully, limping under the weight of the bulbous, heavy sacks they both had in each hand. An hour prior, they were of utmost fraternal regard toward each other (though brothers they were not) and were even prone to split between them the very last pinch of food they had, each night. Now, the younger of the two men, critical toward the other's movements and casting sideways glances at the half of the loot that was not being plied around by his own hands, wasn't considering food at all, let alone the splitting of it with his comrade.

The problem was the sheer size of the day's earnings. Like film cameras suddenly aware of the footage they were projecting, both men tried equally to diminish their thoughts and act as though they hadn't scored so much as a penny. However, it was useless. Their eyes would lock and, in spite of themselves, they'd both smile. They were glad about their earnings, yes, but gladder, still, for each thought about the future they had. The younger bandit began to fantasize about a life unfettered from his companion, and it toxified his mind to think that the older bandit was having the same thoughts he was. It wasn't the younger bandit's fault. He had been thinking about the potential for betrayal since the raid, when he heard the older bandit, in total awe of their loot, exclaim, "A man could make quite a new life for himself, with all this!" The younger bandit received these words quite badly.

They were, neither of them, very good nor lucky bandits, and this was the most money either of the two had ever seen. Six years of banditry has never been as productive as the past hour. They were

constant companions the entire duration, and never left each other for more than a few hours at a time. Yet, "a man could," the older bandit had said. "A man could," the younger one thought, and not "we could," nor "a pair of men could," but, "a man could..." Distrust was planted in the younger bandit's brain, and stuck there like a slime-coated seed. It hungrily swelled up with water, growing larger and larger, until he could think of nothing but this unmistakable object growing within his mind.

"There is a house, just up the way," the older of the bandits said when both had to drop their sacks, exhausted. Neither man knew if his portion was a fair half, but that had become more immaterial the further away they had advanced from the crime scene. By the time the men found the house, the younger of the two had already secretly vowed to end up with the full bounty.

"I knew the guy who lived here," said the older bandit, who was far more experienced about both his craft and the locale than the younger one was. "He probably built this house. So many years ago. I believe he has died."

This last comment fell with a question on the younger bandit's ears. It made him even more suspicious, for he thought he had heard something deeply suggestive in the tone his partner used. He studied the older bandit's face. Uncharacteristically, he said nothing for reply. If something sinister was percolating within his companion's mind, rationalized the younger bandit, he wanted his own suspicious attitude out in the fore, and visible. The older bandit, however, merely crossed himself and, completing that gesture, then kissed two of his fingers. The older bandit was prone to such religious exhibitions, which were always ignored by the younger bandit, before, but to see the gesture now infuriated

him. He held his ire inside and began to contemplate the best method and time to murder the man.

Neither of the bandits were educated, but the more intelligent of the two was doubtlessly the younger. Many who encountered the younger bandit believed him to be hiding a rather extensive education, which was a misconception he fully understood, and sometimes played to his advantage. He always comported himself as a quiet scholar, by speaking in a highly confident and knowledgeable tone even about that with which he had had no experience at all. The truth was that the younger bandit had stopped attending school well before the older bandit had even thought of dropping out. In terms of formal education, the older was definitely more learned. However, in terms of savvy and intellect, it was the younger bandit who excelled. His youthful lack of experience only made him more wily.

The house's foundation was made of stone, but only by way of a very meagre rectangle that broke only for a door. The stonework did not reach above one's knees. The rest of the house was made up of decaying and slime-coated wood. There was a window, but it was a diminutive thing, as far as windows are concerned, and half-obscured by a fallen branch. There wasn't a chimney. Its absence was most likely due to there not being resource enough for one. Once they were inside, the men could see how the floor of the house was overgrown with weeds that shot up through the slats of the floorboards. Despite the fact that very little light at all could find its way to the inside of the building, life had broken into every crevice that the hovel offered.

"What a poorly constructed house this is," said the younger bandit once the men had set their sacks down on the floor. Neither of the men took a hand off of that which they carried, but they did let the loads rest on the ground. The younger bandit noted his elder's hands.

"You'd rather be outside? With all that—" he gestured to the sacks, "that you have about you, now?" the older bandit said with slight irritation. Although he was not the man who had built the house, he was the one who knew about it, and he was also the one who had suggested that they both spend the night there. It was for this reason that he felt so obligated to defend the place from derisive comment. After he had said this, the older bandit looked around and decided it was rather sad, in any case, and thereby let his anger dissipate.

"In the woods? I don't want to be out there. But, at the same time, I don't want to sleep on planks, either." The younger bandit lightly stamped his foot on the floorboards. "It's hard. It hurts my hips. It is impossible for me to sleep on it," he said, eyeing the only bed of the house, which was situated in a damp corner almost completely free of light, it being so far away from the door.

"Sleep?" the older bandit said, as if the idea was entirely new to his mind. After a meditative pause, he said, "Take the bed, then. Although, probably littered with insects. Won't be much better than the floor."

"Insects don't hurt my hips," the younger commented, dragging his belongings across the floor and laying them amongst the weeds growing out profusely beside the bed.

The bed was made of wood and sacks of settled feathers. It was a pitiful piece of furniture that was, indeed, no more preferable than the planks of the floor. The younger bandit sat down on it and felt immediately how damp the entire mattress was; the seat of his pants was, at an instant, thoroughly wet. He, however, pretended to have no qualm whatsoever with the bed, for he wanted to be in the darker half of the house—at least until the sun went down. Although he didn't yet have a



plan, he knew that his companion was far better skilled with their daggers than he was. From this cold and damp area on the bed, he could observe, and, at the same time, not be observed. He was looking for any sign of distrust within his companion's actions, but, most of all, he was looking for an opportunity.

"Snot such a bad place," the older bandit commented. He was by now sitting Indian-style on the floorboards. Before him, growing up through the slats of the planks, was a beautiful but frail looking red flower. Its stalk rose up to his head. He had the flower cupped in his hand, so that the stem of it ran down between the base of two of his fingers. He admired it quietly.

"No. I like it," the younger bandit replied as he leaned back in the bed. Initially, he wanted to lie down, just to show how agreeable the bed was to him, but he had stopped when he felt, with his hands, how slimy and wet the whole outfit was. Instead, the younger bandit stopped there, resting back on his hands. He smiled limply at his accomplice.

Hours passed with neither man saying anything. Their hands had remained on their separate loads, although neither bandit wanted to mention the money that was therein contained. There was not even the pretence of going through the loot and equally dividing it up. As stated before, neither man was a good bandit, and that is mostly due to neither of the men wanting to be bandits. They did what they did out of necessity, and so always had a stiff hook out for any betterment that could be made. It was either split the money and remain a bandit right along with him, the younger bandit thought, or get rid of him and forge something great with all the new resources. The younger of the two was racking his mind for some neutral topic they could discuss—something that had nothing at all to do with the money. The older bandit, on the other hand, seemed not to care about the money, despite the fact that his hand still clinched the sacks tightly. He studied the flower. They spent this time in quiet planning

of the new lives they would make for themselves.

At last, the older one said, "My mother had flowers like this in her garden."

The younger one only grunted in acknowledgement of having heard what was said.

"Don't know what they're called," he continued to say, "but the stalk is so thick and strong, see?"

Where the petals are so easily ruined. Like paper in your hands." The younger bandit said nothing, but merely studied the older one. The older bandit went on, "She had hundreds of these. Don't know why. Must have liked 'em."

After a pause, the younger bandit said, "Those are Ryitos."

"What are they?" said the older bandit, looking up and out at the darkness.

"Ryitos," the younger said, repeating the word he'd just invented. "I know them well. I'd know that plant anywhere. I recognised it right when we walked in."

"Ryitos," the older bandit repeated, trying to memorize it.

"You got it," came the reply from the bed.

"Beautiful things," said the mesmerized, older bandit. His mind slowly displayed to him a few of the things it hid—memories of his childhood and of his mother. "These things have really deep roots," he said. "I remember that."

"Yes, they do. Very deep roots, you're right about that," said the younger, confidently. "They are in the Simptan family of plants, you know. They are known for their strong stalks and roots, but they've all got fairly frail flowers."

"You were a gardener?" the older bandit asked, more curious than suspicious.

"I have been everything, just about," the younger said. "Just about."

"Fine. That's fine," said the older bandit. Looking up, he said, "You think I could be a gardener?"

"Man, you can be whatever you'd like to be. Sure, you can become a gardener. Of course—not overnight." Then, the younger added, "you need resources, first."

It was the first time that either of them had alluded directly to the money.

The older bandit continued to look at the flower, touching its petal with one of his hands and gripping his bags tightly with the other. Watching from the bed, the younger bandit saw the hand still on the bags and thought, now, for sure, that their distrust was mutual. His eyes burned murderously within their sockets. He hated how the older bandit didn't trust him, after all the time they had spent together. As he gazed, he saw a stupid, childlike simplicity in the elder's contemplation of the flower. It enraged him even further. It was obnoxious. It was jejune; so feminine. He couldn't believe that the older bandit would use the money to become a gardener, and, based entirely on that assumption, he began to take out his dagger and bolster himself up for the kill. The younger bandit did not know, himself, what he would use the money for, but he knew it was better

than any aspiration this simpleton before him could conjure—this grown man cupping a flower and sitting Indian style on the floor. He was disgusted.

The younger bandit stood up.

"But, yeah, all you need are some plants," he commented to the elder. "There's plants all around, you know. Even in here, all you do is take them. Put them in a pot, or what have you. Grow them, sell them."

"Yeah? That easy, is it?"

"Absolutely. Start with that one," the younger bandit urged. "You could even use that one to start your career. It's like it was here, waiting for you, after all. That rare flower."

"It is rare?" asked the older bandit.

"Damn right it's rare. Your mother had fine taste, I can tell. Didn't she?"

"Well, I don't know about that..." said the older bandit, feeling a bit awkward.

The younger bandit held his dagger at his side, hiding it in the folds of his coat. He didn't want to use it. He didn't want to stab his accomplice with a dagger. There was an indignity in stabbing his partner, and he knew it. He would have much rather beat him over the head with some object, but he supposed, in this barren house, he did not have that option.

"These plants are pretty strong," cautioned the older bandit.

"Nothing you can't handle. You've got experience, right?"

"Well, maybe if I," the older bandit firmly gripped the stock from where he sat and tried to hoist it up. The plant remained where it was, quite tethered to the earth.

"Come on, you gotta pull harder than that. You know, yourself, how many roots are under this thing."

The younger bandit moved toward the older, saying, "I'll help you—," which caused the older bandit to stand up in full and say, "No, no. No. I got it. I can do this."

The older bandit placed his bags between his legs. "No, it's fine. Stay over there. I have experience, you said so yourself."

"All right," said the younger. One of his hands was in the air, as a sign of surrender, while the other hand gripped tightly on the hidden handle of his weapon. "All right. I just wanted to help. Rare flower, and all."

With an eye that seemed in constantly regard of his companion, the older bandit began to grip the stalk of the plant. The younger bandit saw numerous suspicions in the countenance of the older bandit as the older bandit commenced to yank and pull heavenward. Still, he was prepared to leave off the plant at any moment. The older bandit did not let his guard down. The flower at the top of the plant rippled and waved as though it were signalling a distant post for help.

His plan was to lunge at the older bandit with the hilt deeply fisted in both his hands, bringing the blade directly down into the back of the struggling man's neck. It would take quite a movement,

he considered, for the older bandit and the flower were over seven paces away. Furthermore, it would have to be quick. The older bandit seemed to his companion to be keeping a vigilant air about him.

He was at the task with all his force before either of the men had even seen evidence of progress. Eventually, however, threads of the root began to show, one by one, causing the younger bandit to comment, "I think you're getting it! Keep going; go." The planks which buttressed the plant began to bulge lightly up and shift slightly. Meanwhile, the older bandit was turning red and purple veins, whose paths were faithfully followed by trickles of sweat, fell about his head.

"This damn thing," the elder bandit said through one exhale, mid-pull, of extreme vehemence.

This dumb, old man, pulling at a weed. "Now!" screamed the younger bandit's internal council. The pathetic sight; "Now! Get him, now!" and the younger bandit was, indeed, about to lunge forward with all his speed and strength when the elder bandit, keeping up a solid tug, and grunting as loudly and as long as a furious animal, completely uprooted the entire plant in a very violent splitting of the decrepit floorboards. The elder bandit fell backwards onto the ground with the entirety of the plant gripped in both of his hands. There was an enormous spray of earth during the upheaval, and numerous insects scurried from the freshly made plot. A millipede of shocking, even sickening proportions, crawled between the younger bandit's feet and disappeared under the bed.

The older bandit was laughing victoriously from the floor as he sat up. He had put his knees up before him and

rested his tired arms upon them. Because he still held the plant in his hands, the root, which was more than three times longer than the plant itself, went down between his legs at a stiff spike that had to bend upon reaching the floor and trail away like the tail of a dead animal.

The younger bandit left his dagger in its holster and clapped impulsively. "Perfect job," he was saying to the older bandit. "Well done; nice."

"I got it," was all the older bandit said, still laughing.

Due to his vantage point, the younger bandit saw it first. Approximately the size of a softball, it glowed thickly in the dark (as it was by now fairly dim outside) and seemed to be its very own source of light. Its legs were a drab shade of fuchsia and moved so quickly they could have been as much as 50 in number. Its body, though far darker in its brownish colour than the legs, still, paradoxically, appeared to grow even brighter than those appendages. It was an enormous. Clutching at the very end of the root, it was as though the spider was just previously buried deep within the ground. The younger bandit saw it move with such incredible speed that he did not have the time to call out a syllable before the radiating spider had climbed the entire length of the plant and had deposited itself right upon the older bandit's hands.

Instantly, the older bandit shuddered violently all throughout his body. Repulsed and terrified by the sensation from his hands, he spastically threw the plant aside, to the wall, where it fell quite limp and useless. The older bandit quickly stood up, but had no sooner registered the image of his companion's disbelieving gaze before his attention was directed to the glowing hand that he, on impulse, violently shook. It was futile. The spider was practically latched onto the man's hand, and shaking it did nothing to free himself from the phosphorescent shackle. Wincing in fright, the older bandit began to

scream out noises as he started to move both of his hands together in crazed speed. It appeared as though he was washing them rather violently in mid-air.

The younger bandit kept his distance, for he had never seen anything at all like the creature. He had been attempting to get some substantial observation of the arachnid, which was difficult, for it now busily circled the older bandit's moving hands in rapid criss-crosses. Ultimately, the younger bandit saw no malice in it. The behaviour was strange, but it was not malignant. The spider was in such an excited furor, and was so giddily replacing the threads it wound around the older bandit's hands as quickly as his host had brushed them off, that it almost looked, to the younger bandit, like the creature was playing.

"Get it off me! What the hell is it—get it off!" the elder bandit was in hysterics and could not explain the glowing body that scurried from one hand to the other. The sight was a frantic blur for both of the men. It was neon lights in a hand-held tornado. It dazzled just as much as it frightened. The elder bandit continued to fret spastically, standing in one place and crying out desperately for the younger bandit's aid.

"Please!" He was by now weeping in abject frustration.

"Be careful. Stop!" Said the younger bandit, authoritatively. "Stop moving your hands like that!"

"I can't! I can't stop; get it off me!"

Nothing of the older bandit's frame moved but his arms and hands. Everything else about his person was rooted rigidly, as though he was afraid the movement of a leg would attract the spider to that region of his body.

"Listen!" said the young bandit. "I've heard about these. I've heard about these—it's a Sargong Spider," he said, inventing the name. "I can't help you, if you don't stop moving your hands. It's poisonous, you know!"

"Oh, my God! Please, help me, God!" the elder bandit screamed out in anguish. "If I stop, it's going to bite me!" All his movements were pure compulsion.

"I'm surprised! Hasn't it already bitten you?!"

"I don't know! Please; get it off!" The elder bandit's face was slick with sweat and tears.

"It's rare for it not to have bitten you by now. It's probably bitten you numerous times, already. Can you feel it?"

"Yes! Oh, God. I can feel it! It bit me; I'm going to die!"

"It's over," the young one said. "It's going to keep biting you until you die. That's how the Sargong does it! Don't you feel him biting you?! He's biting you right now. Biting you to death! Stop moving your damn hands!"

"Oh God, Yes! No, please!" the older bandit, at these words, let out a plaintive growl and fell almost directly right down to his knees. To the younger bandit, it looked as though some mechanism within the man had popped, fizzled, and then ceased to function. His entire body shut down. The elder bandit slumped back, his torso doubling over his feet, and he lay on the floor like that—dead.

The younger bandit watched the glowing arachnid as it manoeuvred all over the hands (which were lightly bound together by webbing,) body, and head of the dead man. It was as though the creature was the bored, luminescent hand of someone desperate

seeking entertainment. It crawled, then stood still. The spider rested on the dead bandit's chest as though it were quite demure that the man had ceased to move. Just above the man's heart, the arachnid dropped its bright, brown body down and lied there like a glowing shuttlecock.

It stayed in this position, even long after the younger bandit, saddled with all the bags, left the house. It could have been that the spider was waiting for the corpse to show some sign of animation, thought the bandit. The image occupied his mind as he made his slow retreat. Considering it further, the bandit also thought it looked as though the creature was guarding its quarry, and that it had proudly claimed the old bandit's death for itself. No, thought the younger bandit. He shook his head. That's not how it is. He didn't know anything about spiders, but he did know people. Everything about the scene had told him that the spider was harmless, albeit quite tenacious, and that his companion had died by nothing more than the overwhelming fright of his suggestions.

He laughed to himself, shouldering the weight of the sacks, and moving along the forest in the night. He'd find some safe place to store most of the loot. Why not the house you just left? His internal voice asked of him, and he couldn't think of a reason. After a time, since he was alone, he rationalized it was because of the phosphorescent arachnid. The creature was why he left. But you, yourself, said it was innocuous, he said to himself. He had to leave off these thoughts, and forced himself to think of his future with the money, instead. He slowly made his way through thick and damp underbrush.

Realizing he had no plan whatsoever for the money, his mind was free to think of anything at all, and it soon reverted back to the glowing claw perched victoriously above the dead bandit's body. He shuddered. He counteracted his shudder with

a forced laugh, and said to himself aloud, "come on, now! You got it fair and square."

\*\*\*

## **Bathroom**

*-Nolan*

I had been pissing, the stream just landing in the water connecting my penis to the toilet like a short lived leash, when I saw the little spider timidly crawl up the wall from behind the water tank. It looked unsure, and as I continued to piss, I decided to kill it. I knew it was wrong, that if some greater being were to look down on me and see me, it could just as easily make such a decision, and I would be overcome with fear, helplessness, and cowardice. Yet, still I plotted the little creature's doom. I was not completely merciless however. After all, spiders are natural enemies of the mosquito which makes them a sort of ally, if not a friend. If the spider could manage to hide itself from plain view before I finished my stream, I would let it go with fate to thank. If it stayed out, in the open, then it deserved nothing but death. It climbed on, little by little, still traveling far, for I am a man who passes much water by the by. Another man, once remarked to me, having listened to my flow from outside the door, "That was the longest piss I ever did hear."

So the spider had time to bide, but quietly, fearlessly, it moved on, rounding a corner of the bathroom and starting towards me. My stream ebbed and stopped. Unemotionally, I watched from outside my body as I reached for a piece of toilet paper, only one sheet, and grabbed at the spider without pulling up my underwear. It was not a firm grip but I thought it enough and I dropped the piece of paper over the toilet. Immediately I knew my error. I had dropped the sheet from too high and it had not the weight to fall direct or true. Instead it fell to the dark maroon carpet around the toilet, chosen in my childhood by my mother and now by my wife. Immediately, I lost sight of the spider. Looking down at my penis there remained a drop of urine on its tip. Shaking it off, I pulled up my underwear and left the bathroom, turning off the lights on the little spider who got away.

\*\*\*

## The Gate

*-Pointman*

The land where Heaven rested my head, twisted and spun up all in their dark clouds to have me rule the farms of families, was decrepit in the wake of my interior destruction. When my grace came upon the people, terror swept away their voices under the omnipotence as my arrival did taste so strong. Faith was non-existent, for I had not seen it; nor had those before, nor had those who lifted up the very platform of reality in the earliest reach of the cosmic. Now, beneath the seemingly raw pathway of light leading on this blind to be with the people, there was nothing outside of the God's light;

yet faith was there, welcoming this fragile child as a collective of shuffles, or the myriad symphonies of new relatives.

And though I shouted, they were crying all in my rampage – they did not pity me nor bide the depression of my depth. Tears of them, sliding and bursting with signaling hands all about, were the joyous cheers of a journey end.

Just before, when the steps did stop before the gates and light brushed at you, caressing you away into a lullaby so to wake up for the same eye of God – they will ask if I am breathing.

Heaven-bound in a half-rest, the voice of mine will return triumphantly with a shout.

\*\*\*

## Mirages in the dark

*-Pointman*

When the moon was over us, our eyes twinkly gems in its reflection, we knew that night light exactly would pave out the road for us. I was the figure in the sill, stirring up fear with swaps and double-takes on the bushes just below – there was shadows in them. Sharp moving and messy beings; I wanted to believe that, just like any creature, those cloaks spun out from the porch-light to illuminate a tiny bunny into a ferocious nether-wraith.

The door shook and something scratched at it, with that little peel of light from under the door going blank. Blank, then reappear, then blank. There was, for the strangely first time, total darkness - the moon, me, and the window-sill.

And so, my terror bashed at the glass, the form of my fist cannoning outward blindly in a flat need to escape. Glass crashed down, slamming the rafters and sinking like stabs into the grass from the drop; bushes move again, and I promise myself that nobody is watching me leave.

And, walking out the window, dropping, the floor fell out under me. Terror burst at my heart as a world closed in one big slam. The ground disappeared.

I woke up in the same darkness, and the window was left open.

\*\*\*

## POETRY

### Empty black Russian

*-Anonymous*

Fingers aching with metallic after tastings of an Am7.  
Striking heart chords, striking no chords  
to no-one.

Jessica's gone.

Jasmine's gone, Jayde is gone,

And that's just the J's of my little black book,  
gone.

Striking no chords on no lips,  
Hum silently to Elliott Smith,  
for the full Black Russian waiting  
on the table top.

\*\*\*



## Her

*-Anonymous*

Beautifully unattainable is what you are,  
A girl made of inflections and cream.  
I could dust of these roses I found at your feet,  
if you'd just allow it of me.

Beautifully unreachable you'll always be,  
With your red-hair and red-smile and red-eyes,  
I can save you from the pedestal where you were left to rot,  
webbed in some spider's dead life.

Beautifully untouchable you must always be,  
With your curves, knitted shirts and glass eyes,  
Have you relaxed in man-kind's musky breath or embrace yet?  
Have you sobbed suicide to phone dials?

No. Because beautifully unmoved is your way,  
You're too innocent to notice soft glances,  
Of the men in black - who are short, pale, and not handsome,  
Who murmur to corners for just a girl.

\*\*\*

## The nape of your neck is softer than love

*-Anonymous*

To the office space balloons, which are filled with O-two,  
Which were witnesses to: The drunken boys who threw,  
Round the papers and staplers, one Friday afternoon.

Oh you balloons, you balloons, you balloons,  
Growing bored with bored silence, of all the men who  
are working.  
Which eaves-drop in on key clicks, and are confidant to,  
Unspoken loves, that blossom and bloom,  
Off and on of work hours.

Balloons, balloons. Coloured red, white and blue,  
Who were here when I got here. Who I never really knew,  
Who have shrivelled day by day. Silent witnesses to:  
My removal and replacement in May.

\*\*\*

## Through the TV

*-Milam*

I would so love to live in India.  
Look at the TV it's such a beautiful country.  
If that hindu lady wasn't standing there  
I wouldn't know the difference between it and Bowling Green.

\*\*\*

## Out of Reach

*-Malavox*

Happiness for sale with no down payment.  
Drive it off the lot today. Low interest.  
What? Warranty? It's sturdy I swear to-  
Break down? No, of course not. Ours is top grade.  
Are you crazy? I can't take that offer.  
Happiness isn't free you know. It's true.  
Sorry pal, can't make a deal then. Now smile.

\*\*\*

## The Wall

*-Malavox*

It's like an invisible wall between  
The two of us seperated only  
By will.

Nothing else stands in our way but ourselves.  
We do this why? For what? We know the other  
Hates this.

We sit fully aware of the other.  
Sitting. Thinking about ourself. Selfless.  
But not.

This wall, simple in its practice but so  
complicated in its short creation  
holds firm.

When will we break through it? Who will be first?  
Who will destroy what is so complexly built?  
I will.

\*\*\*

## Words

*-Malavox*

Words fail me once again. I'm still speechless.  
I try to say what I feel, but I can't.  
Language runs on a treadmill in my mind  
desperately grasping for the right words.  
Words to express the fire that's burning.  
Words to capture this emotion for you.  
To help you understand what i'm feeling.  
But words fail me.  
Words fail me.  
But love doesn't. Love stands tall. Love remains.  
My love for you is stronger than I am.  
Love would find the words.  
If love could speak, what would it say?  
Let me show you.

\*\*\*

## North

*-Pointman*

First  
down, the rain,  
off-beat the cobbles near a still;  
rushing or man-made pools.

Swells typhoon quietly;  
dark swallows engulf the sky.

Drown us in these umbrella towns.

"These people fish outside mountains,"  
on our disfiguring end with  
rock-side fester marks in mist.

Inside, eroding faces above,  
the sky fell down on us before haven,  
and, Outside, rejoiced.

\*\*\*

## Afterword

As promised in TAR Issue 5, discussion regarding expansion of TAR efforts has since commenced.

In these discussions, there has been one idea which has been consistently referred back to: The proposal of implementing writing contests which will, at first, involve the submission and judging of short stories written by willing contributors.

The reason why such an idea is attractive is two-fold: One, this will encourage writers in crafting short-stories to the best of their abilities. Two, this effort will encourage readers to approach the works with a more critical lens.

It is the hope of TAR that this proposal will ultimately encourage writers to become more aware of criticism and readers to encourage more constructive, and productive, criticism.

The incentive for writers to participate in such a contest will come through the awarding of prizes, and implementing such a prize system is something that TAR, rightfully, does not take lightly.

It is for this reason, therefore, that the implementation will not be rushed. We are looking into the legalities of non-profits awarding prizes to contest winners, and simultaneously, we hereby open up the discussion to the public regarding what exactly the prizes should be and how the money for the prizes should be procured.

TAR looks forward to hearing your thoughts on this matter.

## 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 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.*

-TAR