



Collection SEVEN

October, 2011

The April Reader

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Preface:

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

Updates:

In consideration of the controversy generated by TAR publishing explicit-content work in the past, the publication has decided to adopt a slightly harder stance in dealing with such material. While TAR still encourages authors to write and submit content in diverse subjects and genres, as a rule of thumb *sexually graphic or otherwise explicit content must be used for artistic as opposed for self-gratuitous purposes*. In case there is any confusion regarding the vague notion of “artistic”, TAR considers it to be “being used to further or deepen a submission’s plot.”

Another major Change for TAR beginning after issue 7 will be the awarding of cash prizes to the work of especially accomplished authors. This change represents the recognition of a particularly long-lived movement within TAR to reward authors on a practical basis. Initially, TAR's intention was to implement of a monthly contents to fulfil this aim- however, legal issues regarding federal tax as a result of this contest idea led this proposition to be dropped. Prizes for literary merit, however, do not raise this particular issue, and as a result will be used as an alternative. For further information regarding this idea in implementation, refer to our afterword.

Our IRC Channel:
Server: irc.freenode.net
Room: #TAR

Our Distribution Page:
www.theaprilreader.org

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

FICTION

The Alcoholic

-Cullom McCormick

“I want to adopt you as my creative son,” the man slurred as he threw an arm around my shoulder. His breath stank of alcohol. “I mean, shit. I couldn’t write when I was fourteen. Shit, kid. I need to get to know you.”

The story was trash. Something I’d written my freshman year in high school after hearing about the “Who Can Get Pregnant First” game. It was only a beginning and amounted to a laundry list of characters, with a brief description of the rules as such: buy several condoms, fill them with water, throw them at each other, and make ironic comments. The first person to get a water-balloon-condom to the crotch was “pregnant” and out for the next round.

It was read aloud to a literary group, one that served a few modest bottles of white wine. Because of this man, they don’t serve the wine anymore until after the readings are over. He’d started the night sober and gotten drunker as the night went on, getting up again and again to drink from the bottles at the center of the room. He’d hated every story there. He grumbled and shat on all of them until mine was read. My tiny teenaged ego quivered in anticipation of what he was to lob at me. I instantly regretted how my dad had started supporting my artsy new hobby by taking me to these things. The man asked who wrote it, and then asked my age. Once he heard a half-defensive “fourteen,” from my father, he loved every aspect of me and the story. After everything was over, he’d grabbed me and wouldn’t stop talking to me.

He rambled indiscernibly for a while. When he praised me, his stubby chin would scratch my face like sandpaper.

“Uh, thanks,” I mumbled when I thought appropriate. My father was in the corner, eyeing the man for being drunk and eyeing me for talking to a drunk.

“I’m serious,” the man said. “We should get out of here, you and me. I’ll show you some things around town, and you can write about them. It’ll be great practice. I’ll teach you stuff about writing, too. Come on.”

He dragged and pulled me over to the stairs. I had no clue how to get away, but reassured my dad that I’d be fine as I passed and that we were just going to talk. The man’s arm was still around me, so we almost fell down the stairs multiple times. My dad followed several steps behind.

Downstairs, the man stopped again in front of the doors. Dad hunched back and watched from the stairwell.

“I’ve got a few things I want to write about too, you know,” the man said. “I want to talk to you about them, writer to writer.”

Dear God, he’s drunk, I thought as his breath wafted into my face again. I didn’t even think my story was good—I’d only submitted it on a whim. His flattery and awkwardness paralyzed me, as I’d never had a conversation with an overtly drunk person before.

“You see, kid, life’s a bitch sometimes,” he went on, “but, she’s totally fuckable in more ways than one.”

I heard dad clear his throat after that line.

“Like my ex-wife,” the man continued. “She still wants me back, but I hate the cunt. Some people might argue back with how *she* divorced *me*, but trust me, they don’t know my life and it’s a complicated situation, so fuck them. And you’re not judging me like them, kid. You’re cool. So I want you to tell me how I should write about it.”

I froze. I wasn’t used to adults being drunk and cussing so much in front of me. Or talking about their fuckable ex-wives. He was getting louder, and I hoped no one upstairs heard what he said. After an interminable pause, I improvised something generic and applicable. I was slightly ashamed for wanting to impress him now.

“Well, you’ve got to be subtle,” I said. “Subtle, but still clear that it’s—” I wanted to be convincing, so I hazarded talking like him, “—still clear that it’s fucked.”

His eyes widened. Dad cleared his throat again, quite loudly this time.

“Yeah, yeah, I know what you mean, kid,” he said. “It’s so

fucked you don't even know."

We paused again. I expected him to talk more. Instead, he led me outside into the cool night air of downtown. The sidewalks lined with people made me feel safe, yet uneasy. Dad came out with us, staying in the doorway. The man lit a cigarette and looked at me for a few moments. I panicked and started again.

"And you've got to describe the relationship between you and your ex-wife. Like, really tell why it's unique. People love that..." I hesitated again, mustering up a cuss. "People love that shit." At least, I think they do, I thought. Dad groaned at my degrading language.

He took a drag, still staring at me.

"I don't have a relationship with the bitch anymore," he said. "I told you that."

My heart pounded and my eyes widened.

"But I get what you mean," he went on. "I could've gotten offended there, I'm not gonna lie. But I'm not going to twist your words like she did to me. Let me tell you something about women, kid."

I stopped listening, because he stepped toward a car and tried to open the door. I was scared out of my mind that he'd drive me somewhere, and we'd get in a car wreck and die because he was drunk. Or that he'd take me somewhere and leave me. Or get arrested and land me in massive trouble.

But the car door wouldn't open, and I felt dad's hand on my shoulder.

"Shit, I swear to God this is my car," he said.

I looked between him and the entrance, thinking of how I could go back in the building.

"Wait, my bad," he said. "I locked it."

I started to panic again.

Luckily, his keys didn't work on the car. He muttered something and told me to come over and help.

"Hold the handle like this," he said, his hand underneath door's

latch in a peculiar way. "And make sure I get the key in there right."

"Actually," dad intervened, "we're leaving. Maybe some other time."

"God damn it!" he yelled. "I just want to get in my car and go, and I can't even do that." He banged his fist on the window and recoiled in pain. He kicked the tire and cursed some more, shouting and holding my sleeve. I just stood there, afraid he'd hit me or get mad at me.

The man halted and looked at my dad, still angry and exasperated.

"Okay," he said. "All right. Sorry, kid. I see how it is. You're just gonna leave me too. You know, I thought you told it straight, but I guess I was wrong. You're just gonna run home to your daddy. So go home. See if I care." He started to sound bitter. "I'll get someone else to help me, since you're tied to the old man." He stopped for a second, peering into the windows behind us. "Could you get that fairy guy in there?" he asked. "The one with the tote bag? Thanks."

He leaned over on the car that probably wasn't his, and we left before he could realize that we hadn't asked anyone to help him. The drive home with my dad was completely silent. I felt ashamed for disappointing the man and disgusted for feeling ashamed.

I met the man at a mosque over a year later while interning for the local paper. I was doing a story on a family that planned to return to a rebelling Libya. He was converting to Islam and told me he was six months sober, and that he was sorry for the way he acted that night and sorry if he scared me. When I told him some of the more lighthearted things he'd said, he got embarrassed and changed the subject to prayer positions.

The Man at the Bench

-Cullom McCormick

Family reunions always strained my family. My grandfather had decided to have one as a birthday party, so my parents got my sister to take a day off from her job in Oxford and come with us to Louisiana. Between my uncle asking my sister if people really paid hundreds of dollars for her paintings, aghast that she would charge such “exorbitant” amounts, and all the relatives I barely knew trying to make awkward small talk with me and others, I was reminded of how forced a lot of it was. The uncle had greatly offended my mother and sister, and they complained about how he knew nothing of art pricing. The relatives made it obvious that they knew nothing about each other, save for an aunt or two.

The morning after the reunion, I sat outside the Holiday Inn where half the extended family stayed. Inside, the same awkward dynamics played out over a large breakfast. I’d gone to the bathroom and came outside to buy more time away from the group.

As I was sitting there, musing to myself about taking up smoking to ease the stress and to shock my grandparents, when an old man with a hearing aid and red walker joined me. We started talking. He told me about his daughter and her family. She’d been a nice girl, taking care of herself well, if he said so himself.

“Her husband’s not worth shooting, though,” he said. “He never treated her right. Ran off with a different family. I don’t think they’re even married. It’s just living together.” As if not marrying was the worst thing the man had done.

“Wow,” I said. “It doesn’t sound like your daughter would want to stay with him if he did something like that.”

“Oh, she didn’t,” he said. “You got a girl?”

“Can’t say I do,” I said.

He chuckled. “Good. They’re too much trouble at your age. What’re you down here for, son? Where you from?” I laughed and told him I was from Starkville and that I was in Louisiana for an awkward family reunion.

He was with his son, cleaning out his daughter’s house. Both of them stayed there, his son painting and moving things. Trying to help, he walked around “setting” things. Were he and his son the only ones working?

“She got a son who’s a no-count, but she raised him better,” he went on. “He’s down south drinking, but he knows we’re up here working.”

“Sometimes I wish some of my family was down south drinking right now,” I half joked.

We sat for a few moments. He gazed at his walker, breathing slowly.

“You know,” he said, looking down at his shaking, folded hands. “She died recently. They said it was an accident.”

I was quiet, reconsidering what I’d said. Did I accidentally hurt him? Two women came out the inn’s doors to get him. They smiled and waved.

“These are the women who take care of me,” he said. One of them was as old as he was, possibly his wife. He got up, leaning heavily on the cherry walker, smiling at the women. They all grinned and waved. He left with them, giving a raspy “goodbye.”

Young

-Ian Fitz

It happened more suddenly than I would have ever imagined. One moment, I did not seem to think of her at all, she was just the younger sister of the girl I had been so caught up with over the past few years, just another piece of furniture that I would sometimes pay attention to. Then, in a beat of the heart, she became something that mattered, she grew from obscurity and filled my mind with thoughts I deemed disgusting, she blossomed and I would be lying to myself if I said I didn't want her right at that moment. But, I couldn't have her. I was seven years older than she was, and I lived in a time that shunned such things. If only she were older..

She looked up to me, quite literally, and I saw those young hazel eyes and how they reflected light and I sighed. Already the frame of a woman was present upon her, already she was growing fast.

I was visiting again, like I always do at least once a month, but since the beginning of these visits my reasons have changed. Once, the reason was for Danielle, a foolish endeavor that she was, but now the reason was younger and more prominent.

I told no one of my intentions. Not that they were bad, they were not. I was going to wait. I was going to let the seed grow. I wouldn't dare touch her as she was now, at a mere thirteen, I couldn't do such a thing. The ramifications were boundless in size. The morality was not present. I decided to see her as much as possible without shouting for notice. Once a month seemed adequate.

"Julia! Come down and say hi to Steve," shouted Linda, her head cocked down the hall and towards the staircase, sending her voice up the stairs to Julia's room. I smiled for a quick second, before dismissing my lips back to their normal state. Danielle was seated to the right of me on a bar stool next to the kitchen counter, her hair cut short after a bout of depression, and Chris was atop the counter, seated, asking me questions I

did not want to answer but did anyways. I was seated between them, overlooking the living room, the kitchen to my back. Linda was handing me a beer as she walked behind me and back to the stove. I heard Julia coming down the hall and briefly wondered what she smells like.

"Hi," she says, as she takes the stool next to Danielle, the stool across and over the counter from me.

"Hey, Julia. How are you?" I answer, very normally.

"Good," is all she says.

She's wearing her physical education shorts from middle school and a long gray t-shirt that looks like a hand-me down from Danielle that I'm guessing she only wears for pajamas. Her eyes are huge and young and I want to close them with my fingers and to kiss her eyelids. She has a round face, freckled lightly, with a smooth complexion of light tones, and a wide smile when she cares to show her teeth. At thirteen, she is already taller than her mother, Linda, and only a few inches away from topping Danielle. Her breasts have already outgrown Danielle's. This is the first time I have noticed this.

"Are you ready for school tomorrow?" I ask her.

"Not really," she says.

"Are you excited? You gotta be excited."

"Kind of."

She smiles as I stare at her and then turns away and walks to

the computer, which is placed on a desk that is constructed in a hole in the wall in the living room I now look upon. Danielle and Linda joke about something as the golden retriever, Mac, sniffs my shoes.

Chris says something, "do you like dubstep?"

I'm appalled that he knows about dubstep and don't want to put the kid down but there is no way I am lying to him about liking such a horrible form of music.

"No, do you?" I ask.

Before he can answer, I start making noises which I define as dubstep. He laughs, and so does Julia, spinning around on her computer chair and agreeing with me. I suddenly remember that the last time I was here I showed her some music that I wanted her to check out, and was surprised when she named some of the bands that she listened to. Some of them I liked.

Danielle finishes the food she was eating and tells me she'll be right back as she goes down the hall, towards the stairs. Linda goes out to the backyard with a glass of wine in her hand and the phone at her ear. Chris walks over to the computer and bothers Julia. I follow.

"Whatcha doin'? Are you on Facebook?" I say in a joking tone as I approach.

"No, just on YouTube," she replies back, not taking her eyes off of the screen.

Chris has already pulled up a chair and is sitting on her left; I'm standing behind the two siblings. I notice that she has pulled up some deathcore band and is in the middle of one of their songs as harsh noises sound from her headphones, which she took out and laid next to the keyboard as we came toward her.

"Oh my god! Bring Me the Horizon is so hardcore!" I say sarcastically in my best preteen voice.

But I think the joke goes over her head because she says, "you like Bring Me the Horizon?"

I answer, "no," with a frown forming on my face as she asks another question,

"why not?"

"The same reason I don't like dubstep, it's just noise."

I actually only part believe this, as I do respect all forms of music, even the bad genres. Each one always seems to have a redeeming quality. I didn't want to get in to the semantics, so I chose to be blunt.

"Okay, what isn't noise? What music do you listen to?"

I'm surprised that she even cares to ask, and I'm about to answer her when Chris starts blaring dubstep from his i-touch and Julia and I simultaneously tell him to turn it off, and he obliges, but another interruption halts me from answering the question that was laid before me: Danielle returns.

She tells Julia to get off the computer and proceeds to push her off the chair with a light force not meaning to shove her on the floor, only meaning to give some motivation to leave. I figure it would be strange for me to start talking to Julia about music and to ignore Danielle, as it could surely blow my cover, or it couldn't and I'm just being paranoid, but I decide to be safe and not sorry.

Julia gets the hint and moves off the chair and stands there

for a moment, behind Danielle who has now taken her seat on the black pseudo-leather, next to me, close to me, within an arm's reach, and she looks at me and I look at her and she's still waiting for my answer but I look away towards the computer monitor. Before I do however, with the few seconds that we meet eyes, I study her. I vaguely daydream of what she will look like when she's older, when my desire won't have to be held back. Even in a pair of red athletic shorts and a body-obscuring grey t-shirt, she is gorgeous. Too young, she's too young.

I think she understands what is happening as I choose to ignore her and sit down next to Danielle, where Chris was sitting before he ran into the backyard, and she walks away from me and back up to her room.

I'm slightly depressed because all of a sudden I despise Danielle and never want to see her again, as she shows me some YouTube video I think is stupid, as the white tile below us seems infinite, as this living room seems to close down on me, but if I tell her that, I'll never see Julia again. I suppose I'll have to deal for another five years.

I can't wait.

Cake

-Ian Gibson

CHARACTERS:

Louis XVI
Marie Antoinette
Pierre

SETTING:

A luxurious room of the Versailles Palace. Gilded portraits and embroidered tapestries line the walls. Various pieces of gaudy furniture are placed about the room. At stage right is a large, double framed door.

MARIE ANTOINETTE, a chubby mid-30s woman in a gaudy dress, lies nonchalantly on a couch in the center of the room. She eats from a large platter of pastries placed on a nearby table.

At stage left sits LOUIS THE 16TH, his bejeweled crown and imperial suit hanging large on his frame. His hands and eyes are at work on the various locks placed on the table in front of him.

From the door comes a heavy knocking.

LOUIS

Marie, could you get that?

MARIE

(with a mouth full of food)

Get what?

LOUIS

The door.

Another knock on the door.

MARIE

I can't - I'm busy.

*She shoves a handful of food into her mouth.
Louis turns to look at her with slight disgust.*

LOUIS

Well, I *certainly* can't get it.

MARIE

Why not?

LOUIS

I'm the king! I can't go around answering doors for myself - that would be *uncivilized*.

A third, exaggerated knock.

MARIE

Well, I'm not moving either.

LOUIS

(sarcastically)

Yes, of course, the queen can't be bothered to be disturbed.

(in a falsetto imitation of Marie)

Come in!

Through the door enters prim and proper PIERRE, a man in his late 50s. Louis stands from his chair to greet him. Pierre bows to Marie and Louis in turn, his nose nearly touching the floor each time.

PIERRE

Your majesties.

LOUIS

Hello, Pierre! How goes my Minister of... uhm... Agriculture?

PIERRE

State, your majesty. Minister of State.

LOUIS

Yes, of course, Minister of State. How goes my state?

PIERRE

I am afraid not so well, your majesty. The situation grows more dire each day and -

PIERRE

Apparently the rioters are of the 'starving' type.

MARIE

They have no food?

PIERRE

Precisely, your majesty.

She gapes in disbelief, crumbs of food falling from her open mouth.

LOUIS

Speaking of food, darling, perhaps you've had enough to eat.

He approaches Marie's food platter and reaches for it.

MARIE

DON'T YOU DARE.

LOUIS
Come on, now - I'm just taking it to the kitchen-

Marie starts to growl.

LOUIS
Honey, we have company...

Pierre takes the hint, coughing discreetly and looking away.

LOUIS
You'll get more to eat at early dinner, dear - I promise.

Marie stares at him for a second, eventually crossing her arms and dropping her head in defeat.

LOUIS
That's my girl!
(under his breath)
Fat cow.

He moves the platter to a table farther away from Marie.

LOUIS
(to Pierre)
Now then, what were we talking about?

PIERRE
The people, your majesty.

LOUIS
Yes, of course! The people... my people... the people of France... what was it about the people again?

PIERRE
They're starving.

MARIE
And so am I!

LOUIS
Oh shut it!
(to Pierre)
Now tell me - why are they starving?

PIERRE
(with a heavy sigh)
Because they can't afford food.

LOUIS
(chuckling)
What, they don't have jobs that pay them money?

PIERRE
No, your majesty - they don't.

LOUIS
Oh, well, um...
(coughs nervously)
I guess that is *quite* the problem.

PIERRE
I believe, your majesty, that as King, you should attempt to remedy this... problem.

LOUIS
Yes, yes... I quite agree.

There is a moment of quiet thought between the two men. Louis scratches at his chin in mock-seriousness, Pierre playing lightly with his hands. Marie picks up a pack of cards off the table.

MARIE
Who wants to play cards?

LOUIS
(enthusiastically)
I do!

PIERRE
Your majesty, perhaps we should...

He gives a stern, serious look.

LOUIS
Yes, of course - attend to the matter at hand.

MARIE
Suit yourself.

She begins a game of solitaire, Louis pacing with hyperbolic seriousness about the room.

LOUIS
No food, you say?

PIERRE
Yes, your majesty.

LOUIS
What if we... gave them... food?

PIERRE
That would cost an awful lot of money.

LOUIS
Yes, I suppose that's right. But...

He rubs his chin with one hand, his other gesturing with mock emphasis.

LOUIS
What if we instead gave them... money?

PIERRE
Well, your majesty, I'm afraid that you... uh, how do I put this.... You have no money.

Louis stops and turns, a look of genuine surprise on his face.

LOUIS
Really? I could have sworn I had some the last time I checked.
(to Marie)
Isn't that true, dear?

MARIE
No - we spent it all.

LOUIS
On what?

MARIE
Chinese silk, Belgian chocolates, Swiss locks - you know, necessities.

PIERRE
I'm afraid those *necessities* have left the royal couple in debt.

LOUIS
(chuckling)
I guess that just means its time for another 'war tax', isn't that right?

PIERRE

Well, I'm afraid that-

LOUIS

(interrupting)

Oh come on now, what's the problem with this idea?

PIERRE

Food is not the only concern of the people rioting. They are also protesting what they perceive to be 'excessive spending' by your majesties.

LOUIS

W-what? That's preposterous! Yes, we spend our money a bit extravagantly, but we are the King and Queen of France - not Parisian paupers! How DARE they criticize the monarchy!

*Louis clenches his fists in rage, his face flush with anger.
Pierre cowers a little at the aggressive display.*

MARIE

What nerve!

LOUIS

(posturing himself quite seriously)

Pierre, this news has troubled me deeply and I wish to do something about it immediately.

PIERRE

Yes?

LOUIS

Of course! I want every hooligan, thug, and whore that dares criticize my crown thrown into the Bastille immediately.

MARIE

Quite right!

LOUIS

Let's see them riot their way out of *that*!

PIERRE

And your finances, sir?

LOUIS

Increase the taxes, all of them. We can't very well starve, now can we?

MARIE

God no!

Louis puffs himself up, placing his hands on his hip and raising his head proudly.

LOUIS

It's settled then. I, Louis the...

He begins to count on his fingers.

PIERRE

16th.

LOUIS

Louis the 16th do declare heresy of the crown punishable by torture and order all taxes to be raised until the royal coffers are sufficiently filled. Harumph.

PIERRE

(hesitantly)

I'm sorry, your majesty, but do you think that is a, um, proper solution?

LOUIS

Absolutely! A king can do no wrong.

PIERRE

And what should I say to the people?

LOUIS

Tell them that these are hard times for all of France and that we must...

(raising a fist)

hold fast.

PIERRE

I should tell them to 'hold fast'?

LOUIS

Absolutely!

PIERRE

And to their pleas for food?

MARIE

Let them eat cake!

LOUIS

Yes, precisely - 'hold fast' and 'let them eat cake'!

*Pierre stares in disbelief for a few seconds
before gathering himself.*

PIERRE

Yes, of course-

(coughs nervously)

I will do as you wish, your majesties.

He bows and exits.

LOUIS

That went quite well, don't you think? I do love meddling in the affairs of my kingdom.

*Louis haughtily tends to his suit, pulling the sleeves and
smoothing the waist. He straightens his crown with smug*

satisfaction.

*Marie watches him with a sly smile. She lumbers to
her feet, coyly approaching Louis.*

MARIE

Oh, Louis - I love it when you get so *majestic* and *royal*.

LOUIS

I must admit, being king does have its benefits.

They share a bourgeois chuckle.

MARIE

Maybe we should...

(softly touching his lapel)

Celebrate the occasion?

He swats her hand away and turns to his locks.

LOUIS

Not now, darling - I'm busy.

MARIE

(muttering)

More like 'not ever'.

Marie returns to the couch, flopping heavily onto it.

CURTAIN

The Good Doctor

-J

A large red and brown brick building dominated the skyline of Manchester. The building shot up fourteen stories high, each story dotted with 12 windows running left to right. On the north facing wall, a dusty old sign lay partly illuminated, partly burned out. *Carpenter Center*, it read, and directly below it a grand entrance resembling that of a once prestigious hotel now weathered by time and circumstance. The Carpenter Center was no hotel, though. Indeed it is no resident in their right mind would call their life at the Carpenter Center a vacation. There were few among the residents however who could be considered 'in their right mind'. You see the Carpenter Center was a peculiar type of place, somewhere in between a nursing home and a retirement community. Some were sent there to die, others could no longer be taken care of – they had become a burden on their families, and a number of them were those neglected souls who simply had nowhere, or no one else to go to.

I was always an early riser, and as such was always fancy to take a job commencing at the crack of dawn, and as I would make my way to work each morning on foot I became privy to a unique insight into this self contained community. Those who knew me well would often comment that my sleeping and rising habits were akin to that of an old man – early to bed and up with the sun. I would often contest this comment, for what is rising early except a measure of responsibility? until I reached my mid twenties and took a real job working just blocks from the Carpenter Center. What a boon this ended up being! Not long after I began my daily treks past the center a certain passion was awakened in me. By and large referred to as 'people watching' the experience was far more passionate for me.

Each day I would stand outside the windows of the dining hall, and simply observe the residents as they took their breakfast, pondering their interactions and gestures, drawing conclusions based on the simple details

that I could observe from my shadowy outpost. There was one man in particular who piqued my interest, always sitting alone in the far right corner, he appeared to be older than many of the other residents, a fact I inferred from his cap, which read, "WORLD WAR II VETERAN", and just below that, the word SELLERS – which I assumed to be his name.

We had a lot in common. I could see myself and my own interests in his eyes – the way he scanned the room, taking in every little detail of what was going on around him. He was a people watcher, just like me. Ages of wisdom locked up within this decaying mind. Weeks upon weeks of regarding Mr. Sellers and the other residents slowly began to build up a particular feeling inside me that I would best describe as an addiction. I had to go there, every single day, and every day the pressure of this feeling would accumulate to a point where I finally broke. I had to cross the third wall. I had to go in, to meet Mr. Sellers.

Inside, the residents who were able bodied enough to do so begin to shuffle into the dining hall of the center at a snail's pace. Expedience was not par for the course at the Carpenter Center, and the director understood this well. A tall, gaunt man with stringy, slicked back hair, the director had seen hundreds come and go from this place, a fact that seemed to have blunted him to the single greatest tragedy of life, death.

Arthur sat down in the corner, quietly, where he took his usual breakfast, black coffee with a glazed donut, and took his place with the Times as he did in a ritualistic fashion. He had an adamant look about him today, as if he was trying to remember something but couldn't, and this was just the case today. What *was* he forgetting? His mental stability was rapidly deteriorating, a fact that seemingly

everyone was cognizant of, everyone but himself.

He wondered whether or not the man would come today. Of course he would! He came every day without fail, thinking himself to be completely incognito. Arthur knew though, he saw him by the corner, gazing longingly into the window every day. The absence of the man today threw Arthur off his already fragile axis, and when someone came and sat down next to him this particular morning – Arthur always ate alone – his reality was knocked out of its orbit entirely.

“Mr. Sellers?” the young man asked.

“Arthur.”

“Arthur Digby Sellers... the same man who wrote 156 episodes of ‘Branded’?”

Arthur nodded politely, “The bulk of the series.”

Unbelievable. The old gentleman who had become his obsession over the past several weeks had also been the writer of his favorite television show. I looked at him and smiled. The conversation ended there, there was no need for it; like two best friends who can sit in a room together completely silent and understand one another completely, this was the aura that had overtaken myself and Mr. Sellers.

The director loomed in the corner, keeping a close watch.

“Yes sir.” The director spoke succinctly and emotionlessly into the receiver.

“I’m afraid so, Doctor. Faster than we expected.”

“I’ll see to it Doctor.” Slowly shaking his head, he placed the receiver on the wall, letting out a heavy sigh as his forehead came to a gentle rest against his right palm, soaking with an apprehensive sweat. He had never seen such a progression before, and despite his frigid persona, he cared profoundly of those under his supervision. He had learned over time how to feign stoicism, an illusion he deemed necessary for the well being of the residents, and, more importantly, himself. This stoicism made him appear jaded, uncaring – that could not have been further from the truth. He had to separate his feelings from his character – he would be a complete wreck if he let his feelings take over, and he knew this. Every time one of his residents suffered, he suffered as well. This profound empathy was both his gift and his curse.

Glancing at my watch revealed that I had spent much more time ‘conversing’ with Mr. Sellers than I had anticipated. I was to be somewhere shortly, though the details of this rendez-vous had strangely escaped me at the moment. Nevertheless I excused myself wordlessly, and, made my way towards the door with a slow determination, thanking a woman on the way out for the coffee and donut. Approaching the exit a hand came down on my shoulder from behind. The grip was firm yet gentile, the same manner a father places his hand on a young son. I turned and my gaze quickly met that of the director's. He gave me a half smile that was betrayed by the obvious anguish in his eyes. He had been crying recently.

“Why Arthur, you’ve already taken your walk around the court this morning and we must make haste - have you forgotten that we have a meeting with the good doctor shortly?”

Nogales

-Matthew S. Vodička (www.msvodicka.com)

It was only a block, but a block was long enough to make him feel conscientious about buying nothing more than a bottle of whiskey and carrying it home. He swaddled it in the plastic bag, holding it the entire way in the crook of his arm. He had to walk; she took his car. On the only night off work he'd have for the next two weeks, she took his car and left.

When he got back, he poured a portion out over ice and breathed on it till the liquid was gone. A minute later, his glass was refilled.

It looked nonchalant (which was what he wanted for when she came home) so he forced himself to read a book. He read for hours. He tried out different poses while reading: lying in bed; then, sitting up against the headboard; on the armchair, with and without a leg bending over the arm; shirtless; then, in boxers. Meanwhile, he continued to drink, and she continued to stay out.

After six slow chapters of words he'd only partly noticed, he tossed the book onto the bed and went into the bathroom to shower. While showering, he kept sweeping his hair back with his hands and listening. He thought he kept hearing the front door.

It wasn't until later, at 4 o'clock and half the bottle tucked away in his vein, that she did come back home. He was now watching TV. He didn't want her to return to him while he was doing something like watching TV, but that's what he eventually started doing—on account of waiting for so long.

When she greeted him, he merely looked at her without responding. He wanted to know where she'd been, but not if it was

information he'd have to ask for.

“Wha' are you watchín'?”

“I don't know,” he said. “Something.”

“Ha, ha,” she laughed. “*Loquito.*”

She put her purse down on the dresser and went to the bathroom to stand before the mirror and smudge select spots of her face with extended fingers. At an interval, she asked, “Arn' you goin' to ask me where I was?”

“No,” he said, but it was unclear to him whether she heard or not.

She replied, singing, “I was in México,” and she moved her arms in an upper-body dance while watching herself do it.

“I'm glad.”

“Wha'?”

“*Me alegre, dije. Me alegre.*”

She laughed, again. “*Loquito.*”

“Yeah, I was wit' an ol' frien'.”

I'll bet you were, he wanted to say, looking away and wishing the Mexican half of Nogales had just fallen off into Hell.

“We hat fun,” she said, casually. “He is so interestin', Like you wouldn' eben believe it.” There was a pause until she pushed her beautiful face, still made-up, out of the bathroom door. “How

comes you neber say not'in' interestin'?"

His voice was cold. "Maybe you're not worth being interesting for," he said.

"Ha," she shot. "T'at is not what some people t'ink."

It was approximately ten minutes later when, done with all she had to do in the bathroom, she came out to join him on the bed.

"Wiskey, hunh?"

He nodded, but slightly.

"Why you didn' call up your *chica*?" She tried, but not too hard, to make the question sound innocent.

He gave her a supercilious look, which he quickly dropped, because he actually did consider, numerous times throughout the night, doing what she was suggesting.

"Well, you should hab," she said. "Better t'an bein' here and watchin' t'ings you don' eben know." She gestured to the TV.

"I'd rather be alone."

She scoffed, settling back on her hands. "Okay, *papi*. Í's good you were, t'en"

"It is good. This way, I could think about some things."

"Like wha'? Wha' t'ings?" she asked.

He shrugged.

After some minutes, he said, "Something strange I saw, once —"

"On TV?"

"No, not on TV. Something in real life, that happened right when I moved down here."

"To Nogales?"

"No, Tucson," he replied.

"Ahh, Tucson," she said, pronouncing the C.

Before, it was always cute to him that Mexicans pronounced the C in Tucson; tonight, it wasn't.

"This is before border patrol, back when I was just a security guard. Then, I had a post at an apartment complex, watching it all night."

She snorted into her hand. "You has come a long way, *bebé*." She laughed.

"Yeah," he conceded. "Well, it was all new to me, at the time. There was a playground at this apartment complex, and I was patrolling through it when I saw this scorpion, there. The first one I ever saw in person."

“*Ai, bebé*, t'ere are millions down here.”

“I know, but this was the first one I saw, and I didn't know if I should try to move it, because it was in the playground, where kids go, and all. So I just watched it.”

She laughed. “*Loquito*,” she said.

“But, while I was watching, this other, smaller scorpion came up, and the two started fighting. They were both squirming against one another, and gripping on each other; flipping around, and stabbing each other with their tails, over and over again.”

“Oh, no. Wha' happen to t'em?”

“Nothing happened. I watched them for about 20 minutes and just gave it up. Either they were immune to each other, or the stingers didn't pierce their bodies.”

“None of t'em died?”

He shook his head. “On my next patrol, I looked for them and they were gone. They both walked away.”

“So, t'er was no winner?”

He looked to her brown eyes. “No,” he said. “There's no winner.”

“*Qué raro*,” she said, after a meditative pause. “T'a's a good story,

bebé,” she gripped his arm. Then, she added, “you shoul' hab stayed t'ere and saw wha' happen.”

“I know what happened,” he said, bluntly. “They walked away from each other.”

She grunted snottily. “Well, t'en, I wonder why t'ey were stinging each ot'er in the firs' place.” With superfine carelessness, she shrugged. “Oh, well. If no one died.” She reclined, lying out on her side with her knees bent. She had put her back to him.

Hearing her say this, and seeing her roll over like that, he stared in disbelief at the small crescent of her face that he could still see. He wanted to slap her somewhere, hard. For half an hour, he thought about doing it. He thought about doing it for so long that he figured she must have already fallen to sleep.

Then, he saw her body slightly quiver. He heard her sniff wetly.

“*Bebé?*” she didn't turn to look at him. “*Bebé*, can you hold me, please?”

He didn't move. He merely listened to her sobbing.

“*Bebé, por favor. Abrazame.*”

He lay down behind her, draping an arm over her shoulder, which she kissed. He had no more thoughts; He decided scorpions just had thicker skin, and left off thinking about the whole thing. He had only sensations: of inebriation, of exhaustion, of the woman—the warm body in his arms, and her fragrant, dark hair, which he kissed before he fell asleep, quite nestled into her.

Midsummer

-Rollicks

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

Like the majority of other guests, I stood and watched, detached—as a decoration on the wall. The only light in the cramped garage emanated from the orgy of constantly checked cell phones and suspended, dim strobe lights. I watched eyes—all avoidant of each other and intent only on their technological toys. Unless, of course, they were admiring the gathering's nubile hostess. They traced her body from the tip of her kempt and tempered hair, down her supplely contoured back, to the bottom of her tight-as-a-snake's-coil black jeans. The stares were ravenous and disgusting, and she would have found them so herself had she noticed them. She did not transmit sexuality as much as she received it. Her firm breasts—a degree pleasantly out of proportion from her petite frame—and luscious legs were titillating, but deceitful traits; in reality, she had no more a hint of grace nor a nuance of delicacy in her movements and actions than did the awkward teenage boys that ogled her.

She remained at the center of the dance floor, surrounded by a small group. Whereas her dance was a slow and apathetic sway, her followers invested deeply into theirs. She contrasted with them so heavily that it seemed the dancers were zealots in an ecstatic, celebratory ritual to her glory as Goddess; she merely, benevolently presided the ceremony. With the end of the current song, she ruptured the human yolk, and the group seeped out all over the garage, clearly lost. Shaking off a lingerer, she walked to the door which led to the laundry room and subsequently, the rest of her house. I watched her search for me, and as soon as eye contact was made I excused myself from no one and rushed to follow her.

“Hey... If I get bored... would you mind... again?”

“...I'll just signal you to follow me, so... watch me!”

Though it was well into the evening, the pervasive summer heat in

her un-air-conditioned house had drained me. I needed to recover. I sluggishly made my way down the spiral staircase while fondly reminiscing on what events had led to now—staggering in a post-coital euphoric daze back to a party where most of the males and some of the females in attendance would not have minded at all an opportunity to fuck the hostess.

“I thought you weren't coming!” She subtly mocked, but the hug accompanying the statement conveyed relief above anything else.

“I wasn't. I changed my mind about an hour ago,” I revealed with a playfulness intended to begin banter, but she had other guests to welcome.

I filed with some others to the garage which she indicated as the epicenter of tonight's festivities. I formed the rear of a human snake so I could unabashedly glance back at her. Her figure was magnificent: the dress she wore—an elegant maroon with scattered white lilies, not low cut or extravagantly revealing—clung close enough to elucidate her breasts yet was loose enough to still rouse mystery. Her lips, glazed with the perfect crimson shade, were lusciously full; my enthralled mind instantly imagined them touching all parts of my body.

My mind scrambled in search of something to say that could possibly be heard over the stentorian pounds of my quickened heart when she interrupted and halted all thoughts with a kiss. Aggressive, assured, and complete, it was a kiss unlike those first pecks between emotionally insecure teenagers whose lips taste of lingering doubt. This was the display of maturity which I desired for a girl of my age to exhibit; I wanted her now more than ever.

“Let's fuck,” she said with no transition: Fuck the foreplay, we didn't have much time. In the millisecond it took my mind to process her command she had disappeared from in front of me, reappeared on her bed, and lost her dress in the journey. Her bra matched her lipstick—I almost didn't want her to take it off.

I easily inserted myself inside her—she wasn't a virgin. She insisted on doggy style, so I couldn't see her face, just her hair—it was a mess. Her bed was very creaky—I paused a few times because I was certain someone was coming up the stairs. I was sweating like a pig—I thought pigs couldn't sweat? I looked down—her back was really sweaty too. I wonder if she feels as disgusting as I do?

“I'm so mad,” she said, but her pensive gaze and drooped mouth betrayed she was instead disappointed.

“Why?” My mind labored for apparent ages to produce the tone which would convey earnest confidentiality in our discourse. She searched my face with periwinkle eyes. Apprehensively, they sought—I recognized—a blemish in my countenance that would counter the perfection of my intonation. When none was found, her eyes relaxed and rested themselves in mine.

“I'm really glad you came to—,” her sentence and our mutual stare were interrupted by a passerby—we were standing in the heavy traffic zone right outside her laundry room.

“Let's go to my room.” She started for the stairs before completing the sentence, and it took a sudden backward glance to jostle my intuition of what she said.

“Won't they notice we're gone?” I knew what we were going to do, and I tried to suppress my anxiety to great success, but it was impossible to be rid of it entirely.

“Even if they do, they won't care. Come on,” she grasped my arm at first, then decidedly locked her immaculately smooth hand with mine, “I want to talk to you.”

A brazen kiss an inch from her bedroom door declared the beginning of our romance. As if she had paradoxically anticipated my unexpected gesture, she calmly continued towards the door, still conjoined to me. Had the walls come to collapse, and we, to plummet, I still would not have allowed the sensation of her lips on mine to cease; we would fall

and die combined. Stepping into her room, my eager fingers gripped the bottom edges of her dress, but my collected mind recoiled its dome to discern approval before continuing. Her face spoke “too soon.” Persistently, I calmed my body and altered the route of my exploration. I led her to lie on her bed—the perfect pressure in my arm spurred her but kept her attached; Physical connection was imperative, for I feared without it our desires would slip out of sync into stagnant awkwardness. I knew I wanted to fuck her, and I wanted her to know. If the rest of our bodies remained in tactile interaction, intercourse would not only be facilitated, but necessitated.

The urge overcame me, and I adopted aggression once again. I slipped her dress off—it left her body like a soul departing from a corpse.

I bowed between her legs—mine were taut strings that quivered; we were a mangled instrument. I couldn't see her face and that made me feel so fucking terrible. I tried to change our routine and get her to face me, but she constantly reverted to the old position. Why couldn't I change this? At this moment she's not a person—merely a figment of desire. I can't see her face because it doesn't belong to the thing I'm fucking right now. This thing doesn't exist.

With its patron saint departed, the deserted dance floor was easy to pass through. I reached the laundry room door, and as I looked at the girl wearing black jeans and a t-shirt in the hallway just ahead with haphazardly arrayed veins on her tattered-flats-wearing feet and tawdrily decorated friendship charms and bracelets on her minuscule wrists, I remembered how distinct she had appeared on my car ride over: she didn't wear lipstick anymore, she told me, and I don't think she even owned a dress.

She turned to look at me. I immediately moved toward her, ashamed of how long I supposed I had stood in stupor. She was

slovenly hunched. I faced her. Bloodshot eyes and pinprick pupils faced back. Her makeup was a mess from dancing.

“I'm sorry you have to leave so soon. I'm really glad you came, though.” She smiled—a friendly smile that forgivingly dispelled all my previous judgment of her. I forgot the figment of my car ride; this smile was the perfect outcome for the evening.

“Yeah...” I paused to cull my culminating phrase. With an embrace, I delivered it: “Thanks. I love you, Kate.”

Journey

-Troy

I awoke on the ground. Last I recalled was falling asleep in my bed. As I opened my eyes, it occurred to me that I was dreaming. It then promptly occurred to me that if I was dreaming, I wouldn't know it. I was very unsure of myself, and I had a great deal of trouble understanding exactly how I felt.

And then I noticed what I was seeing. I was in a forest, and I use that word loosely. I was surrounded by trees, and I was laying in the center of a dirt path. On it were leaves, small animals, and assorted plants. The trees were dense around me, and I could feel the wind.

I could smell the life around me, but something wasn't right about the smell. It was almost dusty. Old. Like I was in a picture of a forest.

The next sense I processed was the feeling. It was neither cold nor warm. And I don't mean that it was that perfect weather, like a cloudy spring day. No, it wasn't between cold and hot, no no - I felt like there simply was no temperature. At first, I thought I had lost feeling, perhaps it was simply a part of the dream I thought I was having, but I could feel the

air, the wind, and that lack of heat. The sensation was unsettling.

And finally, my brain truly began processing what I saw. Words can hardly capture the vision before my eyes, but hopefully I can do my best. Everything was without color. It's so frustrating to describe, it was almost like an old movie - grayscale almost, but what I saw went beyond that. I contemplated that I had gone colorblind, but I certainly hadn't. As I stood up, I looked myself over to make sure I was uninjured. My body, my clothes, my shoes - everything, was in color. Completely normal. Yet, beneath my brown and white shoes, the ground was colorless.

Now that the scene was set, the story could begin. Towering in front of me, and I could swear it hadn't been there before, was a person. Once again, I am forced to use that word loosely. It was cloaked, head to toe, in a simple hooded robe. I saw no face, and it too - was colorless. It did not speak, it did not walk, it did not breathe. But it certainly communicated with me. Not with voice, not with body, not with mind, it seemed to speak silently. And believe me, I know how it sounds. I thought, no, I hoped, I was dreaming. But I knew I wasn't. And I simply felt I was insane.

"Follow me," it said. Once more, that's a word used in the most flexible of ways. I can't imagine any other way to put it.

The natural questions erupted from my mouth - "Where am I? Who are you?" and so on and so forth. The being turned its back to me and held up its hand - which, to further extend the insanity, was simply composed of bone.

"Silence. Walk." I had to admire its straight forward nature. And, looking around, I felt I had no other choice than to follow him (ha, yet again, loosely) into the forest.

Neutral

His stride was exactly the same pace as mine. It was so odd to me, that this roughly eight foot tall skeleton (I assumed) had the same walking speed as I did. It was a trivial thing to notice, until I realized he wasn't walking. Naturally, he was gliding. I mean, what else would a ghostly, colorless skeleton do but fucking float.

I was losing my mind. I had to be. My mind was going a million miles an hour, in sheer terror of what may happen next. Before I knew it, he stopped. I followed suit, and looked forward. Before us was a field, with our path continuing through it. I observed for a moment, in sheer awe of the vast landscape before us.

As far as the eye could see was a colorless field. Occupying it were countless skeletal creatures. Each was slightly different, some missing a rib, others missing an eye, some had hair, others were missing limbs. Yet, to my infinite amazement, they were all completely the same. Each was the same height, same width, same general structure, it was awe-inspiring-their similarity. Yet, each was "unique" in its own way.

After I grasped their structure in my mind, and noticed what they were doing, I cowered. Not in fear or terror, but once more - in awe. I dropped to my knees, attempting to absorb this feeling. They were all standing, completely still, staring - at me. The sight of thousands, millions, *billions* of fucking empty eye sockets locked upon me filled me with a sensation I will never be able to explain. Quite simply, it was breathtaking. The emptiness, the silence, the utter lack of color and feeling left me with a void in my heart. I did nothing but stare back.

The only word to escape my lips, was "why?"

My guide was quite prepared to answer, it seemed, as he said, "They are nothing, in the middle of nothing, doing nothing. For the first time in your existence, you truly know what it is to see empty. To see what it is to be lonely. These will stand here for eternity, as the always have, doing what they've always done. There is no why, there simply is."

I must have spent hours there, on my knees, contemplating. The beings before me did not move, did not shift their weight, nothing. And at the end, the most powerful feeling of all hit me - the sound. There was none. Absolutely nothing, but the beating of my own heart. I could hear my lungs expand and contract. The wind blew, and I felt it, the trees behind me shuddered - but made no noise. The old adage came to mind, "the silence was deafening."

The Descent

I finally stood, at the end of hours, and signaled my guide to continue. He turned around, and held up a bony finger. Where the dirt path once was, there was a door. Once more, that's a loose usage of the word. It was a rectangle, standing vertical from the ground. It was the first color I had seen since I arrived. It was black. And by God, if that word doesn't do it justice. The darkest color I had ever witnessed. I have always heard black was a lack of color, but this black was a color of its own. The darkest depths of the sky, the meanest soul, the blackest night dare not compare to what stood before me.

I obeyed my guide and approached the portal. As I neared, I saw what was inside - my new guide. He had the same structure as the previous, but his face I could see. Oh, I certainly could see his face...

He too, was a skeletal being. But his eye sockets were the same blackness I had seen as I entered his domain. His face was weathered, and shapen. His teeth were fangs, his mandible dripped with saliva, rotten flesh hung from bones. He hunched and held himself up with a staff.

The staff was made of wood. It was charred, black, of course. At the crest was a black gem, with what appeared to be a dark smoke swirling inside. He used it to gesture me onward, as though he was

leading a tour.

This guide spoke, and his voice was a force to be reckoned with. It crackled and echoed. It was not simply one voice, but hundreds stacked upon each other. It was brutal and harsh, but impossible to ignore. He was a mighty being, and his voice carried his power for what seemed to be miles.

"Let the descent into madness begin!" He cackled afterwards, an unforgettable and magnificent laugh I shall never forget. As I turned to look into the world I left, the colorless hole in the wall shrank, leaving my previous guide and the beings he hosted in their bleak void.

Darkness

My eyes adjusted quickly. I had committed to this journey, and had abandoned all hope of waking up. I thought I was ready for whatever I was to see. I didn't feel I was in danger, but the feeling this new land gave me was one I hate to recall.

I had learned what it meant to feel empty, but this world gave me a great deal of feeling. I was full of dark thoughts. I imagined taking my guide's staff, brutally destroying him with it. I wanted to tear at the black stone walls around me, destroying all within sight. I hated everything that surrounded me, and as we arrived in what my guide had titled "madness," I understood why.

I suppose it was what I had imagined Hell to be. Around me, once again, was a field of infinite skeletons. These ones were not doing "nothing," they were doing something indeed. The closest two were choking each other, screaming. I couldn't understand what was being said, but I didn't need to. One took an advantage, then promptly crushed the skull of the other. After, he took a step back. The "dead" one's skull reformed, and he stood again. They began to battle again, with the previous loser tearing the other's torso in half. I watched these battles

repeat for great deal of time.

I looked away from them and noticed the others were doing the same. All around me, an infinite number of skeletons were beating the fuck out of each other and resurrecting. It was an unending cycle of death and destruction. The hall we stood in was of course massive beyond description, and resembled a blackened cave. There were massive beasts strewn about, assisting in the destruction, locked in eternal combat. These behemoths resembled a number of things, including skeletons, assembled collections of corpses, leviathans of putrid material, and all sorts of other terrifying monsters. I was not filled with fear, once again, but this time I had one desire - destruction.

I resisted, with a powerful effort. My guide spun me to face him, leaned down, and said, "Isn't it beautiful? Why fear death when you're already dead?" Once more he cackled, but this time - the being surrounding proceeded to laugh maniacally as well. The sound of deafening, malicious laughter filled the hall. I heard nothing but destruction and laughter. As the final temptation to attack my guide began to fill me, he spun me again to face where we had come from.

Before me was a blinding light. It was somehow restricted to the square before me, not emitting light into the room, but containing itself. I turned to remove the skull of my guide, but he swung his staff, flinging me into the bastion of light before me.

Splash

I was brought to my feet by a hand. As my eyes slowly adjusted to the light surrounding me, I attempted to take in who pulled me to my feet. Her hair was blonde, a pure platinum. The silken strands each shone in the surrounding light. Her face, to say the least, was pure beauty. All of the artists on Earth, gathered into one person, who spent eternity painting the portrait of one woman -

could not match her beauty. I was not attracted to her, despite this, I was simply in amazement of the perfection. All I could do was appreciate what was in mere inches from my face.

She wore a suit of armor, unlike her predecessors. It was made of the most brilliant gold, adorned with gems and streams of silver. It reflected my face back at me, whilst the gems sparkled in unparalleled beauty. Her skin was the most perfect milky white. I could not look away.

Light

She stepped aside and gestured to the third landscape I had seen that day. Tears instantly filled my eyes, as the vision of the grove before me filled my heart. I could live a thousand years, and never see a glimpse of such a land again. The sky was a flawless blue, untainted by clouds or smoke. The sun shone, just above the horizon, like a sunrise at the beach. To my left was an ocean, of the most perfect blue. I could hear the splash of the tide, ever so quietly, simply accenting the magnificence that filled my eyes. The horizon fell off in the distance, darkening ever so slightly farthest from the sun.

The sun, oh God, the sun, was bright as could be. It was massive and close, but did not force me to look away. It was warm on my skin, but the cool sea breeze left me with the most magnificent feeling. I heard birds in the distance, singing songs of pure unadulterated joy. I stepped off of the platform, having forgotten the blackness behind me. Below me, the ground was a soft brown dirt, ever so soft. I fell to it, smelling the flawless scent of fertility and life. I looked to my right and saw an endless garden, springing with life. Flowers, utterly magnificent flowers filled the grove, along with countless trees. Each bore beautiful and shiny fruits of all kind, untainted by bugs or imperfect creatures. Wildlife was everywhere, unbothered by my presence. Deer mingled in the grass, rabbits seemed to almost sniff the flowers, and people filled the empty spaces.

For a moment, I was embarrassed. I considered my appearance - a

man having escaped Hell itself, adorned in tattered pajamas and slippers. And of course, I was lying in the dirt, crying like a child. But they were unfazed, they simply carried on. My guide spoke not a word as she lifted me to my feet again and began walking me through the forest. She had to hold me, as I could barely stand - weak from both what I saw and my journey before.

The people that filled the garden were as indescribably perfect as my guide. They ate, and laughed, and talked amongst themselves. The men and women were paired, unmistakably in unimaginable love. They were all so pure, worryless, wandering in the perfect world. I wiped tears from my eyes to see my guide was simply watching me and smiling. She sat me at a table full of these people, all of whom warmly smiled, and welcomed me amongst their ranks.

I heard not a word they said as I admired my surroundings, the perfect smell of the meadow, the wonderful sound of the sea, and the joy that filled my heart. I turned to my guide, and simply said, "Thank you."

She smiled once again, looked me in the eyes, and asked, "Do you want to know why?"

I nodded, with a permanent smile stuck upon my face. She gently stroked my face, and said "It takes a journey through both Limbo and Hell to truly appreciate Heaven."

I smiled and began crying again. I kissed her hand, and she left me with the beautiful creatures that surrounded me.

POETRY

Poem for R*****

-Arnold Snarb

You are the air we breathe, only
The anaerobic or the dead could bide
Ignoring. But if between
Some wave of want I slip or cry
To part the clouds that cover, a vile
Inviolable blank, it is
Worse to receive or to thank.
So secrets are what gets told,
Children in ankle-deep water,
So forgiveness laps at shore, but only
Words will dry this
Very sodden thing, being
As they are air again made
Warm by proximity to the heart.

So we bid farewell to the sun and wonder
Whether one day someday could
Exhaust so much of us we welcome
Sleep with no thought of the promise we
Will wake again, to spare light of dawn—

Only, my darling, my only, darling, if—

If you are the element,
Endless, certain,
Blessed, that brings it on.

Seraph

-Arnold Snarb

I got my chance.
There in the dark
you laid aside thought.
Years you wouldn't
bring back sing
in choir, in the heart.
And later, caught
in the steps of a dance
you let it all back
in, a head of black
and roaring out.
No record may exist,
and you have returned
to your post by the pump.
And something like this?
I'll do it until
I get it right
by doing it less.
I was once informed
as sure you were
that the smaller you make it
the harder it is
to shake out of your
shoe and keep walking.

Song

-Arnold Snarb

O sing me a sing.
If anything
the years have honed percep-
tion, the dance-step
once fashionable, then dumb,
has carved some
semblance of itself into the hardwood floor,
a pattern ever more
ineluctable and magic, pent
like a rune without a referent.

And the Streets

-Alexander Black

Notice.
The cracking cement below.
Warnings are
spoken through speakers and
seen through screens.
They are friendly but
They are assertive.
And this place is
A city of side walks

The future. . .
– A concrete graveyard.

A man shakes his hand, and his pen
controls a steady stream of ink that
threatens to rain down to the streets.
And maybe the wind may pick up.
Someday.

Yesterdays News – Today's Waste Paper
Coffee Stains, Deep Fried Onion Rings,
Chocolate Nicotine, Sexual Shame,
Innocent Times – Guilty Pleasures
They inspire, service, form
his rising pile of ash. . .

And once the fire gets stamped
into letters,
into words,
into pages,
and books, and readers,
there will be more than sparks.
And the streets will crack some more
(under the stress of feet and heat),
and smoke will rise to the sky,
and flames will lick at the ornate creatures
carved into ancient buildings.
And the burns will mark
the surviving losers
and when the flames die down
and today's yesterday seems years away
The streets will
still suffer.

Rock Sonnet

-Ian Fitz

Holding me tightly now, I may feel smooth,
A harmless hassle among placid palms.
I'm towed in possession to where you move,
A voiceless vessel and continued calm.
But, with eyes caught by a brighter ellipse,
my mass, maturing, will grow large in hand.
I'll become another name on the list,
an antique you wish to leave in the sand.
So if my presence may start to weigh down,
you can throw me with focused force to sea.
And I promise that with my body round,
I'll break your record, please remember me.
That stern rock that clashed the farthest away,
against the smooth sea miles from the bay.

Cycle

-Jessica Brown

Waken again, the cycle returns!
We are out here upon the sea!
The bridge to the old world - look - how it burns!
We are alone - or should I say, me?

For you are gone, yet again
A memory from another time
My dear, my love, my boundless friend
Please do not call this a crime.

For life anew is no dark era!
Rejoice, as the past is gone!
Throw away your great chimera
And depart with a smile and a song!

Far across a distant, sunny land
In a field of millions of golden daisies
There is a woman to take your hand
And whisper little loving praises

At Land's End

-Jessica Brown

At land's end, past His promontory pyre
Beyond the waves of gold and turquoise
Comes an unrelenting, wretch'd noise
Of war's preeminent, harsh-ended fire.

Yet bones of sharks still arrive with the tide
On our bleak, white, flattened shore
Despite the women's prayers: "No more!"
And, all our kins gathered, we cried.

You are in Denial

-Sorbetyumm

Location: The head of a pin
Organisms small enough to be thwarted
by this environment
include the contents of your brain and heart.
A good start right?
Well from here it's all downhill
cause I've got nothing else to say except
I'm ill, I'm ill, I'm ill.
Sick with this shit
from my intestines
to my complexion
a pale green with a little
bit of red for tension.
Upon inspection of our union
I found that inevitably we were doomed and
the flashing red alarm was chanting
"abort, abort, abort"
All hands on deck
If my calculations are correct
you're due for a retort
and knowing you it's gonna hurt.
That's why I'm not even stopping for breath
I can't afford to give you a chance to chip this
hatred off my chest.
So back away now, all sales are not final
If your plan involves changing my mind
You are in denial.

On Art

-!fcpOe3O2SRa

Lord Byron had a thick tongue (I mean
really meaty and heavy with saliva); with it
he painted wonderful clear pictures
on the skins of young maidens-
some beautiful, some less so,
but all a masterpiece-

their bodies were his masterpiece. Yes,
the only one he had.

Allegra and Ada on pins,
trickling through rooms unseen.

ESSAYS

The Meaning of “Write What You Know”

-Matthew S. Vodička

“Now he would never write the things that he had saved to write until he knew enough to write them well. Well, he would not have to fail at trying to write them either.”

-Ernest Hemmingway, “The Snows of Kilimanjaro”

When you tell a fledgling writer, “write what you know,” the usual response is something to the effect that their life has been and still is very boring. That it's not worth writing. The truth, here, is that just about everyone's life is very boring. And the misconception, here, is that “write what you know” means “write your life,” when it doesn't. It does not mean, “give the people you know new names, and write them how they are,” and it doesn't mean your main character is supposed to be you.

This is the misunderstanding perpetuated within the following quotation:

"Bad books on writing and thoughtless English professors solemnly tell beginners to 'Write What You Know', which explains why so many mediocre novels are about English professors contemplating adultery."

-Joe Haldeman

The distinction to note is that “what people know” transcends their first-hand experience. Knowledge is not pure biography. A priest, for example, may very easily write a convincing novel about a marriage. In fact, a priest would probably have more astute things to say about the marriage than would any number of men who have been married for over sixty years, due to the fact that the priest's own parents were likely married, and chances are that the majority

of his parishioners (who attend confessionals with him) are also halves of married couples. He, himself, has never been married, but, he has extensive knowledge of the married—to such a length that he even creates married people through ceremonies over which he presides.

It is a matter of course that substantial life experience is requisite for good writing. However, what one writes does not need to adhere so strictly to that real-life experience—it merely needs to have its basis in the truth of that reality. This is the “knowing” part. The theoretical professor in the above Haldeman quotation could write any number of creative scenarios about a character contemplating infidelity: his character could do it on Mars, or his character could contemplate having the extra-marital affair with a dog, or his character could become a self-flagellator in an effort to quell his thoughts. In each of these cases, it would help if the author knew something about Mars, or bestiality, or self-flagellation, but the important thing is the basis of experience: the frequent contemplation of infidelity that the author has experienced. Edward Albee wrote *The Goat, or, Who is Silvia?*, probably without ever having had any sexual relations with a farm animal. The play, however, is quite convincing in its portrayal of a man who does, indeed, cheat on his wife with a goat. What provided Albee with the savvy to write his play are the experiences he has had with relationships and infidelities—be they first- or second-hand, or a mixture of both.

It is in this same way that “write what you know” does not mean that to write a murder, you must go out and murder someone. Naturally, it will help to write about murder if you have murdered someone; but, all the same, it's not necessary. Research and second-hand knowledge will suffice. A few years ago, I wrote a short play about Dennis Rader, (the self-called B. T. K. Killer,) and I can proudly report that I did not have to suffocate a single person in order to write it. There was enough footage and comment from Rader himself that made it possible for me to conceive of and finish my play. I could not have done it, however, without heaps of research.

“Write what you know” is advice that is really only ever given to novices. For that reason, it is good advice. New writers especially are given to writing only what they think will be interesting, and they are overzealous in their efforts to entertain. This generally leads to writings

about anything and everything, except that what which the author actually knows and understands. “Write what you know” is meant to assuage this. It is a guideline for authenticity and originality. Only, instructors cannot merely parrot the rule without explaining its meaning, because it is so easy to misinterpret it as forbidding creativity, when this could not be further from the truth. Above all else, the rule inspires the pursuit of knowledge, and it reminds novices that if they know very little about it, then they have very little business writing about it.

Afterword

As mentioned in our initial updates, TAR will henceforth after issue 7 be offering cash prizes for exemplary literary skill to our authors. This is a particularly exciting change for TAR, one which we hope our readers will equally share enthusiasm for. In specifics, implementation will be as follows:

- All editors involved in TAR agree to bookmark \$10 for contribution to TAR's prize fund. This would be limited to a maximum of \$10 per month unless voluntarily exceeded by editors.
- Any submission received by TAR particularly impressing any member of our editorial staff will be referred to a mass editorial vote prior to publication of the issue containing it. The outcome of this vote would determine whether said submission is eligible for TAR's award of literary excellence.
- Should the vote be successful, the author of said submission will be notified through email on TAR's date of publication that they have won the award.
- All prize money bookmarked for TAR's award of excellence would then be electronically deposited in the Paypal account of the winning author at their leisure.
- Should multiple authors be nominated for TAR's award of excellence, prize money bookmarked would be divided eventually among all winners

In practice, TAR will probably attempt to double award winnings in a situation of one or more winners simply for sake of increasing prize value. Any further adjustments to this system will be noted publicly on in later issues of TAR.

Credits & Information

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

Website: <http://theaprilreader.org>

IRC: #TAR on irc.freenode.net

Twitter: @TheAprilReader

Editors:

Nipplelesshorse

Prole !XDERDXUpqQ

Wildweasal !FvTu.n1ohA

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

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

See you next issue,

-TAR