



# COLLECTION ELEVEN

FEBRUARY ISSUE



# CONTENTS

#11

## FICTION .....

pg.5 : **Andy Kaufman Syndrome**, *Andrew Mendelson*

pg.23 : **Lucid**, *Xavier Sarra, TAR award winner*

pg.31 : **President for Life**, *Chess Vice*

pg.37 : **Bruised by Cream**, *J., Illustrated*

pg.45 : **Lemon Soap**, *John P. Bohannon*

.....

## POETRY .....

pg.51 : **Hemlock**, *Kushal Poddar*

pg.51 : **Performing January**, *Kushal Poddar*

pg.53 : **The Protective Purple Peacock**, *S. Hitwriter*

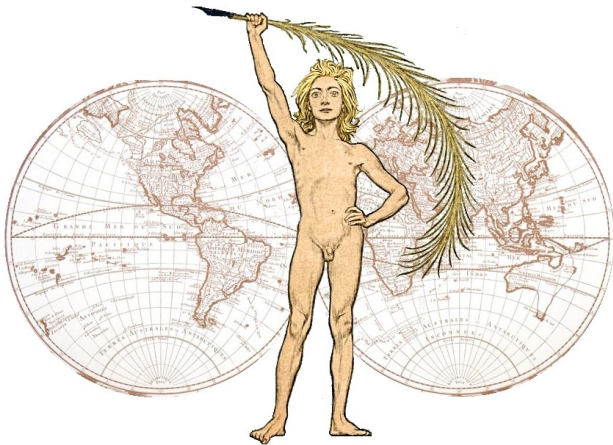
pg.55 : **Seven acts of Mercy**, *John Stocks*

.....

# PREFACE

The April Reader is a monthly publication of poetry, prose, and user-submitted content. It was conceived as a successor to the 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

**Our IRC Channel:**  
**Server:** irc.freenode.net  
**Room:** #TAR  
**Our Distribution Page:**  
[www.theaprilreader.org](http://www.theaprilreader.org)  
**Submit your writing, comments to:**  
[theaprilreader@gmail.com](mailto:theaprilreader@gmail.com)



# EDITORIAL

As promised, the release of TAR 11 coincides with a number of changes to the publication. Almost every aspect of TAR has been subject to scrutiny. However, alternations have not been the only thing happening this month – to our glee, monthly submissions counts have nearly doubled. This is an excellent turn of events, and we are pleased to see TAR attracting a larger audience of writers. Let us not forget to commend our award winner Xavier Sarra for his submission “Lucid” this month. Here is a story of both fantastic and surreal, blending elements seamlessly in a mix that justly can be called “dream-like”.

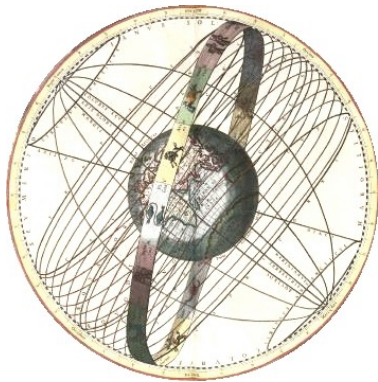
Changelog:

- Website format has been revised
- Publication format has been revised
- Bantha\_fodder is illustrating for TAR

Two new editors (theswedisheditor and Martin) have joined, bringing next month's available award sum to \$40. Theswedisheditor has experience as a journalist, and Martin has talent in poetry critique.

Cheers, dear reader.

*TAR Editorial Staff*



FICTION

# ANDY KAUFMAN SYNDROME

*by Andrew Mendelson*

**A**lthough the phrase “Andy Kaufman Syndrome” (AKS) adequately describes the behaviors in question to some degree, the term is arguably a misnomer. Kaufman was known for a unique comedy style which involved deluding the audience in a way that often resulted in his own amusement at the expense of the baffled crowd. With exaggerated accents, unexpected and intense emotional outbursts, and live skits where people would fake their deaths on stage, people simply couldn’t tell when he was being genuine—this is also true of those afflicted with AKS. They are chronic performers. They are people with odd characteristics so ingrained that they occur as naturally as breathing—in spite of the confusion, irritation, and horror of everyone around them. Thus, the important distinction between Kaufman and someone with AKS is that Kaufman was a comedic genius of sorts who was always in control of his performances whereas the victim of AKS has lost this control.

It is believed that AKS frequently stems from some separate psychological problem as an ineffective coping

mechanism and, over time, becomes worse than the initial problem. The rapidly growing literature about the unique problems which trigger AKS is startling.

Peter McHale is a young man majoring in Exercise Science at Oakland University. He is tall, handsome, athletic, and he shares an infectious optimism with his weightlifting trainees. The unfortunate problem for Peter, a young man who relies on his appearance for his job, is his face.

“My left eyebrow is permanently higher than my right.”

Peter was born with a congenital defect resulting in the constant asymmetry of his eyebrows. As an adolescent, this tormented him endlessly.

**Peter:** Every day in middle school, I was picked on. In the hallways they would all cock their eyebrows at me and laugh. I always ate my lunches in a bathroom stall. Speeches were impossible for me to do with all of the self-consciousness. One day someone called me “brow-brow” and that name stuck throughout all of middle school.

But in high school, things changed. One night during my freshman year, I went to a youth group meeting at the church my parents had started going to. I was reluctant to go, seeing as it was called “The Flaming Youth Ministry Youth Group”, but nobody there would know about me and my raised eyebrow or my “brow-brow” nickname.

There was this cute blonde girl sitting by herself and

texting. I knew that she would immediately notice my eyebrow but I just had to try and approach her. I was so lonely and she seemed a bit lonely herself. So, I decided to play it James Bond—to act all suave. I mean, it made sense at the time. People either raise an eyebrow in a disapproving way or they do it in a “How You Doin’?” kind of way, right?

I walked up to her with a kind of reckless confidence. No girl had ever given me the time of day, so what was the worst that could happen?

“Hey,” I said.

“Hi...”

“You seem to be having a real blast.”

“Yeah. You caught me.”

“Indeed I did.”

“Why are you making that face?”

“Who wants to know?”

“Me.”

“Well, Me, you’re moving kind of fast. It’s a tad creepy of you to be honest.”

And then a miracle happened. She laughed. I was so thrilled that I couldn’t keep it up much longer and I ended up walking away. I knew that on some level she had laughed partially out of sympathy but it had still been a profound success for me.

(From that experience onward, Peter found himself acting with a suave personality each time he tried to



talk to an attractive girl.)

It got to the point where it just started happening automatically. I was so over the top that I still couldn't engage in any kind of romantic relationship. Girls would find me amusing for a few minutes, but when I couldn't put my eyebrow down it would always weird them out.

Things started to get really bad for me in the summer. It was the Fourth of July and my parents were hosting a huge barbecue in the backyard with a bunch of relatives. Two of my cousins, Tracey and June, came with their parents from Texas. They were a little younger than me and I hadn't seen them in a few years. They're twins, by the way. I greeted them on the porch and they asked me where they could leave their bathing suits and before I knew what was happening I blurted out, "You don't really need them—if ya know what I mean." They looked at each other in shock and I tried to make it better. "Or you could just leave them in my room." And to my horror I immediately added, "You can change in there too. I certainly don't mind."

At this point they were really freaking out...as was I. I mean, objectively speaking, my twin cousins are very pretty. But I didn't think about them like *that*. When I realized that I was talking to them the same way that I talked to girls I was trying to hit on, a sick feeling grew in the pit of my stomach and I had to walk away and leave them standing there on the porch.

What followed was the most uncomfortable lunch of

my life. My dad noticed that I looked pale. Every second, I waited in fear that my cousins would tell my mom and she would confront me. When everyone was out on the deck in the back yard, I avoided the table I usually sat at with all of my cousins. My favorite cousin, Rob asked me why I wasn't sitting with him and I just shrugged. Then I heard them giggling.

I hadn't had the courage to look at them after my first blunder and when I finally did look over at them I tried to do it as discreetly as possible. They were both looking right at me and they were still laughing. Tracey was whispering something into June's ear. It was all too much. I quickly retreated to my room.

I wanted to escape my house, but I didn't have any friends and couldn't come up with a good excuse for leaving. There was something so terrible about seeing my cousins whispering and laughing like that. It was unbearable and I had to remove myself from the situation. As I was about to leave through the front door, my mom spotted me.

“Peter, where are you going?”

“I was just gonna go to the fair. For the...pie eating contest.”

“Oh. Well, you need to come and say hello to your Aunt Joyce before you go. She just got here.”

“But, mom—”

“Peter, just do it. Are you okay? You're acting a bit strange. And why didn't you want to sit with Rob?”

“Mom, I just wanna go to the pie eating contest. I told some guys from school that I’d meet them there.”

“Really? Who?”

“Just some guys. Come on, mom.”

“Fine. But say hello to Aunt Joyce first.”

I returned to the backyard, but I didn’t see the twins. I said hello to my aunt and rambled about my college plans, nonexistent friends, etc. As I was about to go back in, the twins came out and stood in front of the door. They were wearing their two-piece bathing suits.

“We changed. Sorry you couldn’t watch, creeper,” said Tracey.

Before I could stop myself I said, “Maybe I could watch you ladies take them off.”

“Oh God, Tracey. Our cousin is a major creeper.”

They giggled. As they taunted me, June was poking me with a foam water-snake pool toy.

“You say that like it’s a bad thing, babe.”

“It *is* a bad thing,” said Tracey.

“A *very* bad thing,” said June.

The whole time I was talking I kept dropping these horrific lines automatically while my heart was pounding and my brain was telling me to get the hell out of there. I tried to walk around them but they moved and blocked the door. When I tried to reach around them for the door handle, June moved into my

hand and I touched her. I snatched the foam toy from her. Tracey grabbed it and tried to get it back. She started to stroke it slowly. June stepped so close to me that that her wet bare foot was on top of mine.

Tracey was the first to notice my bulging shorts. She stepped back and pointed at it. They both shrieked with laughter. I wanted to die but instead I said, “Hey, don’t act like you aren’t impressed.”

“Oh my GOD!” they screeched.

At this point, my relatives started to look over. Before I knew what I was doing, I leaped on to the nearest table and knocked a chili dog onto my NRA-gun-wielding uncle’s American flag shirt. I triumphantly pointed to my erection in front of all my shocked relatives and announced, “Looks like this guy wants to party down!”

There was utter silence. I panicked for about three seconds and then started to belt out the Confrontation song from *Les Miserables*. After about three measures, my dad picked me up off the table and carried me to his room and then beat the shit out of me. I was crying the whole time. Not because of my dad hitting me, but because I was thinking about my grandma’s face when I was on the table. Her left eyebrow was raised. I’m sure it was just an involuntary facial expression of shock, but it felt as though my own grandmother had mocked me.

I haven’t seen my cousins since. My mom sends me out to run errands every time there’s a family gathering. I only talk to my relatives, superficially,

over holiday meals and then I retreat into my room.

I got a gym membership shortly after the July incident. I figured I could at least compensate for my face by having a good body. It's a twenty-four-hour gym, so I usually go late at night. I avoid the cardio area, where women go, and stick with the power racks. All of my clients are male. I avoid women when I can.

\*\*\*

Peter is not alone in his struggle. Some of the most common manifestations of AKS are the constant use of silly voices, accents, and impersonations. One of the first people with AKS couldn't stop impersonating Andy Kaufman's Elvis impersonation.<sup>1</sup> Other people have compulsively impersonated other entertainment figures, as well.

Reuben Goldenbaumstein Rabinowitz is a friendly man. He has thick grey hair and always seems to be smiling. His wife and two boys are the most important thing to him and he worries about the embarrassment and irritation his silly voices cause for them.

**Reuben:** Well, it started back when I was a teenager. My home wasn't the most ideal place, growing up. My mother was a very nervous person. She wouldn't drive above fifteen miles an hour regardless of the speed limit. When she picked me up from school, she would start braking for about one block before each stop sign. When she got to a four-way stop she would wave by a

---

1 This notable case led to the name "Andy Kaufman Syndrome".

few cars before going herself, which would infuriate the five or so people behind her. She was a tender soul. She almost never left the side of my severely retarded older sister, Anne.

My father was a bitter man. He was an Auschwitz survivor who suffered from constant night terrors. Many nights, I was woken up to the sound of him screaming. He owned a clothing store next to a sporting goods store run by an angry, anti-Semitic Irishman. His clothing store seemed to get robbed at least once a month. He would go in some mornings and find a brick had been thrown through one of the shattered windows. Once, it got so bad that all of the windows were broken and had to be boarded up.

“Ha!” he said. “Let’s see the goyim fools try to break something now!”

When he went in the next morning, he found that all of the boards had been torn off and they had thrown bricks *inside* the store at fitting room mirrors and a glass shelf. The craziest part about it was that no merchandise had been stolen. My father decided that Hashem must have mistaken him for a Job-like man of faith.

“That’s it,” he declared one evening during dinner.

“I’m painting the door to my shop red.”

“Why?” I asked. “That makes no sense.”

“It worked for the First Born Sons, it can work for my windows.”

“Well wouldn’t you need actual lamb’s blood then?”

“Oh, and where exactly can I get some lamb’s blood? Doris, are you hearing your son? ‘Get lamb’s blood’ he says.”

“I just don’t see how painting the door red isn’t a complete waste of time.”

My mother began whistling at this point. She always did when things got tense between my father and me. She’d whistle the Dreidel Song—but only the first part in a loop, like:

*Dreidel dreidel dreidel, I made it out of clay*  
*Dreidel dreidel dreidel, I made it out of clay*  
*Dreidel dreidel dreidel, I made it out of clay*  
*Dreidel dreidel dreidel, I made it out of clay*

To be fair, I wasn’t the greatest son. My grades were poor. All I wanted to do was play the guitar like Jimi Hendrix and get high. So things were always tense between my father and I. Things got really bad, once, when he announced one evening that he had invited over our new gentile neighbors over for dinner. My mother practically had a panic attack. They both agreed that I would have to stay upstairs with Anne and keep her quiet.

My parents insisted that the reason I had to watch Anne was because they wanted it to be only adults at the dinner table, but I knew that they were ashamed and embarrassed about Anne, deep down. There was a fear among Jews after the war that their experiences in

concentration camps would leave them with strange diseases or children who were malformed in some way—as if all of the suffering was too much for one generation and would have to be passed on. With Anne, this superstitious fear became real to my parents. They even tried to avoid other Jews from seeing Anne, which made our family very lonely. We were like four drops of oil in an ocean.

My room was in the house's fairly spacious attic. I stayed hidden there with Anne until the dinner was over and the neighbors left. Although I could tell my parents were physically exhausted from trying to appear friendly and normal to the neighbors, I was still angry at them for being ashamed of my sister, and I didn't speak to my parents for a few days until my father confronted me at dinner, one night.

“First he won't speak to us and now he won't eat. What's wrong with him, Doris? Reuben, what's wrong with you? You been smoking the marijuana?”

“Yep. You should try it sometime.”

“Yeah? And you should try getting a job and stop flunking algebra. Mr. Kovacs called today.”

My mother started to whistle.

“Well maybe if I wasn't woken up all the time by someone screaming all night I would do better in class.”

My mother gasped. My hands started to shake. Anne gurgled. I had said the worst possible thing imaginable. For a second my dad just stared at me with his jaw



dropped. His lips trembled for a second and then he screamed at me to get out of the house.

I spent that night at my friend Alan's house. We smoked in his garage and laughed ourselves silly at some old *Three Stooges* reruns. Jerome Horwitz as Curly was one of the funniest people I had ever seen. Alan and I started to impersonate him in front of the TV between our uncontrollable laughter. My impression was spot on. The "woo woo woo woo woo" and his bark were perfect. The "n'yuk n'yuk" laugh has actually become my natural laugh.

When I got home from school the next day, my mother was even more nervous than usual. She greeted me warmly, but she couldn't make eye contact and she didn't dare mention the night before. For the next few hours, the house was silent as my mother and I anxiously waited for my father to come home. I was sitting on my bed in despair, listening for the sound of his car pulling into the driveway. When he finally got home, things stayed quiet for a few minutes and my mother called me down for dinner.

Even Anne seemed to sense how tense things were, as we all stared down at our food in silence and passed dishes around as if they might suddenly explode. My mother started to whistle before anyone even spoke. After what seemed like an eternity, my father looked over at me and said, "I think you have something to say to this family, Reuben."

I cleared my throat and was surprised by my high-pitched voice as I said, "Soitenly!"

My parents looked at me with concern. Anne giggled. I looked at their faces and started doing Curly's "n'yuk n'yuk" laugh uncontrollably. I couldn't stop and tears began streaming down my cheeks. Then, my parents looked at me like I was crazy. My mother looked to my father and mouthed "marijuana!?" and I started laughing even harder.

I was laughing so hard that I fell out of my chair, and when I hit the floor I made the "woo woo woo woo" noise. My parents, who were now panicking, went to pick me up and I barked and snapped at them. Then I melted into a cacophony of barks, woos, and n'yuking. I could barely breathe between all of Curly's noises and I started getting tunnel vision and everything was fading away. Right before I fainted, I was convinced that my head had been hit with a hammer that made a cartoonish and high-pitched *kunk* sound as it bashed my skull, and I could hear the voice of Moe saying, "So ya think it's funny do ya? Ya know why the old man screams at night? Know what he saw? When they made him pick up empty canisters of Zyklon B he saw—" n'yuk n'yuk n'yuk n'yuk n'yuk... I'm sorry.

I was passing out and I heard Moe say that my father saw—saw... N'YUK N'YUK N'YUK N'YUK N'YUK N'YUK N'YUK N'YUK—

\*\*\*

Reuben broke down into a delirious imitation of Jerome Horwitz's laugh when he tried to recall his story. It was the same kind of fit he had experienced

thirty-eight years prior, as a sixteen year old. When he came to, Reuben explained that painful memories often triggered what he refers to as a “n’yuking-fit”. Both a car crash and his first time flying seemed to exacerbate his AKS and cause n’yuking-fits for him, as well. For the most part, he is able to keep his AKS subdued enough so that he simply appears as a man with an odd laugh who frequently makes silly noises.

AKS is slowly starting to enter into public discussion. A recent example of the growing awareness of AKS can be found in the viral internet story and photos of Emma Pierson, a twenty-nine year old woman who was incapable of smiling at her wedding. She wrote about her experience in her blog entitled *Is This Water?*

**Emma:** There were a million things on my mind that day, already. We had only had time for one fast rehearsal because a FYM Youth Group had, unknown to us, booked the chapel the evening before. So, I didn’t sleep at all that night and early in the morning I was drinking champagne, getting my hair done and driving myself insane imagining all of the things that could go wrong. Most of the ceremony is a blur. Someone forgot the runner; no one was sure of their cue, since the rehearsal had been so fast; the piano player freaked out and choked in the middle of playing *Canon in D*; the best man was having a panic attack over his speech; the chapel ended up having a wasps nest inside; my dad almost refused to attend because Kyle and I insisted on serving alcohol at the reception; we got started late because my grandpa had rear-ended

some crazy lady at a four-way stop—and these are just some of things that I can remember.

The thing that really stuck with me was all of the faces staring at me as I walked down the aisle. Everyone seemed to have very nervous smiles. I guess that's typical, in a way, but there was some kind of nightmarish quality in their smiles. I felt naked. It was like everyone felt really sorry for me and only smiled to try and alleviate the tension, but only made it worse in doing so.

I knew something was really wrong when I was standing across from Kyle, and he had the same uncomfortable look as everyone else. I could tell he wanted to ask me if I was okay.

When the ceremony was finished, Kyle, my mom and my aunts immediately asked if I was feeling okay. I almost cried and I told them how everyone had been looking at me so oddly. They got really quiet for a second and then Kyle said, “Baby, you were sticking your tongue out the whole time.”

Then, I couldn't help it and I did start crying. I told them that I didn't know what they were talking about and that I had been smiling the whole time. My aunts got me more champagne and tried to calm me down. Outside, everyone was waiting for pictures.

If you had gone on my Facebook page and looked at every picture I had uploaded up to my wedding day, you wouldn't find a single picture of me smiling. That's not to say that you couldn't find a picture of me looking happy or having fun, it's just that all of my

pictures showed me doing things like pursing my lips and making a peace sign, or making a goofy face with my eyes crossed, or I was stretching my lips in such an exaggerated grin that it wasn't *really* a smile. Other times, I was trying to make a sexy pout-face—you get the idea. All of my facial expressions were exaggerated in some ironic way.

This ironic/goofy face thing probably goes back to my horrible first job in retail, which I got right after my amazing senior year of high school. This mega-store that I worked at was absolutely littered with stock pictures of photoshopped models smiling. There was almost no surface you could look at without seeing some ripped guy in underwear paid to show his squint-inducing bright teeth as he stood in front of a sterile white background, or a little girl wearing designer jean overalls and riding a tricycle with that oh-so-precious little kid smile with the front two incisors missing. I hated every one of those photos. They were so perfunctory and forced that it actually creeped me out. They made me wonder if I was giving the same kind of smile every time a customer went through my line. All I could think of when I went out with my friends and someone pulled out a phone or a digital camera was that I didn't just want to give another “work” smile. And so, goofy faces.

Now, when I was at my wedding and I was being told that it was time for pictures, I felt nauseous. I realized that over the years I had lost my ability to form a healthy natural smile and I had nothing left for my face except pure silliness. After a few “just for fun”

pictures, the photographer and everybody else started to get impatient with me and urged me to smile “for real”. And I tried. Oh, I tried. If you’re curious to know how physically awkward it was for me to try and smile, drink ten shots of tequila and try to brush your teeth with your non-dominant hand.

I’m currently working with a physical therapist to relearn my natural smile. She assures me that I’m making excellent progress, but that it will take time. It’s all so terrible. It’s as if there’s actually some truth to that old motherly-myth about how if you keep making a funny face it will become permanent.

Despite numerous stories like the ones you have read here, there is much debate over whether AKS is a universal disorder that should be officially codified as such in the DSM, or whether it is merely a folk-illness. Whatever the case, as more and more instances are reported daily, it is clear that we are dealing with a very serious problem. At this time, there is no clear evidence of a chemical imbalance in the brain being responsible for AKS, although there are strange anecdotal claims that this psychological condition is somehow contagious. Surely, this is a superstitious claim, but it’s nice to know that readers such as yourself are becoming aware of Andy Kaufman Syndrome, just in case. Thank you for that.

Thank you very much.

\*\*\*

# LUCID

*by Xavier Sarra*  
*TAR Award Winner*

**H**e was given the name Mummer, and with that name he lived. It fit him, of course, he was here to entertain. His masters found everything he did hysterical, and, to Mummer, that was a better fate than what the masters did to some of their other servants. The new ones are usually bound up on the Great Oak and left there for days until they are near death, then nursed back to health. This is their rebirth; their baptism into their new home. Most are gained through raids and warfare, the masters bring their winnings before the King and he christens them thralls of the Goldenclaw Court. It is rare for the King to deny any new subjects; he is at war and needs every resource he can get.

Mummer himself was brought to the Goldenclaw court only a few months ago. He does not remember much, but apparently he was trespassing. He was a dreamer, and in his dreams he learned how to control himself. After that, shaping the dreams was easy. It only took a little willpower, a little creativity, and a

little patience. Mummer, before he was Mummer, had all of those things in spades. He believes he was an artist, but he cannot be certain. It seems so long ago.

He wakes up slowly, as always, as morning is not his time. His bed, made of the softest feathers available, is beckoning for him to return to sleep, but he presses on, untangling himself from the sheets. As soon as his feet pad against the floor, he twists around and begins making his bed. His fingers work methodically and he is finished within seconds. His masters did a good job at making him useful. He was glad for that, because they would have blamed him either way.

Mummer knows he doesn't really have any duties, he's simply there to add chaos to the politics of the realm. The nobles all compete for the King's favor, and it is the Mummer's duty to mock mistakes and praise successes, highlighting various events for the King to take note of. Mummer's act can make or break a noble, and so, most of them are very courteous to him. Their plastic smiles and fake commending amuse Mummer in a strange, morose way. Mummer decides to go for a stroll around the garden. He knows the guards will not allow him out of the palace grounds, but the garden is enough. He walks through the grand stone hallways and down a few treacherous, twisting staircases. When he finally comes to a gatehouse, the two blind gatekeepers wordlessly thrust open the doors and Mummer walks out humming tunelessly. *And where to today?*

Mummer decides to go down the high road today, heading left and ascending the stone staircase to the



Great Ebon Bridge, which is really more of a road made of the finest dark work suspended on grand columns. Its twists and turns were the wonder of the realm, and the King spoke with pride of dreaming it up. Mummer himself found it beautiful, and since it was wide enough for four carriages, he had plenty of room to himself.

He took in the beauty of the forests and the horrors of the vines where prisoners were perpetually impaled. He breathed in the alluring scents of the realm's finest flowers, and he recoiled in disgust from the smell of the rotting corpses that were used as a dam for the river. His fingers felt the bark of the trees that had grown around the bridge, the roughness a welcome sensation. After walking for a few hours, humming the whole time, Mummer decided to head back to the castle. He wanted to see the court in session.

When he arrived in court, an argument had already started. Himr, of the house of Kaalfeather, claimed sovereignty of the Moormarshes. Turskan, of the house of Herfire, disputed the claim, citing some old pedigree. Both were abstract creations of the King for exactly this purpose; pointless intrigue. They were both fat men with all-black eyes and stupid faces, dressed in fine silks that only accentuated their size. The rest of the court was amused by their antics, laughing hysterically. Only the King seemed to actually be listening, and even then only out of courtesy. "It's mine!" one would yell. "It belongs to my family and my heir!" says the other. Soon enough, they are so close to each other only a coin's width of space remained

between their screaming, blood-red faces. And still, the court echoed and twisted with shrill, terrible laughter. Hahahahaha.

Few people noticed Mummer taking his seat by the King, as they were too busy watching the spectacle. He gave the King a respectful nod. He turned his eyes back to the two nobles, who now seemed as if they were on the verge of tears. Both were too damned stupid to make even a single valid point in their favor, yet both felt that they could win by screeching louder than the other. The crowd burst into yet another round of hearty cackles, as Mummer turned to the King and began his daily oath.

"I swear, as your most loyal vassal, to reveal the innermost workings of my mind and my perceptions, to shed light of the machinations of others, to gift you the motives, lies, deceit, and incompetence of your courtiers, so you may know them truly, and truly rule them. I praise you, and I praise Goldenclaw." He bowed in an elaborate fashion, and the King's thin lips whispered a dismissal. Mummer turned to the audience and stepped into the middle of the circle. "Welcome, noble lords and noble ladies. The King's court welcomes your presences and your countenances." The two fools quieted themselves and struggled, as hard as their feeble minds could, to compose themselves. Mummer cleared his throat and smiled, the stitches on his mouth tugging painlessly at his lips.

"The event today is a discussion between two gentlemen about the nature of the Moormarshes. Both claim to own the land."

The King knew and liked where Mummer was going, and his violet eyes grew alive with anticipation.

"Well...who holds the land truly?" He turned and faced the crowd. "Who?" He made a grand expression with his hands as he continued. "We are here to find out! Though the answer should be clear to both of these useless fools you call nobles!"

The crowd returned to its jovial state, and the two fat men became red with anger again—only this time, they could say nothing.

"Tell me, counts, what is your purpose?"

Himr blurted out first, "To rule over our land! Fairly. And..."

Before he could continue, Mummer twisted his head sideways, glared at him, and screamed "WRONG!" at the top of his lungs. The echo of his word, combined with the sudden laughter, made the room ring with noise. "You are servants! To your liege! Fools. Impossible fat fools!"

They both could tell then, and the lords prostrated themselves and began weeping. "No, m'lord. Don't! Your grace, we are loyal. We swear it!"

Mummer never saw why the King would get so riled up over semantics, but there he was, smiling a wicked smile. The headsmen then lumbered in, with his mismatched limbs that once belonged to the first men that he had killed. His head was permanently contained in a steel, cage-like helmet bonded to his skull with nails. His grunting and slow, shambling

movement was greeted with cheers from the crowd and long, pathetic sobs from the nobles. Mummer retreated in a slow, deliberate pace. He did not want to even be nearby this. He never did.

The fat nobles were seized by the guards, with their hodge-podge of acquired body parts, each a badge of honor. A lever was pulled by their captain. Two bloodstained steel slabs emerged from the ground, causing the crowd to quiet and the nobles to bleat even louder. Hoisting them up onto the platforms, the guards uniformly sighed in relief upon releasing the nobles.

Mummer composed himself, and began again. "Count with me, loyal subjects." His tone was noticeably more dour. "One." A shrill shriek filled the air as the manacles were placed onto the nobles' necks. They were targets, more or less. "Two." The room was silent with anticipation. "Three, now, three!" The sound of steel cutting through air then flesh filled the room, and then it was over. Mummer never could stand it, and he always looked away—something his Lord never seemed to notice.

After the debacle, Mummer dismissed himself and began to walk the court grounds. He needed comfort desperately, and so found the glorified bordello known as the Temple of Flesh. Slinking his way in, he found that his favorite mannequin, Delilah, was still in; the sight of her instantly comforting him. Her hair was still vividly red and her skin still invited his touch. However, she still wore the mask of her order so that no outsider may ever know her identity or emotion.

She was there to comfort, and that seemed to mean she wasn't a person anymore.

Delilah curtsied in a delicate, sophisticated manner, pinching the silken wonder that she wore as a skirt and catching Mummer's attention fully. Then, she walked forward with confidence, and grasped Mummer's hand. She lead him up the stairs and, for a moment, Mummer felt as if he was in a grand palace, and that the walls were actually gold instead of just being painted that way. If walls are even painted in this place.

Delilah's room was as beautiful as she, and even reflected her appearance and personality. The furniture and walls were the colors of autumn, and a fierce fire twisted in a nearby fireplace. Mummer always felt more at home here than in his own penthouse near the Court. It was warm and aggressive. It felt alive, just like she did. They both removed their shoes and sat on the carpet, with a small table between them covered with pretty little dishes and silverware.

"Close your eyes." Delilah's voice was smooth and sultry at the same time.

And so he did.

When he opened them, there was a wonderful meal lying on their plates, with the finest wines in their glasses. He leaned across the table and kissed her mask, then started tearing into his food. It was wonderful. There was salad made from the freshest vegetables, topped with a strange citrus dressing. It burned his mouth in a wonderful way as he chewed in utter bliss. Next came a fine duck they split between them,

marinated in lemon and fine black peppers. It seemed to almost dissolve in his mouth as he slowed his pace to enjoy every second. Finally came a sort of strange custard with a bowl of pomegranate seeds which they shared. Anytime their hands would meet, Mummer's heart would jump a little.

When they finished, Mummer reclined on the floor, resting his head on a soft silken pillow. Delilah stood up, her bare feet padding against the carpet. She gracefully sauntered over to the violin she had on a mahogany stand, and retrieved it with the utmost precision. Then she sat back down and began playing.

She didn't have any song in particular chosen, but Mummer could not tell. Every note was flawlessly strung together, and every time she stopped Mummer felt obligated to clap enthusiastically and then give her another kiss. He wished he could see her face and feel her lips against his. He had to settle for a slight hesitation before she resumed playing. He hoped that she paused because of care and not revulsion. He hoped very, very much.

Eventually, Mummer had to leave. Delilah returned her violin to its stand and then walked him out, allowing him another kiss before he slogged his way back to his manor.

He didn't dream that night, obviously.  
Why sleep, though, if you're already dreaming?

\*\*\*

# PRESIDENT FOR LIFE

*by Chess Vice*

**P**resident Munto was holding his ear in his hand. It was sticky with his blood. His mind was unable to put this in any context. All around him in the Presidential limo, there was chaos. His best bodyguard, a young thug he had recruited from the slums, was slumped over Munto's lap. He was dead, his head leaking blood onto Munto's clothes. His attendants and other guards held him in the back, leaning out of the window and shooting at the crowd that had gathered to see the President.

He was rushed to the hospital under heavy guard, but he didn't remember this. A blur of sights, sounds, images rushed past him. He just stared blankly at his ear. He was terrified to reach up and touch the wound on the side of his head. As the doctors worked at him, guns aimed at their heads, he turned to his Head of Security, a portly black man with bushy eyebrows, a pot belly and a permanent scowl on his face.

"Who did this?" he asked, his voice hollow and

devoid of emotion.

“A terrorist, your Excellency,” the Head of Security answered back.

“Are you going to do something about it?” Munto asked, his voice shaking. He wanted to feel anger. He wanted to be furious. He wanted to feel as powerful as he usually did, but instead he felt hollow. Weak.

“Yes, your Excellency. This country shall fear your name,” the Head of Security said. The Head barked some orders to the guards in the room and the President was taken home.

The Munto home was a presidential palace worthy of a man of Munto’s stature. It stood, gleaming and white, with statues of African animals adorning its entrance, and the entire grounds consisted of a magnificent garden unseen in most parts of the world. Munto was escorted inside, his guards carrying AK’s and chatting to each other excitedly. When he was inside he sat inside his office and looked at himself in disbelief.

Munto was a tall, thin man. His hair was greying at the tips and his face sported wrinkles. He wore a pair of box-frame glasses with golden rims. His face was clean shaven. Munto had been chosen by God, so he always dressed and looked his best. He didn’t believe anything had changed.

It was true. His ear was gone, blasted off from a sniper shot. The Head of Security had told him he was lucky. Was he lucky? He touched the spot where the



stitches had been sown and recoiled his hand, wincing at the pain.

Munto spent a few weeks inside the house, the guard becoming heavier and heavier. The Head of Security would not let him swim in his pool anymore. “It’s too dangerous,” the Head had explained. The grounds were off limits, for they were too large to police effectively. He was not even allowed to gaze outside his large bay windows anymore, because he was too obvious a target.

Munto devised a plan of escape. He snuck out of his house and wandered the streets of the city. He did not have a specific plan of where he was going, only that he needed to get away. He needed to feel free. He was chosen by God, and God’s chosen do not sit inside a mansion, hiding. He noticed posters of his face everywhere, and many of these posters had been painted over with large X’s and targets. He shivered, and ducked down an alleyway to get off the main street.

As he walked down the alleyway, he was approached from behind by three youths. They began to call after him.

“Where are you going, old man?” said the first.

“That suit looks expensive, old man!” said the second.

The third said nothing, but Munto heard the metallic *clink* of a switchblade.

Munto quickened his pace.

He felt a rough hand on his shoulder, and heard the first youth say, “Where the fuck are you going, old man? You do not walk away from—“

As Munto was turned around, there was an audible gasp from the three youths. Their faces grew pale and one of them exclaimed, “It’s the ghost!”

They dropped their weapons and ran away from Munto. Munto picked up the switchblade and placed it into his jacket-pocket. He felt powerful, now. “They should fear me,” he said to himself.

As he reached the end of the alleyway, he found himself inside one of the many slums. He heard a commotion coming up a little further ahead. Carefully this time, Munto approached the sound out of curiosity.

There was a family there, and they danced around a fire. They jumped and clapped and sang, playing ratty, worn-down instruments. The music warmed Munto, and reminded him of his youth, and his family. They had all died in the war. It seemed so long ago that this had happened. A small child saw Munto watching from the darkness and screamed. The family looked to where the child was pointing and began to panic. The fire which the family was dancing around was doused and the people scattered into the darkness. One of them exclaimed, “It’s the ghost!”

Munto left the area confused. He had become president to help people like this family, but they were afraid of him. He had no time to ponder this as his security arrived to see what the commotion was about.

They saw Munto and raised their weapons.

“The President is under attack!” shouted one of them, and they charged off into the darkness after the family.

Munto tried to explain that they weren’t doing anything of the sort. They ignored him, and two burly young men dragged Munto away, covering his head. Occasionally, he heard the familiar pops and some wailing screams emerge from the darkened slums.

Back at the palace, the Head of Security was scolding Munto.

“How could you let yourself get kidnapped like that?! We need you here, Munto. You justify all of our actions! You are Chosen by God. If you are kidnapped like that again, you must shout for us,” said the Head of Security. As he was telling Munto these things, Munto noticed a pair of workmen installing bars in the window of his office.

“Why are they doing that?” he asked.

“So nobody can get in,” said the Head of Security.

“Now, Your Excellency. I need you to sign these papers. This is for a crackdown on the populace for the recent assassination and kidnapping attempts.”

Munto signed them.

A week later, Munto stared out past the bars in his window, looking over the city. It seemed distant, out of

reach, almost ethereal. Munto knew this. The Head of Security came in and placed a new stack of presidential orders on his desk for him to sign. As he sat down and began to sign the documents, while the Head of Security watched, Munto knew exactly what God had chosen him.

\*\*\*

# BRUISED BY CREAM

*by J.*

A valve burst, a gasket split, and all the hundreds of gallons of cream in Silo #4 came rocketing out. Greer loped over, slipping in the white froth, and the jet slammed him square in the chest like a broomstick. The nurse practitioner told him his ribs might ache for a week or two, and Motrin for the pain. If they were still looking for somebody to move up from the creamery to the fruitroom, he could be pretty sure his name was no longer at the top of the list. Inside the apartment, he kicked off his boots and they hit the kitchen cupboards with a clang. “Aud?” Greer called out, the soreness in his chest wall following as an echo felt not heard. Two cigarette butts reeled like minnows in a cupful of water on the table. Greer looked at a Domino's flyer without interest and headed for the living room.

Greer's girlfriend Audrey and her friend Steph were cuddling under a comforter on the couch. The venetian blinds were shut.

“Babe, check this out,” he said, and he couldn't help

smiling. He hiked up his shirt to reveal his chest, a patchwork of sodden purple and dingy yellow.

“Oh gross,” said Steph.

“Sick!” Audrey gasped. She struggled up onto one elbow and rested her cheek on her palm. “Did they give you anything for it?” Her sympathy was of course real, though he knew it was mingled with a hope he'd scored a few Percocets to save for a rainy day.

“I tried,” he told her once his shirt was unfurled.

“Rolling around, moaning and shit. They said just over the counter stuff though.” On the floor was an emptied can of fruit cocktail. Some of the heavy syrup had spilled and pooled on the shag. The mild reaction was puzzling. Driving home, he had imagined Audrey recoiling, peppering him with questions, then jumping up and asking to touch the colorful wound.

Steph planted her feet on the floor and rubbed her nose. “Audrey, could I have another one of your Cokes?” she asked in the timid voice she used for requests.

“They're Nick's,” said Audrey, looking at Greer, “but I'm sure he don't mind.” Greer fixed a smile on Steph, signaling that he did, in fact, mind, and with a skittish look she hurried out to the kitchen, still wearing the comforter like a cape.

Audrey yawned and stretched, then put the ghost-hunting show she and Steph were watching on mute. “Babe, Cora called. She wants rent plus whatever she spent fixing the sink.”

Christmas Eve, Greer got wasted, and when he cut his hand on the corkscrew he was so mad he punched the bathroom sink with his other fist and knocked the faucet loose. Cora, normally an understanding landlady, was married to a plumber who had her convinced anything that happened to the fixtures at her properties was bound to be a catastrophe.

Steph stood in the doorway sucking the foam off a glass of Coke. “Cora can go screw,” Greer said. “I got ER bills.”

He figured he'd better settle down some before going to see Cora, so he drove out to the Lowe's on the Bypass. The store sat back off the road in a sea of brittle cattails and was a good place to kill some time; nobody bothered you much. Greer wandered a while, inhaling the smells of lumber and kibble and epoxy, just trying to relax.

The creamery attendant before him, Big Pete, got sent to the hospital with a terrible staph infection under his thumbnail, and the plant wouldn't hold the job for him. Greer was working downstairs stamping plastic cups of sour cream with expiration dates when they asked him to take over. People were bitter toward him over, “stealing Big Pete's job,” not least because Big Pete had hooked them up with molly and shrooms from the Rez – a service Greer couldn't provide, even if he wanted to.

He thought he'd smoothed things over, for the most part. That morning, though, was strange. Greer was playing Hearts on the computer, trying to shoot the

moon every time because that was the only part of the game he really remembered. There wasn't much else to do in the creamery besides checking temperature gauges. "Greer bud," he heard Matt Thurston call from the far end of the chilly tiled room.

"Yeah?"

"You like the pinky?"

"What?"

"You like the pinky?"

"Sorry, what?"

"*Whah*, kid, you deaf?" Matt Thurston grinned and lifted his eyebrows at Gavin, the skinny new kid. "Do – you – like – the – pinky? Or the thumb, or what?"

"Sorry, don't know what you're talking about," Greer said, wheeling back in his chair to the computer console and trying to look busy.

"He don't know," Gavin snickered.

"He likes the whole hand!" cried Matt, and they both doubled over laughing. He was about to go over and get in Matt's face a little when the #4 sensor started pinging. They were gone by the time the cream had knocked him flat.

He bought a post maul and some snelled hooks for more than he intended to spend. The rumpled paper bag of his purchases weighed him down and by the time he reached the Accord his chest was throbbing



with a new intensity. Bad planning.

Greer found Cora chiseling ice off her basement windows with a scraper. Her teal jacket rustled on her round form. “Here it is December,” she grouched, “and me comfortable in just a windbreaker. It's wrong!”<

Cora was convinced that the seasons were switching. When they met, she explained (with lots of hand-waving) that every however many thousand years the Earth's magnetic poles exchange places, and they were due for it—had been for about five years now. Droughts in December, sleet and blizzards in July, and unimaginable disasters across the world as the fields of electrons swept past one another. Weekly, she burned a sage smudging wand and waved it all around her house to, “preserve its alignment,” though, as near as Greer could tell, it just made the place smell like Stove Top stuffing.

He followed her indoors and sat down next to a baker's rack piled with musty Whole Earth catalogs. Cora took a pitcher of tea off the windowsill and squeezed half a lemon over it, letting the seeds fall in and tumble to the bottom. “I really can't tell you how disappointed I am, Nick,” she sighed, “with the damages this weekend. Up until now you and Audrey have been two of my most reliable tenants.”

She was more upset than he expected. No talk of California crashing into the sea, or Lake Huron freezing solid. They'd never spoken without at least ten minutes of her preaching calamity at him.

“It really, we um, no disrespect to your property,”

Greer mumbled.

“I know you wouldn't on purpose. All the same, though, I think you understand...” She slid him a plump white envelope. Greer unfolded the carbon copies inside and winced.

“Now you just hush,” said Cora, with a motherly swat on the back of his hand. “Ted agreed to do the repairs himself, and he's giving you quite a big break on materials. You really lucked out—not everyone you rent from's going to have a plumber for a husband.” Her smile was wide and close-lipped.

“I'll take care of it, Cora.” He tucked the envelope into his coat pocket.

“Oh, you're a good kid, Nick. You know how to listen. Unlike a certain other young man I could mention.” Greer knew from experience that she was talking about her son, Craig. Craig was living in Tacoma, Washington, and it grieved Cora to no end that she couldn't convince him to move before Mount Rainier erupted into a blazing inferno. There were weekly shouting matches over it.

Just like that, she had moved on to her favorite topic. She wanted to know how he was preparing. “Since that's what it's going to come down to. When you see the water spin down the bathtub drain the wrong way, you'll know it's happening. But by then it'll probably be too late.”

“I mean, first of all, you don't hand someone a bill and tell them they're lucky it's not more,” said Greer,

parking his elbows on the bar. “Doctor's not going to say, oh, you're lucky, it's just cancer. It's insulting, is what it—here, pay for this new sink, be grateful though, 'cause you really coulda paid through the nose! Is that not—would you not find that insulting?”

“Thoughtless,” Mitch agreed. Mitch was a buddy who was still stamping sour cream cups on the line. Greer called him up when he got done at Cora's. He didn't want to show Audrey the bill. He didn't want to go home. “You bring paperwork into any situation, people get thoughtless.”

“Guess so.” Greer slumped, drooping around the sore spot over his breastbone.

An interesting-looking redhead in a plaid skirt sat at the end of the bar, nursing an amaretto sour. He made an effort to perk up some, and finished his shot. He was going to talk her up, and for once he had an in, a good one. He could show her the bruise, the medallion of injury on his chest, and tell her he'd gotten it from cream. That's right, just pure dairy cream, no joke. She'd never believe it. He could maybe bet her a dollar, and he'd win, of course, since it was the god's honest truth.



Illustration by Bantha\_fodder (<http://banthafodder.deviantart.com/>)

# LEMON SOAP

*by John P. Bohannon*

She had e-mailed: "I know. But that's the way it is. The way it must be." Those e-mailed words could be the ending of the story. Or, at least that's how he saw it. An ending. The ending. But then, he knew his story would go on, that he would go on, as, of course, would she. On to another day, on to the very next moment when the laptop snapped shut. Surely, he would still see her in the elevator. In the grocery. The street. The story would go on, but just upon another tack.

She too, he was certain, had noticed something, had believed that something was happening. That's what she was really saying, wasn't it? But, like all the women in his life, she was wiser, more practical. She was ending what had not even started. What shouldn't start. This felt so much like the end of the story, but it was not. Is not.

There had been two major snowstorms that year. Both on Saturdays a week apart. Each bringing over two feet of snow. He helped her shovel. Helped her and her husband. Digging out the cars of neighbors, pushing those that slipped along the packed-down mess. There was camaraderie, red cheeks, and dripping noses. Afterward, about ten of them walked to the Abbaye. He had a whiskey. The others drank beer. A

game show played on the one television. ESPN on the other. There was a fireplace. He had told her a story about his once being concussed after walking into a billboard and she had laughed hard. And that is what he had wanted.

Christmas was what everyone had talked about. The living hells of parental visits. The drunken bacchanalias with out-of-town visitors. It all seemed different from his own. His was trouble-free, kind, and generous. Though, often, he felt absent; not in the moment. As one aunt began a song or an uncle recounted a threadbare tale, he felt removed and seemed to watch it all play out from above. At these times, he often imagined her there with him, at Christmas, at his aunt's, listening to what he had heard so many times, over and over again. In that way, she was refreshing for him, for he could hear and see everything—at times—newly; he experienced what was, to him, old, now through her first-time eyes. Perhaps, that was part of it. He wanted to show her the world that he knew, the world that he was still excited about, the world of his that she was not—he knew only too well—a part of.

She had sent the e-mail in late summer. Months ago. He didn't remember what he had originally written. What she was responding to. She had said, "I know," but he could not fathom what she "knew."

He drove her to the airport because she needed a ride. The husband was somewhere. He didn't know. A mother was dying somewhere. She said she could have taken a taxi, but he was happy to give her a ride.

"I'm glad you decided to go," he had said. "I wanted you to get there. To see your mom.

They got there much too early. Security came sweeping him from the drop-off. She had only a carry-on, no luggage to help with, and so, an awkward hug, a quick "good luck," and a peck on the cheek. He had wanted to say something. To learn something. The opportunity passed.

Through the rear view mirror, he watched her stroll into the terminal as he glided into traffic.

Husbands and wives. Significant others. Lovers. Boyfriends and girlfriends. It seemed to him that the only women he was ever interested in were the ones who were already paired. He laughed unforgettingly to himself, thinking that somewhere, some shrink would have an answer to all that. He certainly did not. He drove home from the airport in a snarled-lip funk, kept the radio off, stopped at his local and spent the afternoon mindlessly watching television, mindlessly chatting with the bartender, mindlessly listening to the men around him.

"That's the way it is. The way it must be," she had said. He wondered what she felt while she was typing it. He could not know. He wondered if at that moment she too felt deflated, resigned. He played with her words, as one worries a cavity with the tongue. He wanted to ask someone, but Tommy behind the bar was not the man. He felt sadly alone. Not well alone.

She had gone to see her mom. A lone trip to see a fading parent. The longest of trips, he figured. He

wondered what she was like as a little girl in rural New York. He pictured her in pigtails, riding a bike through lanes surrounded by apple trees. It was not the first time he had imagined her so.

That Monday, she knocked at the apartment door around eight in the evening. She'd been home for a few hours and she had a thank you gift—soap. It was wrapped in some burlap sacking with raffia twisted in a bow. Very clever, like she herself. He could smell lemons when he opened it. The soap was shaped like a lemon. It was waxy and oily and strongly fragrant.

"You didn't need to, you know."

"I know. But you helped me out. You always help me out."

"How's your mom?"

She shrugged and gave a grunt.

"No worse?"

"No worse. No better. I'll be flying back for a funeral next, I guess."

She pouted in a way too young for her age, but perfect for her face.

"We've all been expecting it. Waiting for it, even. But it's sad, nevertheless."

"Well, let me know if there's anything I can do. I know there isn't, but if there is, let me know."

"I will. Thanks again. I'll see you tomorrow, probably."



He stood there with the door open and the single bar of lemon soap, the burlap and the raffia, and watched her walk towards the stair well. She turned when she got to the steps and waved and then disappeared. And the hallway filled with the waxy smell of lemons.

"Who was that?" his wife called from within.

"Just Liz from downstairs. She brought me a gift for taking her to the airport."

Little things tend to throw him for a loop these days, and the rounded shape of the lemon soap was one of them. It wasn't like a bar. It didn't just sit there on the slippery corner of the tub, but rocked slowly and slipped often. But it smelled good. And it reminded him of her.

\*\*\*



POETRY

## ***Hemlock***

*by Kushal Poddar*

Drink hemlock knowing  
the same rule guides the stars and the planets,  
death and blue.

I throw my eyeballs down this turret  
and their fall was simple and equal.

Now darkness, God drinks death  
and his neck radiates blue.

## **Performing January**

*by Kushal Poddar*

The white of the January  
black.

All day I celebrate night with  
the bed suspends between the surface and the seeds.

The mill-workers begin late.  
The chimneys linger close.

A big My hangs from the voice of an old woman-

my vacant spaces, my history of town, my old man,  
my winter bones.

My dead moth collection comes in help.

When they flap their wings, permanently decayed,  
they all open windows.

Open and shut.

Like a flip of head bobbing up and down for the  
pleasure of her lover.

Those workers.

What right do they have to whistle

and pretend their mills

produce both the white and the black?

All day I hang on to my bed watching January  
becomes January.

My.

My January milling all the wings.

All the open and shut cases.

## **The Protective Purple Peacock**

*by S. Hitwriter*

It's cold outside and I have nothing to show  
for the fruits of my labour: a day spent fishing.  
Yet again, the fish didn't bite. I sit by the lake and  
the warm light from your cosy cottage entices me:  
it's still not dark yet but it shimmers through the  
dead trees.

I've seen you outside in your vegetable patch  
sowing seeds and hoeing the earth.  
I smiled at you but you stared back, expressionless;  
yet I know you are warm. Right now,  
I can smell stew cooking in your kitchen.

I approach your house and the only sounds  
are those of the twigs snapping and leaves crackling  
under my soft footsteps. I just want to look at you  
again  
through your window, watch you relaxed and calm:  
perhaps you'd see me and invite me in  
and I could share your hot soup.  
Suddenly though, as always,

the purple peacock predatorily pecks at my ankles.  
It protects you loyally, never ceasing to keep away  
perverts and malfeasants and ignorant trekkers.  
I cannot pass: it is too strong, too agile.

One day though I will kill the peacock  
and bring it to your door. We will feast on peacock  
and then we will drink brandy and I will make love  
to you.

I will gently stroke your naked back with its feathers  
then fall asleep on your breast, proud of my  
conquest.

## **Seven Acts of Mercy**

*by John Stocks*

First he will salvage the old photographs  
The half lit Edwardian drawing room,  
A glimpse of another dimension  
Fixed smiles from sepia-tinged faces.

The Shibboleth of all desires, here  
Distilled in letters, old documents  
Residuals and marginalia,

The shards of benign fragmentation.

He will protect the tiny girl that died  
With her daughter, haemorrhaged after birth  
And the soldier on the Somme, alluding  
To the consequences of indiscretions.

He will keep the prayer books from the library,  
Boxes full of tissue medals, trophies,  
Won on distant sun kissed playing fields,  
Evocative of languid, post war ease.

And this long lost, blurred, half focused world  
The loose plasticity of flowing time,  
He will store in a corner of his mind  
Their heart beats, their tear stained miseries.



# INFORMATION

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

\*\*\*

## Editors:

Matthew S. Vodička

Prole !XDERDXUpqQ

The Swedish Editor

Martin Lohrer, Poetry Editor

\*\*\*

## Special thanks to:

Bantha\_fodder , Illustrator  
<http://banthafodder.deviantart.com>



### *Disclaimer:*

*Copyright law in the United States states that a writer or creator of any 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.*