

# TAR18

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## **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.

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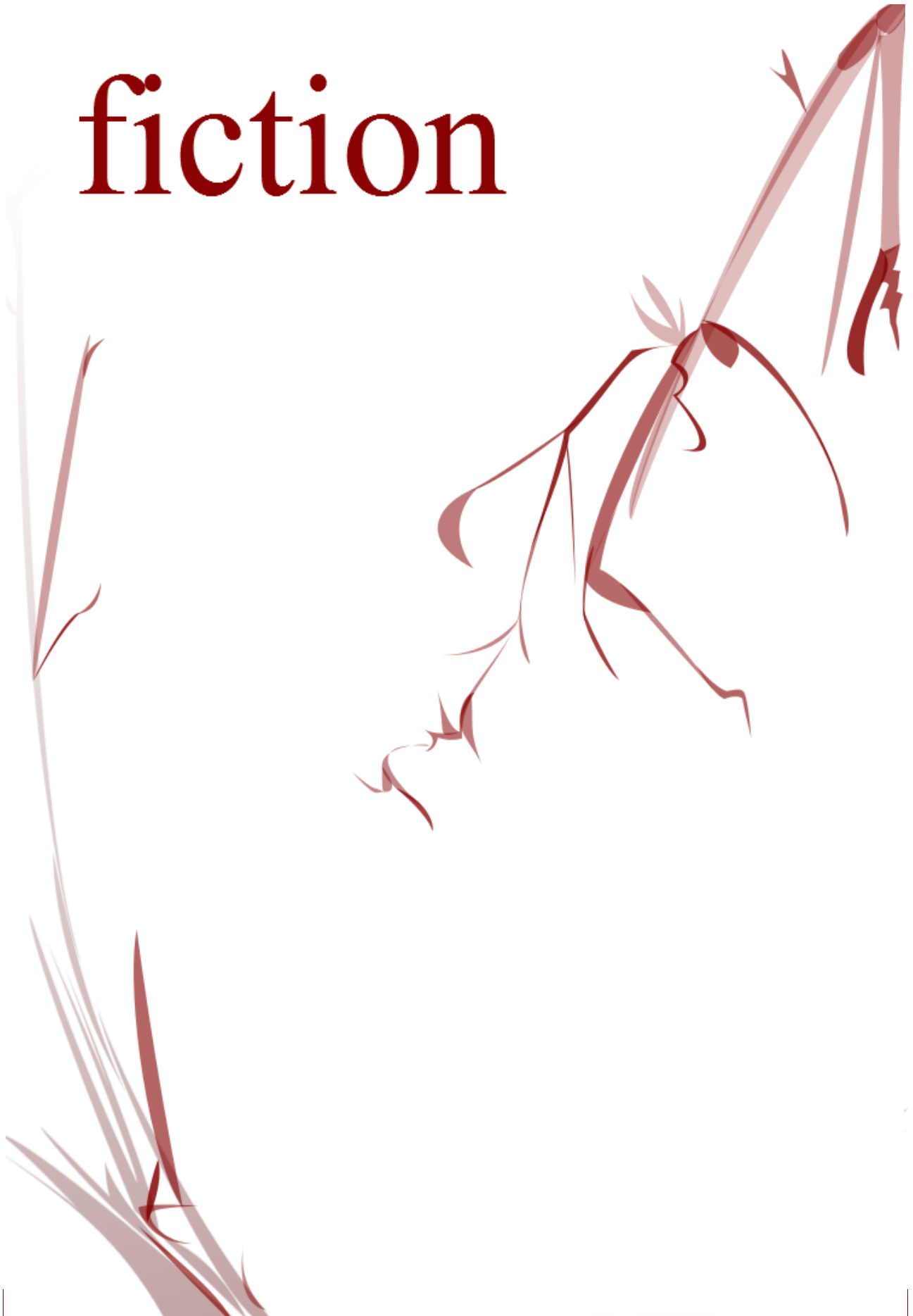
## **FROM THE EDITORS:**

With the start of September, TAR 18 is published. The submissions this month have been very impressive in quality and creativity, with clear talent being displayed in both the poetry and prose selections of this issue. Deciding which submissions to fit into this issue was a strenuous task, and we still feel frustrated that we had to delay some amazing works until next issue. We are grateful to our contributors for their patience and understanding in negotiating the date their works would be published. We hope September will be as bountiful for both ourselves and our readers.

And a quick reminder: TAR is now accepting **visual works**! If you have a visual arts piece you would like to feature in TAR, go ahead and e-mail it to us at [theaprilreader@gmail.com](mailto:theaprilreader@gmail.com).

With Love,  
TAR STAFF

# fiction



## Daddy's Home

By James Doster

“Come on, else you’ll be late,” the voice implored from outside the bathroom door. Michael rapidly entwined his fingers under the warm water as he’d done since he was a boy. He turned his hands and ran heavy fingers along the creases of his palm. A fleeting memory made him smile. He saw himself in a similar bathroom many years ago, running similar fingers along the shallow grooves of younger palms, thinking he would never age and never die. “I’m getting old,” he thought, leaning over the small basin and examining his thinning hairline, carefully tracing the retreating fringe.

“They shan’t be pleased. Come on!” the woman’s voice cried again, this time suggesting her head was level with the keyhole.

“Oh alright, alright. Give me some time. Lord knows I haven’t much to spare woman.” He was a busy man. He worked long hours. He did his part. He fought to wipe the steam from the mirror until he could see himself. He was a good man.

Of course these things he knew, and most of the time his mind was happy enough to have that knowledge, that kernel of his character, circulating silently within itself. But every once in a while, laying awake in the smothering dark or jolting suddenly from an unplanned sleep with the day bleeding on the windows, the infinite silence suggesting every living thing had fled and left him behind, he muttered these facts sternly to himself.

“I’m a busy man Laura,” he said, stepping from the bathroom, “and if these goddamn people are crying wolf again I’m not going to take it ligh-!” he winced and stuttered. Laura bent and slipped her shoulder beneath his upper arm.

“You know he’s looking forward to this, now – that’s it, hold on you silly thing”. She laughed as a mother laughs at the nervous innocence of her youngest child. Michael had hurt his left leg the week before, or was it a month? He couldn’t remember how he’d hurt himself, or when, but his pride didn’t stand in the

way of him resting on Laura’s arm. They limped their way to the porch, where he was left leaning on a firm pillar while she quickly turned to lock the door.

His father had been widowed from a young age and had spent the long years of his life toiling in the silence of his hardware store, aging prematurely and allowing his mind to succumb to illnesses that usually burdened men far older than himself. The illness had first manifested itself by inspiring in him a period of unexpected lucidity. He sat in his small back garden most evenings revisiting his early life, feeling again the impulsive thrill of childhood games, furtive glances beneath school desks and the borderless future, unmapped and abundant. This pleasant gift of restored memory was soon snatched away. He felt mocked and vulnerable as memories were blotted out, as if they had been briefly exhumed only to be cast back into a deeper grave.

In every dream from then on a young boy appeared, running towards him from a darkness which inspired in him an incommunicable despair. Every night this boy aged slightly. He mouthed a scream and wordlessly pleaded for deliverance from his flight. His strides lengthened, but the fear in his eyes never perished, nor did his pleas diminish in their morbid intensity. One night he forgot to show up.

“Now dear, strap yourself in” said Laura, giggling and looking down at his lame leg.

“Why did you say we need to visit the old man again?” asked Michael, lifting his fragile leg into the car and buckling his seatbelt.

“He’s ill dear, don’t you remember? He forgets who he is and he’s been threatening the nurses again. They think he’s ready to pass if only he’d let go. Then again, he let go a long time ago,” her voice drifted into a sigh. She turned her head to Michael and smiled wistfully. Her frankness was something he accepted and she knew it. “Let’s get going, you don’t want to

be late.”

They drove in silence, the morning roads barren and clean after rainfall. The care home was a ten minute drive away, hidden among tall spruce trees whose fingers caught all but a few sunbeams that fell on the extensive building, which served as the Shady Grove Care Home. They pulled up and exited. Michael, dressed in the smart clothing reserved for family occasions, stepped out cautiously to avoid the puddle at the foot of the car door. Laura circled the vehicle, helping him shuffle to the large electronic doors.

“They better be expecting us, I don’t want to be waiting around. Spare time is a luxury you know!” he gruffly complained to nobody in particular.

“Come on, for heaven’s sake” her voice playfully stertorous beneath his weight, “We’re almost there.”

“Hallo Mista Maikal” said the smiling uniformed Thai, standing stiffly inside the entrance, “How are you feel today?”

“Good enough, good enough” he replied dismissively. “Now I heard the old man isn’t well, but this better not be a false alarm.” He dropped heavily into one of the small waiting-room chairs, the only one occupied of all three rows set out to accommodate non-existent visitors. They won’t remember anyway...

Laura walked over to the reception desk, handed something over to the portly receptionist, occasionally glancing at Michael while she chatted and signed various forms. He watched this disinterestedly before turning to the Thai woman, sitting in the row opposite him with her hands in her lap and a contorted smile on her small, ugly face.

“Now what *exactly* has the old man done this time, nurse?” he inquired, chuckling at the thought that his old man could cause such a fuss at his age.

“Well Mista Maikal, he has been a very naughty boy,” she replied, the wrenched smile unwavering. “He think his home is no here. *He* think he still live in old house, so he walk there and made us *very* worry.”

Before he could inquire any further,

Laura appeared at the nurse’s side, taking the seat directly opposite his and reaching across to take his hand.

“Now Michael, I have to go for a little while, but I’ll be back. You go and see him and I’ll come back then. I love you.”

She quickly stroked the back of his hand and rose swiftly from her seat.

“Laura, where the hell are you going? What the hell is this about?”

She turned from him and began to walk. He attempted to rise, turning his weight onto his right leg and pushing himself from the narrow chair. The Thai nurse now sprang to her feet, clamping her clawed hands around his arm.

“No, Mistar Maikal, come now Mistar Maikal!” she said, pushing him downwards, the smile, he thought, had curled into a sadistic grin.

Laura didn’t turn. Her head was bowed as she quickened her pace, striding into the damp morning air. Her dark mass of hair was the last thing to leave his sight, entering the Lotus and driving steadily from his mind.

“What the hell is this? Why is she running away like that? It’s a Saturday, for heaven’s sake!” he cried, an unmistakable note of desperation in his voice.

Another nurse appeared pushing a wheelchair. She was soon followed by a yawning young man, bag-eyed and dressed in white uniform. He stepped in front of Michael and squatted down.

“Now, Michael, do you need my help getting on this thing? Because I’ve *heard* you do pretty well without it.” He laughed noiselessly, raising his eyebrows and drawing approving glances from both women, mirrored in their meaningless smiles.

His eyes widened in childlike fear and confusion. The man impatiently stood and took hold of the underside of Michael’s jacket sleeves, pulling him towards the wheelchair.

“W-what’s going on g-goddamnit! What the hell do you think you’re doing? I’m not from here! I’m not one of your vegetables! Put me down or I’ll call the sheriff!” His strained voice was muffled by the man’s shirt. “My name is Michael Leist; I’m not a patient here. I didn’t

want to come here!”

His eyes opened to a tiled ceiling. It was the same type of ceiling he'd opened his eyes to after a fight in the school bathroom years ago. Back then a constellation of wet toilet paper greeted him, gravitating around the scattered satellites of a pencil butts launched upwards by the more ambitious pupils. This time no blood lay in the cherub-like groove above his upper lip and no curious liquid lapped against his matted hair.

He raised his head from the pillow and tried to remember what the reason was for him being there.

“I am...I'm...”

He stepped slowly onto the cold linoleum as if testing the thickness of ice. Purple lines tracked his pale skin, making it look as though children had been chasing his pulse with purple crayons while he slept before growing bored, leaving a large area of his chest uncoloured. The sky outside was a vast empty white, not promising snow, but empty, as if weather had ceased to exist.

The pallid frame shuffled to the stainless steel doors of a medical cabinet on the opposite wall from the bed.

Michael saw the entire room in the obscured reflection of this small metallic cabinet. He could not understand why the shadowy domed figure in the reflection seemed so determined to block his view of himself as it moved from side to side following the movement of his own head.

“I am lost.”

He knelt down on the floor and fell sideways onto his back. Moments passed.

Suddenly the slap of stampeding bare feet echoed from somewhere outside of the white door and the white room. The sound grew and laughter flooded the narrow corridor without. A rush of bodies reached the door and burst inside.

A dozen children ran and skipped around the thin body laying nude in the centre of the room. He looked up at the rotating faces and could not tell one from the next, as if a rubber caul covered each of them, leaving only soft

mounds and depressions where noses and eyes should be. They chanted short-lived and conflicting rhymes and danced like dervishes around the still body. A cry burst from one of the figures and the dancing ceased, each child sprung onto the wasted body, stubbing their crayons after the heart-bound pulse, which only those not yet living can see.



## DRAWING TIGERS

By John Tringham

I am going to describe briefly the lives of two people who do not fall in love with each other.

Sarah Roddick was born in February of 1983. Both her parents were lecturers at Stainbridge University, her mother in Classics and her father in sub-atomic physics. Her favourite film is Rambo III, but she pretends it is Citizen Kane because she is scared that people will think she is stupid.

She was always encouraged to be clever. She was home schooled since she was born, and non-fiction books engulfed the house. Although it was never said, they lived by the rule that being correct is the most important thing.

When she was seven she was taken by her father to visit a museum, specifically for an exhibition on particle accelerators. By the entrance were several people wearing t-shirts with a large cross on the front, handing out leaflets. Her father pulled her hand away when they tried to give her a leaflet and said "fucking relig-o." She did not know what either of those words meant, and she asked him. He exhaled in frustration and stated to her that "God does not exist." This didn't answer her question.

At age 11 her parents sent her to high school. She had her first ever art lesson and drew a tiger, and her art teacher told her that it was 'very poor'. She took it home and attached it to her wall. She smiles whenever she looks at it.

At the same school was Harvey Brownwood. Harvey Brownwood was born in the summer of 1983, becomes an unsuccessful professional artist in 2004, becomes addicted to meth in 2009, becomes addicted to heroin in 2012, and kills himself in 2015. From ages 11-18, Harvey Brownwood was tall, had greasy hair and smiled a lot. He made lots of cartoons that everyone thought were funny. In his last year at high school he was voted "most likely to be a famous artist" and he was slightly embarrassed when he went to collect his award.

Sarah Roddick first met Harvey Brownwood when she was 14 and he was 13.

One of the teachers had had a stroke so they had to re-organize the classes, and they had been set in the same physics class. In a test she saw that on the question "what causes oxygen to be more electro-negative than copper?" Harvey Brownwood had written "wizards". She told him that wizards don't exist. He smiled, and said that 'that doesn't stop them from being cool.' She said that wizards can't be cool, because they don't exist. When she got home she thought about that. She then drew a picture of a wizard casting a spell and put it on her wall next to the picture of the tiger.

After this, Sarah Roddick became very interested in Harvey Brownwood. He drew a picture of both of them riding a brontosaurus and gave it to her. She thought about the fact that there were millions of years between the last dinosaur and the first man but she didn't say anything to him. She drew a picture of a koala bear eating a eucalyptus leaf and gave it to him. He did not know what it was meant to be at first.

When they were both 17 they dated for 4 months. They broke up after they had a fight where she told him that being an artist was "for assholes that can't get a real job" and he told her that she was "a fucking psychopath". They both went home to their own houses and cried quietly.

Sarah Roddick went to study a degree in astrophysics at Stainbridge University at age 18. She did not make many friends and studied a lot for her subject. She passed with a first and was hired by a research observatory in 2005, and stayed there for many years. In 2008 she married a well-paid astrologist and they have three average looking, short sighted children.

Harvey Brownwood did not go to a university once he had left school, but instead moved out and designed posters for upcoming gigs at a bar near his flat. He didn't get paid very much or very often, and what wasn't spent on rent or food was spent on alcohol at bars by himself. One night he bought a tin of red paint and secretly painted a large wolf on a public wall near his flat. He was very proud of it at the time



but it was buffed away after 8 days. He regrets the majority of his decisions after that day, but you already know what he does.

In 2019 Sarah Roddick goes to her high school reunion without her husband, because he was busy. She spends the three weeks beforehand deciding on a dress to wear. At 9:13 she is told by the aged chemistry professor about Harvey Brownwood's suicide. He describes him as "a funny lad, a shame he didn't amount to much". At 9:15 she goes to the toilet and sits in a locked cubicle for 31 minutes, staring at the door, breathing slowly. She drives home in silence, shivering slightly. When she gets home, she sits at her desk, looking out of her window. After a while she gets out a piece of lined paper, draws a tiger, and cries.



## WE WILL MAKE YOU ALL SLAVES

By ASA

The world watched in awe the day the Vogt Device was activated, ripping a wormhole through twenty light-years of intergalactic space to Gliese 581. Our first baby-steps towards colonising the Milky Way, we'd finally overcome the hurdle of the mind-numbing distances involved. We were so proud at that moment, we'd unlocked time and space, unlocked the universe. All of humanity stared open-mouthed at our multitudinous screens as reality warped and buckled, popping "outwards" to create a tunnel from inside our own solar system to another. We held our collective breath as our scientists prepared to launch the *Ousar*, an unmanned probe to travel through and explore under the light of a new and distant sun. We sat upright in our seats in uniform shock as the one thing we'd long ago ceased to hope for, when faced with a galaxy as silent as death, *something came through from the other side*.

It didn't stay for long – just long enough, perhaps, to make a quick scan of the solar system. It was gone as quickly as it came, leaving us rubbing our eyes, convinced it had been some sort of mass-hallucination. It took little time for us to realise what we'd seen and less to start debating the implications. Intelligent, space-faring life, we could agree on that. But now thanks to the irreversible nature of the Vogt Device, alien life was practically next door, for good – our mutual orbits bringing the Earth and Gliese 581g (or Zarmina as it was unofficially known) closer than Neptune. This was terrifying. We could only imagine how we would react if they situation had been reversed, if one day an alien race had tunnelled through to us without warning, the idea wasn't pleasant. *Ousar* went ahead as planned, but the live transmissions were cancelled and the mission cloaked in secrecy for "reasons of global security". The entire populace was left in a frightened mix of uproar and trepidation. After wallowing in the inconceivable mystery of the Great Silence, the lack of any detected communications from deep space for so

long, we had come to the conclusion the universe was dead and lifeless save for ourselves. It was ours to traverse, ours to own, ours to colonise. Billions of empty star systems just waiting for us. Now we'd stepped blindly to the closest neighbouring habitable planet and beyond all belief something was already living there.

Three days later, the broadcasts started. They emanated from the wormhole, the first breach of the Great Silence, mankind's first message from alien life. It was broadcast on every conceivable signal frequency simultaneously, at a volume so loud it was painful.

WE ARE THE TIMANAK. WE WILL MAKE YOU ALL SLAVES.

The voice was as sinister as its message, atonal and grating to hear. A bizarre, jarring alien voice synthesised for human ears on a planet light-years away, immediately terrifying for all who heard it, doubly so, for the five hundred million English speakers on the planet who could interpret its foreboding message. The same message repeated at intermittent intervals around every forty-five minutes, intruding on any media we tried to watch or hear as a constant reminder of the alien presence. It blared from radios, phones, from any technology capable of producing sound; it filled television screens with static and interfered with internet connections. For the first few months, we did not get much sleep. Stocks in ear-plugs reached a record high. Our orbit began to take us away from the wormhole, as did Zamina's on her side. The message continued to repeat, slowly growing fainter in the great distance. What could we do to respond to this alien threat? The answer seemed clear enough. What fringe dissent there was in the form of religious and conspiracy fanatics were dismissed by the world at large. Under the direction of the newly elected Secretary-General Tredway of the United Nations, a United Earth

prepared for total war.

Zarmina's orbit brought it close to the wormhole just under once a month, as was obvious from the oscillating strength of the broadcasts. Ours would take a year to return us to within range, so that time was allotted to building armaments. We judged that as nothing further than the message had come through so far, it was likely they could not invade until our natural orbits brought us back together. We'd prepare until that last minute, then strike. This wasn't science fiction, there would be no warp-drive interstellar battleships bristling with ION batteries, no space-borne mecha-suits, no heat-rays or zero-point energy cannons. What little resources we had were stretched thinly building the rockets that could deliver their payloads across the distances involved; carrying our crude nuclear weapons, hydrogen bombs, advanced strains of viruses and biological weapons that our top scientists assured us probably might survive on Zarmina and could maybe potentially cause trouble for an alien immune system.

The year passed quickly, all of mankind united with one purpose in the face of universal enslavement. The third world was fed out of necessity; their value as manual labour outweighed the costs of doing so. Suicides, stress related illness and workplace accidents quickly became the most common causes of death, far beyond infant mortality, hunger or any of the ailments which once would've been known as old-age. The whole planet was driven and on edge, too frightened to riot, too much in agreement to complain. Money was poured into space programs that dwarfed even the *Ousar* program; our panicked super-rich and super-powerful abandoned the planet, seeding themselves in fragile missions to form colonies around the harsh and unforgiving corners of our solar system. With no way to be sure even that could save them, they did not complain when Secretary-General Tredway subsequently declared all resources be pooled for the public war-effort. Every country with the resources to build rockets was given the technology, we even

gave out nuclear secrets to countries who up until then had been classed rogue or terrorist – sacrifices had to be made in the interests of all humanity. They were no longer a threat, every hand was needed and no hand was unwilling.

While this was going on, grainy images declassified from the *Ousar* mission showed what appeared to be an inhabited planet covered in gigantic building sites – they too were united with a purpose, a fleet of ark-ships under construction that together would be large enough to incarcerate and transport the entire human race. We looked upon these images with grave expressions and continued our tasks with renewed vigour.

In the eleventh month our preparations were complete. Every deadly device human ingenuity could devise had been fitted with an engine and aimed at the sky. Secretary-General Tredway gave the order and in unison they launched with a deafening roar heard around the globe. The noise was so loud it drowned out even the Timanak's ominous message. The skies darkened with a criss-crossing of engine smoke as the missiles tore through our atmosphere and were slingshot away into the hostile solar-system. Once more we watched our computer, tablet, television, projector and cinema screens as the culmination of Earth's might vanished into the wormhole like a plague of locusts being sucked into a jet-engine. We waited with tense and bated breath and then... there was nothing. The broadcasts had stopped and the Great Silence had returned.

Tredway and his command did not relax yet, with grim faces they watched their feeds as the successor to the now rusty *Ousar* mission, the *Ousar II* slowly crawled away from the Earth and towards the wormhole. Reaching the other side safely, it began to transmit back images that caused them to exhale with relief – it showed a dead and smoking, radioactive Zarmina, unfit for habitation by any life. A planet turned to glass and hot slag. Nothing could have survived. The strike had been a success. Not a complete

success they noted with alarm, as the Timanak ark-ships sped past *Ousar II* towards a now entirely defenceless Earth.

All our over-eager celebrations ceased abruptly as we awaited our impending death or enslavement in the Timanak retaliation. The ark-ships approached Earth, slowed and waited in orbit. A few smaller powers that had secretly held on to a few dozen of warheads in the hope of using them for post-crisis leverage fired the remainder of their arsenal. A handful of the ships were destroyed; their wreckage rained down upon the planet like holy fire, one notable miscalculation taking almost a million lives as a falling ship turned the sprawling metropolis of Mazar-i-Sharif into a lifeless crater. Many simply shrugged off the attack as though it had not happened, many more were simply not struck as the ships greatly outnumbered the weapons.

They stayed in low orbit, seemingly dead in the water as though waiting for the command to land and attack. We turned our instruments to the ships and found they could detect no activity on board. Even stranger, the ships did not appear to be pressurised, incapable of supporting human life through space. It seemed something had gone wrong, they had launched too early to avoid the bombardment and perhaps we had won after all. At the back of our minds we knew there was a chance that retaliation was still coming, but the return of the Great Silence was enough for most and after the most harrowing year in Earth's history we could finally relax. Humanity had faced an alien menace and prevailed. We felt we could finally sleep peacefully again.

It was a week before the exhausted United Nations could mount an expedition to the ships. In the middle of global celebrations a contingent of heavily-armed troops was deployed in an orbital transport to investigate the floating husks. As their transport drew near they warmed up their plasma-cutters only to find them unnecessary, as a door slid open automatically at their approach. For the third time, as one we watched a live feed from a

helmet-mounted camera as they boarded and began to explore the ship. Together we saw as he dropped into a firing position and clipped off three armour-piercing rounds into the abdomen of the angelically beautiful humanoid creature who had seemed to glide out of a mounting on the wall. Seemingly unfazed, she addressed us all via his video link.

Greetings. I am one of eight billion cybernetic organisms. We have been built as a gift of the Timanak, a symbol of their goodwill. How may I serve you?

*For the memory of Damon Knight, 1922 – 2002.*

## The Adventures of Boris the Tentacle Beast (Part Two)

By Some Pervert

### *A Note From The Editors:*

If the title isn't enough indication, this work of fiction contains *explicit material*. Readers of this work should be aware that it contains descriptive depictions of **masturbation; tentacle-like appendages restraining unwilling women and inserting themselves in various orifices (even the naval cavity); swearing; and women using the restroom**. Reader discretion is advised.

Boris was first introduced in TAR Issue 4. Readers interested in its canonical origins should consult that issue.

With Love,  
TAR STAFF

### Author's Preface

**Rachel**, an undergraduate science student, arrives at the cryptozoology department. During the search for her supervisor, a tentacle monster emerges from an office, and subjects her to its terrible, many-limbed embrace. Once the ordeal concludes, a sore, disoriented Rachel stumbles away, unsure of what to do next.

Amy, a graduate in the same department, returns to her office later that evening to find that the creature she was keeping there has broken out of its tank. She carries it into the bathroom to indulge in allowing the creature to copulate with her, but notices that it seems less energetic and eager than usual. After the act, she finds that the creature hasn't implanted an egg in her, unlike every other time previously...

\*\*\*

**Rachel** still hadn't encountered a single other person by the time she exited the cryptozoology department - the place seemed entirely deserted. She had stumbled, dazed, into a bathroom near the building's unattended reception area, and cleaned herself off as best she could with the entire contents of a paper towel dispenser. She had locked herself in one of the stalls to have a cry, and after that, things seemed to become more real again.

Water did nothing to remove the orange stains from her top, only serving to work them in deeper. Rachel decided that the best thing she could do was to get back to her dormitory room, clean herself off properly, and try to work out what to do next.

The department was about a ten minutes' walk from her room, all contained within the

university's extensive campus. She managed to make the journey without encountering anybody else that she knew - a few people raised eyebrows at her brightly-stained top and disheveled appearance, but asked no questions. The combination of a skirt and the absence of underwear made her especially nervous, and unable to appreciate what might have been, on any other day, a quite enjoyable feeling of cool, breezy freedom.

She took the elevator upon returning to the first-year girl's dormitory: a multi-floored, concrete monolith which had probably looked futuristic when it was built in the seventies. Her room, along with those of two dozen other girls, was on the third floor. Hers in particular overlooked a quadrangle with a few flower beds and benches, and, further away, a tennis court which saw frequent use.

The communal kitchen was between Rachel's room and the elevator, on the left hand side of the corridor. As she walked past the open door, one of the other girls called her name.

"Hey, Rachel!"

Stephanie was on a course studying the literature of some Asian country (Rachel couldn't remember exactly which). Presently, the girl was standing at the worktop, chopping something. Rachel leaned around the doorframe.

"Hey."

"God, Rachel, you look terrible! I mean, oh, you know I didn't mean it like that, but, did something happen? Are you okay?"

She came out into the corridor.

"What happened to your clothes!?"

There was a pause as Rachel considered



what she could tell the girl. She didn't rate the plausibility of explaining that she'd been raped by a tentacle monster. Who would believe that? Who could she possibly tell who wouldn't either laugh, or accuse her of attention-seeking with a ridiculous story?

"I- "

"What's this orange stuff?" Stephanie leaned close, (a little too close) and sniffed Rachel's clothes. "It smells weird."

"I- I fell," said Rachel. "And... I was carrying take-away food. It's sauce."

"You're not hurt, are you?"

Rachel swallowed hard against the ache in her throat, and wiped away a tear while making it look like she was just scratching her nose.

"Nope. I'm fine," she croaked.

"You sure?"

Rachel nodded vigorously, biting her lip.

"Well, okay. Oh, if you still haven't eaten, I'm making pasta, do you want some later?"

She nodded again. Rachel hadn't paid much attention to the fact until now, but she was actually feeling quite hungry.

"See you in an hour, then?"

"Okay," said Rachel, quietly.

"You're sure you're all right?"

"I'm fine, Stephanie."

Rachel made it back to her room without meeting anybody else. She got a clean set of clothes and underwear from her wardrobe, and took her towel from where it was hanging in front of the radiator, still not completely dry from that morning's use. Rachel made her way to the bathroom at the end of the corridor, and retrieved a rubbish bag from the cleaning supplies cupboard. She got undressed and put her clothes in it, knotting the top tightly closed and leaving it on the floor by the dustbin.

She took the longest, hottest shower she had ever had, scrubbing her skin until it was bright pink, while steam condensed and dripped from the ceiling tiles above her. She cleaned between her legs, and saw faint traces of the orange colour on her fingers. Rachel fell to her knees before curling into a foetal position on the shower floor, bawling without restraint as the hot

water rained down onto her, drowning out the sounds of her cries. She scrubbed herself raw, until she was completely certain that none of the vile stuff remained in or on any part of her body, and then she turned the water off and sat, chin resting on her knees, until she became uncomfortably cold.

Rachel got dressed in the clean clothes she had brought, and felt much better for it. She remembered something that would definitely help while she was returning her towel to her room – there were still some drinks left over from a celebration of other girls' birthdays a few weeks back. They hadn't quite needed all of the spirits they'd bought, and Rachel had brought a half-full bottle of worryingly cheap vodka back to her room, to save for future occasions. She was glad of her foresight. Rachel reached the bottle down from on top of a cupboard, took a large mouthful, choked, and immediately spat it all over her mirror. The stuff was far too strong by itself. It tasted like paint stripper.

Now knowing what to expect, she tried again, and managed to swallow down a few small mouthfuls. Her throat went warm and numb. That was better.

She returned to the kitchen, looking forward to whatever Stephanie was cooking. Rachel felt like she hadn't eaten all day. Her stomach growled, and the sound was accompanied by a brief, sharp pain, which she assumed was the hunger.

Although come to think of it, it had felt a lot lower down than her stomach.

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There was definitely no egg anywhere. Every time that Amy had allowed Boris to fuck her, she always had to carefully remove one of the small, white globes from her anus or vulva after the act. She had made very sure of its absence this time, to the extent that she was now quite sore down there. She scrubbed her hands at the sink, looking at the reflection of the creature in the mirror, and wondering.

What if Boris had somehow got at one of the other animals in the basement level? Did it

even have to deposit eggs inside another creature? From what little she had studied Boris, she knew that its eggs needed a rich source of biochemicals to grow. Did that necessarily imply an *in vivo* environment? Where could it be, if not? How far might Boris have ventured from her office since breaking out of the tank?

The unmistakable sound of Dr. Bryant's tuneless whistling reached Amy's ears from the corridor outside. What was he doing down here? If he saw the office, she'd be in serious trouble. It had been difficult enough to persuade him to allow her to keep Boris in there. If he saw the mess, Boris would be straight back in the quarantine zoo with the other specimens, with Amy's identity logged by a card reader every time she took him out to play. She couldn't lose that freedom. She got dressed rapidly, and burst out of the door as Dr. Bryant approached within six feet of it. He was completely unfazed by her sudden appearance.

"Ah, Amy," he said. "I forgot to mention, I'll need some slides from you for the presentation tomorrow. Shouldn't be too much work, just ten or so."

"Oh, ah, sure," she said. Amy pulled her jeans up properly. "Any content in particular?"

"Just the recent work. I think they'll like the nucleotide experiments. Bring out the stuff that'll convince them to keep funding us. You seem a bit out of breath, Amy, is something the matter?"

"Nope. Nothing. I'll get started on those slides right away."

"Good. Good work."

She motioned as if she was going to walk back to the office. She would need to extract Boris after Dr. Bryant had left.

"Oh, and Amy?"

"Yes?"

"Your t-shirt is inside out."

The whistling grew quieter as he ascended the stairs, returning to his own realm. Amy rearranged her t-shirt. She paused as she was pulling it down over her head, suddenly aware of a faint rushing sound. She pushed open the bathroom door.

A toilet was flushing. Boris was no

longer in the corner. Boris, in fact, was nowhere to be seen.

"Oh no no no no," she repeated the word as she rushed into the room, throwing the door of the bathroom stall open just in time to see the tip of a blue and white tentacle disappear beneath the frothy water. The flushing ceased with a gurgle, leaving nothing but calm water and white ceramic.

"Oh, shit."

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With lectures as the only timetabled activity in the day, Jessica had planned to spend the afternoon reading her notes and going over the textbook. This had started well enough - she managed a full hour of reading after lunch, before she decided that she really should get her laundry done. And if she was going to take care of that, she may as well clean her room a bit. At half past four, she read one more page from her book, and then realized that she hadn't written a letter to her grandmother in a while.

Then it was time to eat, and she couldn't work too soon just after eating - it wasn't healthy. Her tidy room was evidence of just how productive she'd been today; surely she could allow herself a few episodes from a DVD as a reward first.

At half past one, Jessica finished the last episode of the box set. Too late to start work now. She'd need to be up early for tomorrow's lectures. Best to just get some sleep, she thought.

She padded quietly to the bathroom at the end of the corridor, feeling her way along the wall. She slipped inside, not turning on the light. It would cause the extractor fan to come on, and that would disturb the girl in the next room, who liked to sleep early. There was just enough moonlight to see by, coming through the small windows set high up at the tops of the walls.

Jessica brushed her teeth first, and then went to one of the cubicles. She felt around in the darkness for the lid of the toilet and lifted it up, before lowering her pajama bottoms and sitting down. She pushed the door shut with one foot, not bothering to lock it. The chances of



someone coming in this late were pretty slim.

There was a splash in the bowl, which was surprising, because Jessica hadn't started yet. She parted her legs a bit, and squinted down into the gloom.

Something wet and slimy burst up from beneath her, soaking her behind with cold water. Dark, black shapes darted from below, wrapping themselves around Jessica's thighs and squeezing tight. She screamed in total terror, and another shape exploded upwards and plunged into her mouth, forcing her head back until it thumped against the tiled wall behind her. She retched as the cold, worm-like appendage squirmed at the back of her throat.

The shock made Jessica finish what she had originally come there to do very quickly. The fouled water splashing up over her legs was the least of her concerns, as she grappled with the thing that was trying to force its way down her throat. She tried to scream again, but her mouth was completely filled with smooth, slimy flesh. More of the things wrapped around her wrists, pushing her hands away and pinning her arms against the cubicle walls. In the darkness, she could make out nothing but vague outlines. Were they snakes? Eels? What was happening to her? She couldn't stand up, she couldn't move at all, firmly held down in a sitting position by cold, wet tendrils coiled around her legs.

She kept trying desperately to cry out, to make some noise, but only managed a faint "Nnnn", through her nose. Biting down on the thing in her mouth was impossible: her jaws were forced open wide, the thing was slightly soft but otherwise unyielding, like an overly ambitious mouthful of steak. The need to scream became even more pronounced as Jessica felt a cold, wet touch creeping along her thigh, towards her genitals. She got one arm free for a brief, desperate moment, and was able to beat her fist against the cubicle wall before it was seized once more and bent around behind her head. Her feet kicked against the toilet and the floor uselessly, splashing in the dirty water.

Jessica's hips bucked forward as something cold, slippery, and horrifyingly large began to force its way into her anus.

A wedge of light appeared on the bathroom ceiling. Someone was coming in! Jessica, still unable to scream, made as much noise as she could around her mouthful of invading, slimy limb. Whoever it was turned the ceiling lights on, and the fluorescent strips flickered to life, illuminating the stall in a harsh, blue-white glow. Jessica got her first look at the appendages molesting her.

They didn't seem to be individual creatures - no eyes or other features, just smooth, rounded tips. Tentacles. They were the horrible, serpentine limbs of something whose main body remained out of sight in the pipes beneath. Their surfaces were unnaturally colourful: blue and white intermixing in a swirling pattern. There were at least six that Jessica could feel: one for each limb, one for her mouth, and the one continuing to ease itself into her asshole. A pair more revealed themselves, splashing up between Jessica's legs with orange mucus seeping from small slits at their tips. One of them gripped tight around her abdomen, making her grunt. The other snaked up beneath her pyjama top, wrapped itself around a breast, and squeezed hard.

"Oh my God, what the fuck's going on!? Who's in there?"

Footsteps came across the floor, stopping outside the door of the cubicle. There was a splash.

"What's - eww! Gross! What are you!"

"Mmmh!" Jessica somehow managed to make a noise.

"Are you okay? Answer me!"

"Mm-mmh! Mm-mmh!"

"I'm opening the door, okay?"

Jessica was relieved that she hadn't locked it. She was going to be saved. Thank God someone had heard her.

The door began to swing inwards. There was a blur of movement as a few of the tentacles immediately released their grip on Jessica's helpless body and surged, in unison, at the door. It was punched off its hinges by the impact of the tentacles, with the sound of splintering chipboard. From the other side, there was the briefest of screams, and then a dull thump. The

girl from the neighbouring room was sprawled on the floor beneath the sink. She wasn't moving. There was a small, red mark on the sink's rim.

Jessica thrashed her limbs as hard as she could, but the tentacles returned to pin her down. Her fists clenched and unclenched in a futile gesture, and what was worse, with the door now gone, she could see her own reflection in the mirror opposite the stall: she was powerless to resist, grappled firmly by all her limbs as the remaining tentacles explored her body, and now able to see every detail of her merciless violation. The one in her ass slid further inside, filling her with its slimy girth. She saw a bulge shifting beneath her pyjama top as the tentacle around her breast uncoiled and snaked downwards. She let out a muffled cry as it reached the top of her pubic hair, and, as if it had sensed that this was the right direction by the change in terrain, the tentacle darted down, under, and then back up inside her, lodging itself firmly in her pussy and writhing vigorously.

She felt herself lifted up off the toilet seat by the force of the intrusions. The two tentacles drove themselves deeper and deeper inside her; orange slime seeped from around them as they thrust relentlessly with a wet squelching noise. A sickly sweet flavour filled her mouth, and she saw in the mirror that more of that brightly-coloured stuff was oozing down her chin.

Despite the sudden, horrifying brutality of the assault, Jessica was rapidly being forced to confront one unexpected factor: the tentacles were beginning to feel good. It was profoundly wrong. Jessica, frightened for her life and in a severe state of shock, could feel a telltale warmth and tension growing inside her, ten times more intense than anything she'd managed to coax from her body with her own fingers while curled up furtively beneath her duvet. Her cheeks were blushing red. Her toes were twitching.

The tentacles pulled her legs wide apart. The surges into all of her holes became slower, but more powerful, more purposeful. The squirming limbs seemed to be able to alter their shape, bulging and fattening to fill all available space. Her hips ached. Her breath came in shallow gasps around the obstruction in her

mouth as another tentacle squeezed tight around her chest, flattening her breasts. Tentacle-tips intertwined, almost playfully, with her quivering fingers. One of them tried to insert itself into her navel, admitting defeat only after half a minute of energetic probing. It left a mucuous trail as it slipped downwards to join the first tentacle in her cunt, insinuating itself into her at the top of the slit, its silky-smooth, slime-lubricated skin gliding over her clitoris.

That was too much. Jessica surrendered to the creature with a shuddering groan as an all-consuming orgasm seized her body. She trembled in the tentacles' cold, moist grip, suffused with ecstasy. A tingling glow welled up inside her, rolling out like a wave to dissipate at her extremities. It brought tears to her eyes - not borne of fear, but of total, overwhelming bliss. She hadn't thought it was possible to feel this way. No drug, no man, nothing could cause a sensation like the one she was experiencing then. The creature held her down for what felt like whole minutes while she thrashed and writhed, eventually ceasing her struggles as all her muscles became weak and warm.

The tentacles gradually withdrew.

Jessica choked up some orange slime, and spat it between her legs into the toilet bowl. She shivered once, gasping for breath. She realized that her arms and legs had been freed. Beneath her, the last tentacle withdrew itself from her ass hole with a sucking sound, and disappeared beneath the surface of the cloudy water. The creature vanished as swiftly as it had come.

Jessica was completely exhausted, only semi-lucid as the residual feeling of orgasm flickered through her nerves. She knew had to check the other girl. She stumbled out of the cubicle, tripping over her own feet - the feeling and function had not yet fully returned to her limbs. She crawled over to the unconscious girl, and listened for the sound of breathing. She felt for a pulse on her neck, and was relieved when she found one. She was going to be okay.

She lay on the floor beside her, staring up at the ceiling, willing her body to move to no avail. The shock and exhaustion were too much

for her. She needed to rest here, even if for only a few minutes.

When Jessica opened her eyes again, the pale light of early morning was filtering in through the high windows. Her muscles were stiff and aching. Her mouth was dry, and there was a definite, unpleasant aftertaste of something. Her genitals felt strangely sore, as if there were some kind of swollen tenderness deep inside her.

With some effort, she sat up.

The other girl was gone.



## Early History

By Connley Landers

Adam's Grandpa and Grandma lived on five acres, just outside of Edenberg, Oklahoma. They had a small orchard with six red tart cherry trees, three Purple Leaf plumb, and two Granny Smith apple trees. On spring break in 1997 when Adam was eleven years old he saw a green tree snake in one apple tree. The snake said, "Have an apple and always wear underwear." Adam shot it in the head with his BB gun and always remembered its words, with the hint of a smirk on his face, when he went commando. As his Grandpa was something of a naturalist, Adam showed Earl the dead serpent and asked, "What species of snake is it?"

"It's a Green Tree Snake," Earl said. Adam wasn't expecting a Latin, genus and species, phylogenetic description, but maybe a little more. Earl could detect the disappointment and added, "The word 'snake' is interesting. Ages ago they called them Large Worm-Like Things That Snake Around On Their Belly. Curt Brevitos printed a small newspaper and started calling them just 'snake' to save space, ink and time. It caught on and calling a creature by what it does made all the sense in the world to his readers, too. So, they started calling them 'flies', for example, instead."

"Instead of what, Grandpa?"

"Bugs That Buzz Around Shit And Dead Things. Have you ever heard of Curt Brevitos?"

"No."

"I'm surprised! You study words, etymology, in junior high?"

"Geography, Geology and English Lit., once a week, but not *that* stuff."

"Etymology is a combination of those three. All language is fossil poetry. Words retain in their roots, traces of their early history and use." Adam looked at his Grandfather as they headed back to the house, reached for his hand and held on.

"Well, Curt invented the wheel, also. It was in 4089 BC. Curt had to deliver his newspapers on a bike. The prototype wheels were square, not round like today. The jolting

and jostling that the papyrus took on those delivery trips made them unfold and nearly impossible to throw; fluttery like slinging a wounded duck." Earl made a throwing motion with his free hand and shook his head. "Curt's black and blue perineum was sore, too, and caused him to short-arm every toss. He invented the Barcalounger bike seat and advanced wheelology by five hundred years when he created the hexagon wheel that smoothed out the ride by a factor of four times six to the third degree hypotenuse—divided by Pi." Earl took a deep breath and looked at Adam. "You get wheelology in school?"

"No not yet, though maybe in High School."

"Good. Listen up and you'll be ahead of your classmates. Anyway, five hundred years later the pimply, Egyptian mathematician, Pliny the Sebaceous, was able to make an octagon bike wheel after he had an epiphany as he was squeezing a brow zit, waiting at a four-way intersection, and happened to notice, through the gaps between his probing fingers, a stop sign that had that singular shape. The ride down the side of the pyramid was still pretty tough on the spine though. From that same era Pliny's Greek physician, Davos Chiropractos, invented a curative modality that is still used to this day by healers who can't get into medical school. On Pliny's last ride down the pyramid he took a nasty spill and discovered a partial cure for his acne that we refer to today as a 'peel'.

Jump ahead a few thousand years to about 1900 AD and by this time Wheeldom had thirty-six sided bicycle wheels that Orville and Wilber Wright sold (like hot cakes to Auschwitz prisoners) on their bikes from their shop in Dayton, Ohio. The boys had toned down that huge, heavy seat (gravity and wind drag having been discovered) to the teensy-tiny type that you would recognize today. They had the help of their genius, monocle'd, Venetian, bio-engineer, Prepotti H. Suppositorino. "The seat's-a called the *The Wild Goose*," he insisted. "Because-a she-

a lets legs pump free like-a-da wings of a bellissimo Canadian Goose going south for winter.'

Orville said, as he thrust a forefinger in the air as to test the wind, "I thought it was...."

"No, no," said Prepi.

Although the bikes still vibrated like mad, the Wrights hungered to make bikes popular to men, too, as doubling their sales was the goal. Orville, while satisfying some of that hunger by eating a large bagel, got a great idea and the round wheel did double their sales for a while. Although their old, popular model, *No, No. Oh, God, Yes*, never seemed to do as well with the round wheels."

"I thought that the Wright's invented the airplane."

"They did—after the round wheel.

Because of bruising, Wilbur had overcompensated and replaced Prepi's seat with a four by eight sheet of plywood. He was coming up over a hill, caught some air and achieved an eleven second liftoff. The rest is history. While he was recuperating, the event combobulated a practical airplane in his imagination and the Wright's mechanical brilliance gave them the ept to build one."

"'Ept'?"

"It's a word I made up from 'inept', which of course means the *lack* of skill or ability. Shakespeare, you know, is said to have invented, on average, every sixteenth word he used. Now, I'm no Shakespeare, but 'ept' is mine. There is very little known about that other writer, a contemporary of Shakespeare's, of whom it was said, invented every *third* word *he* used."

"Who was that, Grandpa?"

"Raoul Gibberishy."

Adam's earlier disappointment in his Grandfather's answers to honest curiosity was forgotten. Earl could see the contentment on Adam's face as they walked back to the house. Earl was glad, too, that he'd always encouraged his Grandson to question authority. It seemed to come naturally to Adam.





## My Rather Unorthodox Muse

By Richard Grunert

Closing the book, I sighed, standing up. The maze-like tranquility of Roland's Books had always given me the greatest sense of peace but, frustrated as I was, could at the moment do nothing to improve my mood. On many occasions prior I had come to this place – my little escape from the real world, as it was – to cheer myself up, the rows upon rows upon rows of books stacked high to the ceiling throughout the store's many corridors of shelving resembled to me a sort of bibliophilic Minotaur's labyrinth in which I could lose myself in a never ending stream of escapist fantasies. I had once spent an entire day hidden away in a far, dark corner of the language section digesting a chronicle of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt; away from the agitating eyes of the old store manager (whom I had never spoken to at length but could only guess to be the eponymous Roland) allowing myself to be safely and securely removed from reality. Ever since I had finally decided that I was going to finally stop merely reading and become a writer myself however, my former den of solitude had become one of the greatest sources of discord in my life.

The tome returned back to its rightful place on the shelf marked 'fantasy,' I retreated to a darker corner of the room. The first two chapters had been an interesting little tale to be sure, and I could tell that the author had worked very hard on it, but my problem with the book stemmed from the fact that it was horribly, horribly *generic*. I couldn't count the number of books I had already read about a boy from a small village in some stock world of elves, goblins and dwarves who discovers he is some long lost hero and rises up to overthrow some evil wizard or tyrannical king. No, that had been done to absolute death, and I wasn't about to stomach another one. Since my decision my reasons for coming to the store had become much less about merely seeking an escape, what I now sought was nothing less than pure inspiration, I wanted a story to tell, but I just couldn't for the life of me think of anything I

considered sufficiently original; that was the reason I was there that hot evening in late August, I wanted, no, needed to understand how a writer came up with a great story.

Pulling a few other books down from nearby shelves at random, I briefly skimmed both their backs and first chapters. One was a neat little story about a talking mouse who lived in an abbey and had to fend off an assault of evil rats and vermin; a cute twist on an old concept, I liked it and made a mental note to read it someday. Another turned out to be one from a series about a young, beautiful nun who roamed America in a Ferrari solving mysteries for the CIA; creative, but stupid. I returned it to the shelf. The third relayed the tale of a space marine in the far future on some strange planet where he battled an army of space orcs; this one seemed somewhat familiar to me, and I tried in vain to remember if I had read it sometime before. Three books, three completely different stories; what I endeavored to understand as I turned the corner into the classical section was how the authors had come up with them, what their inspirations had been and how I could capture it as they had.

I knew every inch of Roland's, from the brightly colored books on Native American religions to the much more drab shelves on the Czech language, but this part had always been my favorite. When I first stepped into the store and rediscovered my love of reading three years prior, it had been these shelves that first introduced me to the likes of Wilde, Huxley and Poe, whose works I now admired more than any other. As the familiar ambient music hummed through the cheap speakers overhead I scanned the walls for something new to take my mind off my troubles, but somewhere between Joyce and Conrad I found myself stuck staring at the old photographs of great authors decorating the walls. Of course I recognized some of them, but far greater was the number of those with whom I wasn't, and would probably never be, acquainted. One of the greatest regrets of my life is the fact that I will never be able to read all the great

books by these authors, of the huge volume of great literature I will never get to experience. My thoughts and my solitude were abruptly interrupted, however, when Roland rounded the corner, chastised me for still being in the store half an hour after closing and shoved me out the door into the oppressively hot summer dusk.

The trek home wasn't something I'd been looking forward to. Forced out into the awful heat (still 84 degrees at 10:30?!) I mentally muttered a curse at myself for picking today, of all days, to wear heavy jeans, and grudgingly began the long, uphill walk home.

Late on a Tuesday as it was, Bellingham was still bustling with its usual nighttime activity. Two foreign men stood outside a dark strip mall convenience store, arguing in a language I couldn't hope to comprehend. They yelled and yelled as the low, red light from the sign high above the parking lot illuminated their angry hand gestures and venomous expressions. Right as it looked as if one was about to swing, they calmed down and shook hands. One laughed as he climbed into his bright green Cadillac and sped off into the night.

Outside the record store near the bus station a jersey-clad group with wild haircuts stood in a tight circle, muttering numbers to each other in a hushed whisper. Arms entered and left of the circle quickly, into and out of the open mouths of heavy black backpacks. An older man with ghost-white, slicked hair and a leather vest looked up from the organized chaos of the circle to make eye contact. His dark-rimmed, sagging eyes told me something that didn't need much interpretation, I hurried on my way, making sure not to look back lest he get an even better view of my face.

The sidewalk under the radiant neon glow of the 'SUPER BOWLING' sign found itself host to a heated battle of drunken honor. A grotesquely muscular man without a shirt swung a huge right fist at the right side of his much smaller opponent's head, which the blond man in a crimson shirt dodged nimbly by ducking to the right. He retaliated with a quick punch to the larger man's abdomen followed by a loud, cracking uppercut to the underside of the jaw,

bringing the behemoth to the ground in a dazed, bloody mess. The encircling crowd cheered, and the victor let out an intoxicated roar. As the roar of sirens approached, I left; looking back in time to see the swarm of police run into the group with batons held high.

I passed all these things in as much a state as anyone else drenched head-to-toe in sweat would have, and that's the only reason I can think of to justify my missing of the obvious. Near the top of the hill there's a small park on the west side. Needing a rest, I stepped up onto the grass and headed for the park's only bench, only to find it already occupied. There under the dull yellow glow of the light from a building about ten feet back sat an old man wearing ripped blue jeans and a plaid gray jacket over a stained white t-shirt; he sat there, hunched over in a daze with a half-empty 40-ounce bottle in his hand. Tired as I was, I didn't really look forward to the prospect of sitting down next to this man, but since he seemed to be quite well enough asleep, I decided to chance a brief rest. About eight seconds later, the man leaned over and shoved the bottle under my nose with a smile.

'Have some, it's good,' he said calmly with a cough.

The yellow liquor swished flatly inside the bottle. I sat up and took it from him, chuckling. It might be nice to have a drink, even one that wasn't cold. Sipping, I returned it, thanking him.

'Have you figured out the answer to your problem yet?'

I was startled.

'What problem?' I asked as he took a long drink, head back.

'Your problem,' he dropped the bottle down in his hand, gripping the mouth with just the tips of his fingers. 'That whole "inspiration" thing.'

'How'd you know about that?' At this point I was legitimately creeped out.

'Just shut up and listen to me for a second.' Before I could protest further he had shushed me multiple times into submission. 'I know you say you want to write, but can't figure out how to come up with a story. The answer is



really simple, I thought you would have finally understood after I threw *three* perfectly good ones right at you.'

'What do you mean? Three stories?' I'm not able to tell you why I didn't just leave, but the off chance that this crazy drunken bum, creepy or not, might actually have some good advice was enough to get me to stay.

He sighed, visibly frustrated. 'Think about it. The two Pakistani guys? the fight? the meth deal? Can you really tell me you don't get it? We'll have to start at the basic level. Tell me, what are the three things every story needs?'

He didn't give me very much time to answer.

'I didn't think so. And I'm only going to say this once so you'd better listen. A story needs these three things: characters, a conflict and good setting. Without all of these that assemblage of letters you've forced onto the page is just that: text. Think back to what happened tonight, you saw two men yell at each other in a language you didn't understand; what do you think their argument was about? what did he say to calm the other down? Invent the conflict. Who were they? what are their names? do they work together? The same goes for the others: what drug were they all go eager about? who were those two men and why were they fighting? Maybe the smaller one insulted the larger's girlfriend, or maybe Randal (as you've named the bigger one) just happened to spill his rum and coke on Kenny's shirt by accident, causing little drunk Kenny to attack? Maybe Old Bill (the man eying you from the crowd) had just come across a great new kind of drug, one so great he could barely keep up with demand. What if his stare hadn't been menacing, as you perceived it, and was merely his way of inviting you over for a taste? There's no excuse for writer's block when there's so much inspiration all around you every day. If you're stuck, take a walk around town at night, watch people, make them into your characters and give them personality.'

'What about setting? You mentioned that.' I asked when he finally paused for long enough for me to get a word in.

He responded by throwing his patched

arms out completely, as if pointing to all that existed around him at the same time. 'Can you really not see it? I thought you were smarter than that. This is your setting! What could be better than a humid night on a seedy street in August?'

'Lots of things.' I sipped the bottle again.

He sighed, relaxing his arms. 'Fine! Set it wherever you want. The desert, the jungle, wherever! Just try to remember this much before I go: any combination of conflicts, characters and settings has the potential to be both wonderfully amazing or woefully boring; it all comes down to the writing and whether done well or not.' He stopped, wiping a sweaty brow. The heat was still just as uncomfortable as it had been when I'd started. 'I'm going to go. Try not to forget what I've told you alright? I've got much more important people to help. Goodbye.' The moment he finished he was gone, vanished in the blink of an eye.

The morning bird's chatter woke me up, slouched on the bench with a sick stomach with an empty bottle in hand.

## Withdrawn

By *Andr\_w M\_nd\_lson*

“A clown,” Doctor Aryk had said. “Two-thousand dollars if you paint a clown. You paint sick things, but I find it all so...I don’t know, fascinating.”

It was crazy of David to try and paint what was so horribly scary to him, but turning down two-thousand dollars wasn’t an option. Bland paintings and bland cans of food would not do that month. Doing things again and again in dull familiar ways was tiring. Just a painting of a clown and cash would not distract him. Soon it would obviously distract him again, but it was too hard to think that far along, and what was distracting David was not cash—it was his missing doorknob.

Last night, David had found that a bolt was still holding his door shut, but only wood was at a spot that his doorknob had stuck out of. His windows took to abandoning him also. No hint of his missing windows was found. Additional and uniform drywall was occluding any possibility of a void as if nothing was actually missing and his flat had simply had a poor layout consisting of walls with no windows. How confusing: David couldn’t bring to mind any sounds of construction occurring in his months of living at that flat.

*What if my doorknob and windows didn’t just combust into nothing? David thought. Can walls just absorb windows? What could a window do to piss off a wall so much that it would absorb it? And why isn’t any wood missing from this point on my door? Hmm. I admit, staying in will ward off many distractions.*

David was working non-stop for days and trying hard not to look at his clown painting. A draping cloth was good for hiding it.

*If this clown is too sloppy-looking for Doctor Aryk, I’ll claim it’s abstract. Loola—I’ll call this clown Loola.*

“Good thinking,” said Loola.

“Thanks,” said David.

Painting Loola was going okay, but as David was painting, additional things would

vanish: pan lids, a sock, bathroom tiling, guitar strings, pillows, a mirror, shirt buttons, his sink, his futon cushion, his goldfish, and so on. Occasionally, his vanishing stuff would pop up again. His clock, in particular, would sprout up in various rooms but it would only display 2:30 all day, which was his final push into a condition of constant insomnia.

David thought that his situation was hard, but daily talking on his radio had taught him of poor souls who had to fight in difficult situations constantly and who saw only futility in complaining.

*Why not think of such stoic champions during my own fight? And who knows...things might go back to normal if I can finish painting Loola.*

Nothing but insomnia was visiting David for many nights. His painting was almost at a point that would allow him to cross it off his to-do list. This thought was occupying his mind as a cry from his front room hit him.

“David!”

“I’m coming.”

David, pushing his afghan off, slowly thought about what to do.

*It’s not as if it’ll just go away...*

Though night’s dark conditions sought to blind David, his door adjoining both rooms was ajar. A light switch was by him. With a flick, a strong light shot out forcing him to squint and adjust. His canvas had grown and his cloth that had hid it now only hid a lousy half of Loola’s scary clown grin.

“Stop this, Loola. If you don’t go back to your original proportions by tomorrow morning, I will rip you into tiny scraps.”

His harsh words didn’t work. That awful clown said “adios” to his canvas and stood right in front of David’s bathroom door.

At first, David could only gasp: Loola had dark crimson hair, an alizarin snozz, fuchsia clothing with big cyan buttons, and humongous pink flip-flops. But it was mostly Loola’s skin

that David had to gasp at—it was light gray.

David had his outburst.

“I couldn’t stay blind to you, Loola. My cloth only hid your paint. In my mind I could not avoid your awful form. Now I can’t avoid you at all, but I CAN look away from you, foolish clown!”

Loola said nothing and his grinning did not stop.

“Talk!” David said.

“Know my words. Know my words and I will put your stuff back. I may go back into that canvas too.”

That morning, David did his typical things as if a grinning clown was not lurking at his bathroom door.

*Soon I gotta shit. No stopping it.*

David was looking at a hollow jar.

*That’ll work.*

“What now, Lola?” David said with his own grin. “Block my bathroom door as long as you wish.”

For days, David was scanning through a stack of old books and pooping into jars and always looking away from his bathroom door. It got to a point at which most of his cans and jars had only piss and poop but no food. David had to talk to Loola again.

“I want my doorknob back. I must fill this flat with food or I’ll go hungry.”

Loola’s grin was monstrous.

“You must know my words. Hark! Look upon this clown and things may start coming back.”

“Go on, Loola.”

“Daddy shits and siblings pout but you cannot avoid this bout. Mommy sits upon this floor and looks and says ‘you lost parkour’. In a glass within my ass, alas, a lass who knows not of my class.”

And on and on Loola was ranting for hours till David could not stand it.

*Too much to know. Too hard to walk. I want food...food...*

“Loola, I can’t walk. Stop it. I...my doorknob, my windows—”

“Don’t fuckin’ talk about windows. I got rid of your windows. I can’t stand that kid

always looking in and laughing. I’m a clown, I’m a fucking clown! Th-that don’t justify his laughing. Ok, I stink. I’m no good. Laugh, just laugh away. I’ll k-kick a chair away that I’m standing on, you want that? That’s what kids wanna watch. But I can grow. My kingdom is within. Your windows ain’t around but it’s all dark at this point anyway and it’s mostly shadows, not just night. Who won last night? I can’t aim that high. No, that was wrong. If a bird falls it won’t hit a window. What if that guy has to fix your plumbing? Can’t—no. Nobody in, don’t. Don’t ask, ok ask. Any contamination starts and it won’t st-stop until it all rots. No, no, no. Is it two-thirty? No? What if it walks through walls? I did. My atoms got sloppy, said I was drunk. No way. A, b, c, d, a, b, c, d, a, b, c, d, a, b, c, d—NO, stop it. Clanging, clunky, clinging and cunning. It’s mad at us. I did a bad thing and that’s why things got bad, I just know it. Why do cartoons always play in that spot? Is Bugs just a bunny or a colony of aphids in a bunny suit? Laffy taffy sticks—no good. If I don’t think too loudly it’ll stay put. Why is...” and so on, and so on.

Loola was raving for roughly thirty hours. David was unconscious for all but four.

Loola did not inhabit David’s flat as a pounding at his door was jolting him back. His mouth was sticky and dry, but his clothing was moist with various body fluids. A part of him could only wish all of that loud-pounding would stop.

It took all of David’s will to finally stand up. Rays of light struck straight through his skin into his marrow.

*So bright...my windows! Snowing? I thought it was still Fall...?*

All of his lost things now sat in disarray on his rug. Shards of his mirror lay by his clock, his pillow, and his flopping goldfish, showing him an odd disassociating portrait. In this shard—his gaunt skin. In that shard—his filthy pants and long nails...

*What if mom or an old buddy walks in right now? I’m such a fuck-up.*

“David?” Doctor Aryk was calling.

David couldn’t stop smiling at his

doorknob.

*I was looking for you for so long...*

His smiling did not stop as Doctor Aryk was coming in and gaping at him.

“David...my god. I’m taking you to a hospital, but first—did you finish it? Did you finish it, David?”

“It’s back, Doc. It knows.”

As Doctor Aryk was walking past David, a foul odor hit him.

“Christ! ...jars!?”

A canvas blocking David’s bathroom door brought Doctor Aryk to a stop.

“Why is this cloth hiding your hard work? I am trusting that you will blow us all away as usual, David.”

With a swift pull of that cloth, Doctor Aryk saw things—things that will always haunt him. His shouting could do nothing to stop so many howling thoughts and so many absurd things that still occur in David’s flat—that uncanny spot which you may go into only on occasions that its doorknob is not withdrawn.





# poetry

## Deluge 7f

By *bad lt.*

Last night  
a dog howled near my bed,  
it was in blood  
under the half moon.

I heard water  
dripping tender,  
each drop  
an accusation.

I sat up  
fumbled to find matches,  
lit a cigarette  
and smoked mechanically.

Have I offended somebody?  
Have I neglected something?  
I should have.  
The water kept going.

I roused  
and turned the faucet  
very tightly.

When I went back to sleep  
the rain began  
to pound on the roof,  
the leaves, the dust.  
It pound, pound, pounded  
on my guilty heart.

Torment until  
I brought the sound to sleep.

## My Ode To The Jasmine

By *Kieran Hunt*

### I.

(as it appears in its original text message format)

dark eyes etch  
themselves into memory  
/ to recollect another  
day / easy my sorrow,  
waltzing Iris / darting to  
and from my glance.

### II.

(an fb message)

Her favourite flower  
was made on blank canvas

red strokes evoke blushes  
(the many we'd share)  
while white maintains nothing  
(with infinite care)

/ Her eyes vivify  
details on petals. /

My favourite flower  
was sculpted in skin

Her hazel calls Nature  
(a child of She)  
speckled freckles heckle grief  
(fitting me to a T)

/ Her eyes are the details  
vivifying my life. /

### III.

(a response to Her response poem)

Sand swishes through our fingers  
'tween gaps (though tightly locked)  
I envy every grain  
to nuzzle in your palm.





Our Holy Palmers' kiss  
heaves my frets away  
I sink in sinful bliss  
knowing our hands must stray.

IV.

(as it appears in its original poem, "Mab's Quaint Kiss")

I  
see smiles in my sleep  
long forgot  
ten teeth per row  
with chestnut lips  
and tic tac tongue.

I  
toss and turn  
moan and yearn  
(with throbbing burn)  
.. cannot discern

to whom these Lips belong.

## The Elder God's Lament

By ASA

My genitals are so pitiful." great Cthulhu  
bemoaned one day  
He'd approached Mother Hydra, his hips in  
thrusting motion  
Hydra had laughed and turned him down to his  
dismay  
Crying "Like a crabstick tossed into the ocean"

When all at once a lonely figure he spied on the  
clifftop clay  
The forlorn Obed Marsh, a man bereft of pride.  
"Alas!" Obed cried "for although my member is  
enormous"  
The women shun it so! As polyp'd it is, and  
squamous!"

"No human wife e'er it fit inside, ten foot long  
and four foot wide!"

Mighty Cthulhu thought of a plan!  
"Together, you and I" he said to the man  
"You take my women and I'll take yours,"  
and we shall rule these windswept shores!"  
"All my kingdom shall remember  
to rue their laughter at my member!"

And so Innsmouth was born;  
watched over by the beastly spawn  
where Dagon is now free to roam,  
where all our nightmares shall call home.



## The Pile

By Bread

The pile is glittering, forgotten, priceless trash.  
It is where you put the thoughts that are too painful  
or uncomfortable or sharp or unwieldy to fit inside  
your precious little brain without stretching it at the seams.

The pile is where I jitterbug and spiral in shaky,  
ecstatic parabola with my insectoid body being torn  
apart and made anew upon the rusted and polished  
thorn spike glaive knife spear alike.

The pile is the time and the place for me to don my  
set of thick, heavy leather clothes to prepare my dirty,  
filthy poet's hands for handling those prickly, blood  
thirsty balls of potent, metallic points.

The pile is blood sweat cerebrospinal fluid and  
it drips like the kind of ridiculous false prototypical  
"moaning slut" your sexually frustrated mind constructs because  
it needs somebody to imagine you having sex with.

The pile is picked apart by the weepy eyed and jelly legged  
mythic scavengers like me who's eyes are on the pronged,  
pointed, serrated, serious, molten, melted prize and our feet  
are, of course, rooted deeply in The pile.

## I Know This Place Like the Back of My Hand

By Bread

There's fuzzy edged darkness out about now,  
and the streets are slick and shiny with the  
pitter-patter of a thousand laughing raindrops  
falling into a solid, concrete incoherence.

A coursing river of whiskey, cola and the brain  
which suckles to reach a desperate jittery  
pleasure pads through the twilight like  
a shade that doesn't quite remember who it was.

It remembers the way home, though.  
Not that street. That's the one where the rough  
boys chased it away that night it was in  
year 9 and it screamed the whole way home.

Make a left here, if it continues straight on  
it'll go to the patch of slowly dying grass  
which it used to play truth or dare on, and  
that means it's gone too far.

It's nearly there. This is the street where  
the smoky girl looked defiantly into it's eyes  
and pulled it down into a caustic, alcoholic kiss  
and it walked home with nauseous thoughts.

The click the lock sounds like a sigh of relief  
to the sojourner, and it's fractious, fractured  
form comes whole as it lays down to rest,  
and sets about remembering itself.



## On Another Sunday Mourning

By *Michael Atreides Lair*

On another Sunday morning,  
 Lord, my God, called for us to rise  
 and mingle with the flock.  
 As I remember,  
 we drove and drove and drove  
 through the church's endless parking lot.

Cursed and late we arrived  
 right on time for stories.  
 The man of God spoke of war  
 (such a serious house this was)  
 waged on high, invisibly, with the demons  
 down below.  
 "Some may walk  
 some may talk  
 -whispering in your ear. . .  
*Look out!* All around,  
 the demons come dancing near."  
 Then that man sputtered out a joke.  
 His crowd laughed so much they cried and  
 writhed,  
 in fact some of them might have foamed.

Those curious little lambs  
 drank blood poison in their cups.  
 And ate paper thin flesh of a friend  
 smiling as they did, smiling as they did.  
 Near the end,  
 someone sang,  
 others played,  
 and another seemed to sleep.  
 The rest followed flowingly

with little less than falter step  
 or splintered seems.

I could hear with ears  
 and I could see with eyes  
 yet why was I just so bored  
 and drawn to virgin isle thighs.  
 And in my mind I took  
 adventure (or sojourn)  
 to the land where parables grow  
 and lessons forget to form.  
 In an ageless age ages ago,  
 God spake to me as if to a child,  
 "Give me your wise, give me your young,  
 give me you love, give me your tongues."  
 I spake back at him as well,  
 "I will not rise, I will not age,  
 I will not hate, I will not explain."

In the near distance,  
 A serpent tongued man mashed his food  
 in his toothless head, and  
 he whistled a wicked tune  
 to the damned and the dead.  
 "The eyes are lustful  
 the lips are full of sin,  
 the flies are plentiful  
 and they hunger for their kin."  
 And then I awoke,  
 we left,  
 no one spoke,  
 and never have I again.

## The Afterlife

By *Stanley M Noah*

You enter the other room of yellow light, yellow walls. You see a Picasso hanging on the far side, looking like all of his many paintings. You turn, and the landscapes are seen as if rushing away. You see a round table and chair, covered with white cloth, a bowl of fruit. But

these items don't seem quite  
real as the apples have no touch.  
Coffee and flowers, the smell

of clean linen, baked bread are missing. You think of the Mona Lisa, as, or anyone to talk with.

You search for sound: a TV, DVD, radio, a lonely train, weather, most anything. You see a book on the

table, titled: Book of Hymns, and the feeling of redundancy, boredom over take you. How long can this

last, you ask? The ceiling and floor  
start to become one dimensional.  
You don't know if you're in heaven

or hell. The body of light from the window is unapproachable as things are quickly disappearing here.

## House of Vanishing Doors

By *Stanley M Noah*

A breeze came through the window In a small vacant farm house very far  
From town as the soft transparent Cloth curtains danced. A chair and  
Table nearby held an open book; pages Turning themselves as if alone by the  
Force of what was searching from the Outside coming inside, intermittently,  
At my reading pace. You see, I once Lived here in the flesh of events with  
Passion like others had done so when Our fields were full of cotton and trees  
Had deep water wells for their leaves To grow cool shades. And the back bed  
Room at times became silent as things Stood still for moments. Again, just now,  
I can recall one summer day like a dream Written down, the long letting go, a closing  
That haunts me since, as I was the one Who died here; and people were walking,  
leaving like in slow motion while the landscape dried up as the seasons moved  
On. Still, I remain looking out the stark Window of migrating birds and dirt roads.  
Watching them going, changing, disappearing Into some kind of a lonely series, never ending.



# INFORMATION

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