

TAR 20

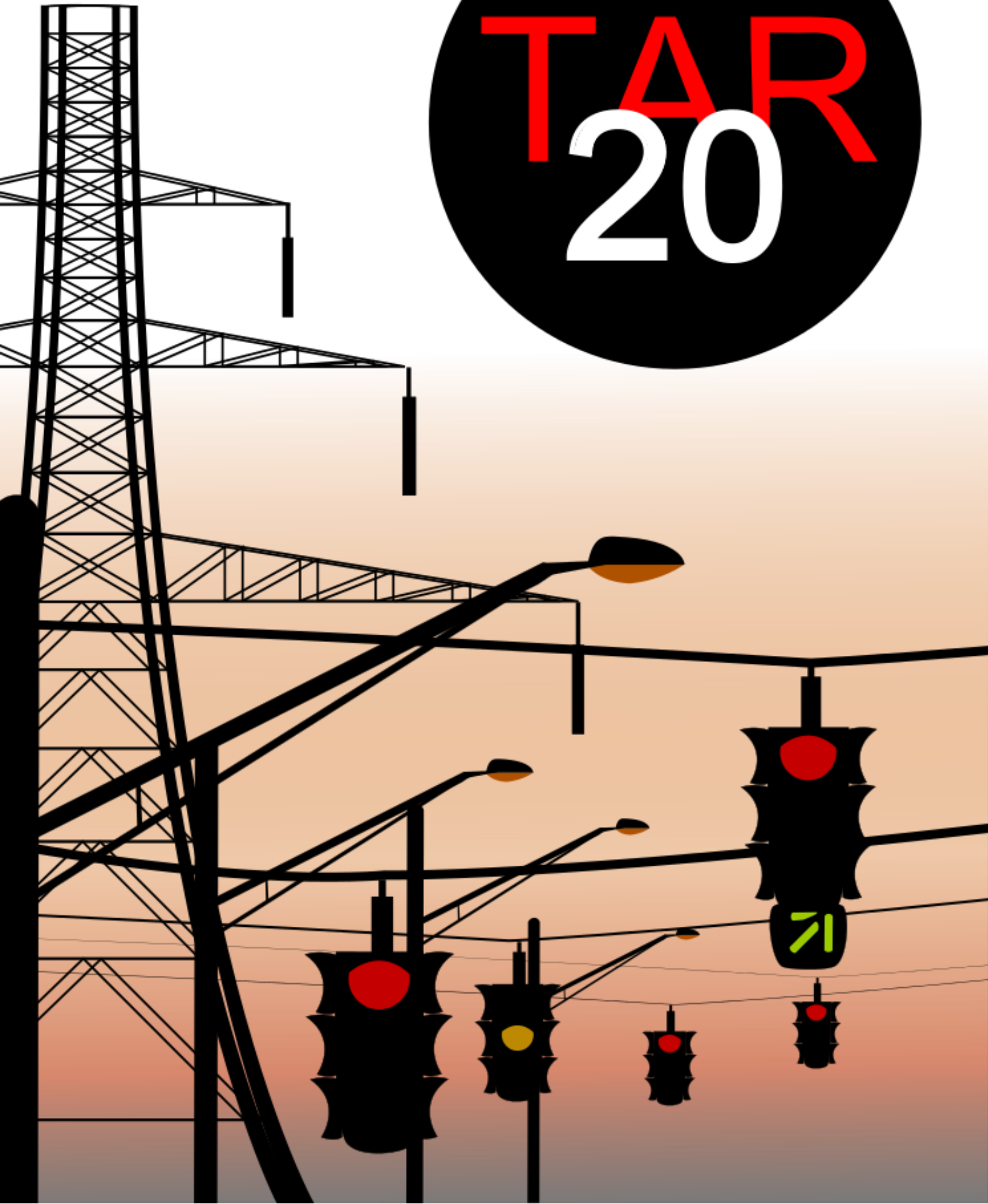
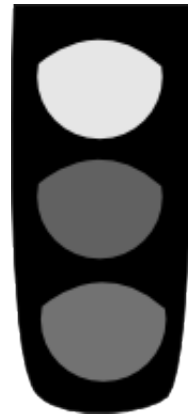


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PREFACE

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



FROM THE EDITORS:

Winter is fast approaching, dear readers! So, while you watch life wilt away outside your window, why not cuddle up in a blanket, get a seaming mug of cheap tea (or stale coffee, or a half-empty can of lime-flavored beer, or flat cranberry soda), and flip through another issue of The April Reader?

Expect no shelter from the cold and rain in this issue. Instead, you'll get legless men doing acrobatics on the moon, fetuses kicking their own mothers, talking vomit, and lonely writers in the fiction section. This month's poetry is a storm of words on words, frayed twine, and drunk Thursdays. And when you aren't clinging to radiators and electric heaters to avoid hypothermia, we hope you'll enjoy these creative contributions written by their ever-generous authors.

For those that pay attention to TAR-related news: we are planning a mid-month online assembly of staff, authors, and readers to discuss TAR's future and plans for grassroots management.

We'd also like to send out a big **HEY, THANKS BUDDY!** to everyone who gave us feedback on our paper-print prototypes. Entering the corporeal realm is a pretty wild ride, and we're ever grateful to anyone that wants to help us out.

To get keen on all this mail-order print copy business, visit theaprilreader.wordpress.com.

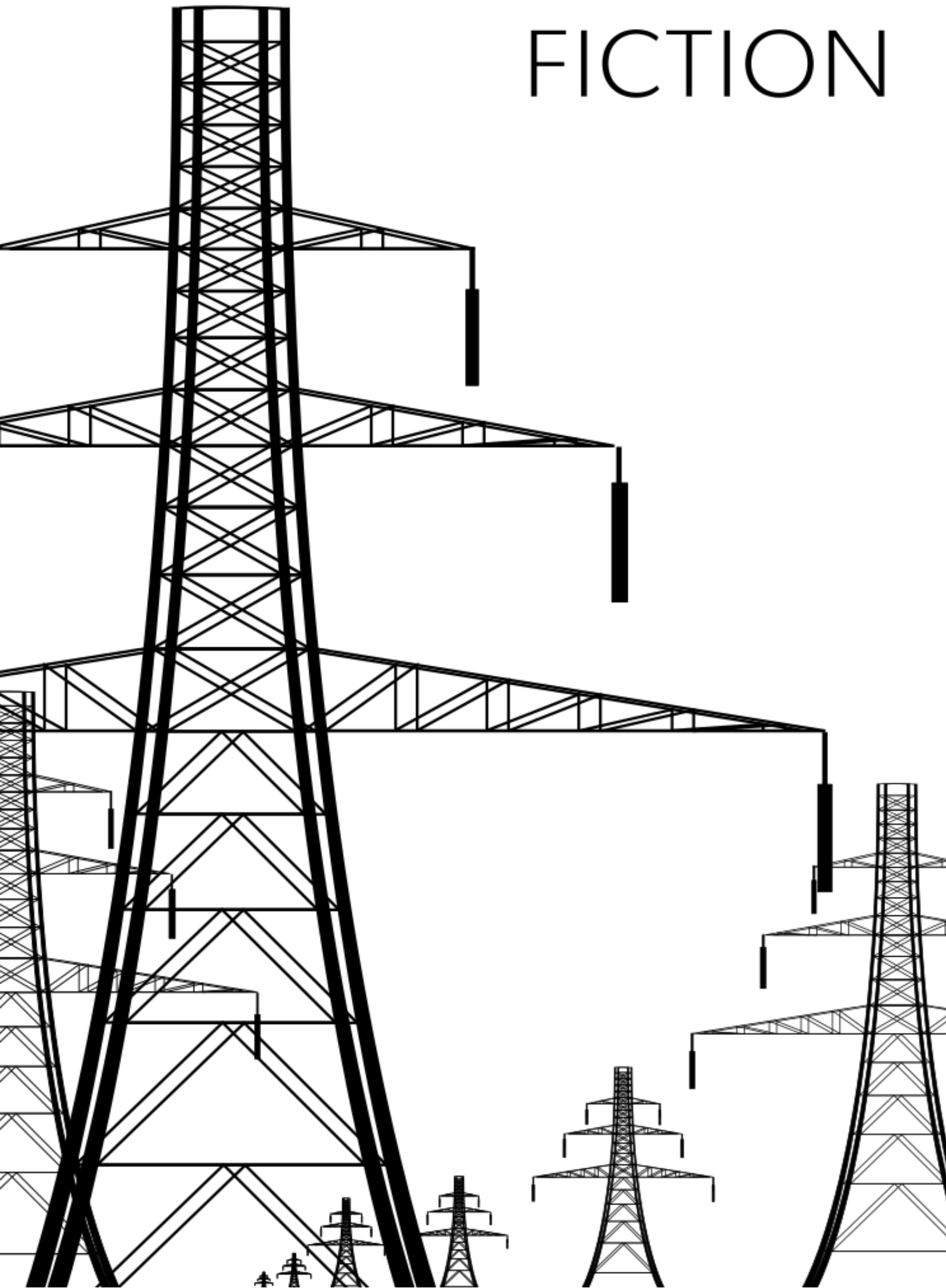
If you'd like to grace us with a submission of prose, poetry, essay, or visual arts, go ahead and submit it to theaprilreader@gmail.com

As always, we thank you for supporting TAR, and sincerely hope you enjoy what this release has to offer.

With Love,

TAR Staff

FICTION



A Lunar Landing

By Andy Mee

They sat, huddled around the television, patients and nurses together. Gasps and sighs of uncomprehending wonder filled the rehabilitation ward. Prosthetic limbs and doctor's charts for the moment discarded, laying forgotten on the polished, mahogany floor, as all sat watching, transfixed on these two men in white, setting down upon the moon, as if anything were possible.

21st July 1969, 10.56pm. St Bartholomew's Rehabilitation Hospital. Ward B.

Behind awe-filled eyes, other more sinister thoughts still continued to stir in broken minds. On the day when 'possibility thrived', impossibility still lived, hiding behind disbelieving smiles. For some of the residential patients in St Bart's the world was still just as black as the dark side of the moon.

Sgt Eldrick Thompson, or Patient 0295, disbelieving eyes glued to the fluttering movement of what they called the lunar module, now sat the way he always had as a young kid, with the chair turned the wrong way round and arms folded across what was supposed to be the back support. It had always annoyed his mother. When he looked down, for the very briefest of moments, he had seen his own fourteen-year-old sneakered feet on the floor below him, in the Nike's he'd loved, size 8, as they once had been. But Eldrick knew that he was seeing only what used to be, translucent apparitions of the past. The commentators buzzed about these brave astronauts about to set foot on the moon. Eldrick longed only to set foot on the earth below his knees. But that was a reality even more impossible than these adventures in space.

He wondered how much of himself he'd left there, in the jungle he still couldn't escape, as he watched the Eagle's descent toward the moon. The battle had taken place on Dong Ap Bia (or 'Hamburger Hill', as it would soon become im-

mortalized as). Eldrick had known it, more simply, as 'Hill 937'. There was a time when he too had thought anything were possible, he considered, as he watched the men in white begin their descent to the dusty lunar surface. There had once been a time when, like a young fool, he had made his own descent, in jungle green rather than space-white. He'd believed that there could be victory in the Vietnamese jungles, like the rest of them. That hope had been destroyed by the elephant grass and what had been hidden inside it.

Eldrick still remembered the young fool who had started off for the Indo-China Peninsula the previous summer. He still remembered beaming that goofy, pot-holed smile as he set down on the asphalt of the 'U-Tapao Navy Airfield', ready for B-52 transfer to join the other grunts on the front-line. Even the smothering humidity hadn't dampened the sincerity of that eager smile. That lost eighteen year-old had harbored a naivety that now made him wince with embarrassment. He hated that damned kid!

But now he sat in that rigid, hardwood chair, his own prosthetic legs propped up beside him, watching patiently as the 'Eagle' edged closer and closer towards the lunar surface. As he stared at the dark images and heard mission-control communication via radio transmission (a sound which he'd become so familiar with himself), he found himself conjuring blurred green and orange shapes once again, ghostly shapes of blurred explosion and jutting gunfire, which leapt out from the television feed's blank black canvas of space. He winced and began to re-live the horrors once more (he couldn't help it) as the black and white feed turned to jungle-green and fire-orange technicolour. He willed the ghosts to disappear.

He supposed that his blood (which had run from his thighs like two streaming bath taps) still stained the dense foliage camouflaging

Hamburger Hill. It wasn't the only part of him that was still there; his mind still couldn't escape the elephant grass (that in some areas was taller than the M113 Armored Personnel Carrier he often rode on). Advancing on the orders of the Company Captain, Eldrick, and the others in his small band, had moved vigilantly up the highly-sloped hill, and, pitted against the well-trenched VPA troops, had navigated their way through the bottle-green foliage. The rain came down in torrents which exploded on the thick, waxy leaves and caused the elephant grass to bow, as if in mock-greeting. Welcome to the jungle.

Then came the explosion. Eldrick heard it before he felt it and wondered where it had come from. Then he felt the pain...

A murmur amongst the amputees brought Eldrick back to reality once more.

Houston had reported to the live world-audience that Armstrong and Aldrin were passing landmarks on the surface '4 seconds early'. They were 'long', apparently, a term repeated over again. They would land miles west of their target point according to the anxious voice on the television. Eldrick knew all about being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Diane Vickery, Patient 0349, sat and watched the action on the small portable television in the seat to Eldrick's right. All evening she'd watched, fascinated, as 'The Eagle' had moved through the blackness of space; anxiety had suddenly filled the shattered ward, one so often full of desperation, angst and tears. Unexpected alarms onboard the module had caused their fragile hearts to flutter, as they watched together. Murmurs rose again in St Bart's Exercise Ward as another bleating alarm started, piercing the reporter's progress update and throwing him into a spasm of live-feed panic. The alarms indicated, what the reporter now called, 'executive overflows', as the scientists buzzed in his ear. It sounded serious. Diane Vickery was used to alarms from her time in the high-dependency ward.

Inside the 'Mission Control Center' in Houston, a serious-faced computer engineer told the T.V. reporter that there was 'no major problem' and that it was safe to continue the descent. Diane wasn't sure that she could take any more news of possible hiccups. She would have lifted her arms to cover her eyes had they not been removed. So she sat and watched through half-closed eyes.

The old magazines and newspapers on the ash coffee-table in front of her (such collections on magazine tables were common in hospitals the length and breadth of the country) had initially sent anger brewing through her recovering mind. It was yet another sign of impossibility, in a new world of many. The very sight of them and their secrets had made her weep, another torment of her hopeless condition. Like so many other things, she'd never have the dexterity to turn pages again. At first she'd considered asking them to get rid of it, but she'd learned to accept that she couldn't just rid the world of the numerous reminders of her limitations.

But, with time, practice (and a good dose of perseverance), she'd been finally able to turn the thicker front-pages of those darned magazines, that had mocked her with their secret articles, with what was left of her arms. Albeit clumsily, and not with page-to-page fluency, she read anything she turned to, to dispel the demons. She still remembered the first article that she'd finally managed to get to. It was an obituary. Typical! Boris Karloff had died that February. She hadn't taken much notice at the time (she'd had other problems), but now, as she watched these adventures in space, he came back into in her mind. There was something about the scientific equipment in that large room in Houston ('Mission Control' they had called it) that made her think of Karloff's monster coming alive. He'd had scientific equipment too, he was breaking scientific impossibilities, albeit if only in fiction. These days she had more sympathy for the dead, unsurprising since she'd come so close herself. She remembered, vividly now, Karloff's portrayal of Franken-

stein's monster in the infamous 1931 film and, briefly, thought how closely she must have resembled him after the trampling.

Then her mind drifted back to that horrid day, as she watched *The Eagle's* slow descent toward the moon; she remembered the final moments of her old life. An old world that soon erupted in the forefront of her rewinding mind and all those old voices of anger and dissent, brutal voices from the past, sounded in her ears once more...

As a proud African-American North-Carolina student, studying at Duke University, she had regarded her presence at the black-student demonstration and taking possession of the Allen Building, as vitally important, symbolic. She had been determined to lend her support and her voice to the non-violent protest. Perhaps it would finally spark University-action regarding the ridiculous limit on enrollment numbers of African-Americans, and highlight the meagre financial support offered to them. It was something that had affected her own life. She'd got in because of her grades, but she was flat broke. Attending the protest was a decision Diane would later regret, probably for the rest of her life. Perhaps she had lived in an unrealistic world back then – she had believed that if her intentions were for the greater good, and against such tyrannical idealism, it was a good idea to protest and lend her voice.

She could still picture the face of the senior university representative, selected by the administrative powers sent out to be the voice of reason. He had spoken to them very civilly, at first, pleading with them to leave the building and inviting them to discuss these important matters amicably with the university. Diane remembered thinking their point had been made and it being time to pack up and leave. But others, had successfully convinced the group (about fifty strong, Diane remembered), and her, to stay awhile, just to demonstrate the gravity their concerns.

They renamed the building the 'Malcolm X Liberation School'. 'Maybe that's what had caused the anger', Diane wondered as she sat, still watching *The Eagle's* descent. Their exit had finally come (as she hoped Armstrong's and Aldrin's soon would) and it had been peaceful in the early evening sun. She remembered telling some others that their point had been made, but a few determined to stay even longer. To add the exclamation mark to their point. That was when things took a bad turn.

A large crowd of students unhappy at the protest had gathered outside. It seemed as if their peaceful rally had upset many; renaming the school probably hadn't helped. Diane remembered the police lines trying to usher her away to safety in the seconds before the stampede came. Diane saw the danger approaching early and, taking the officer's advice, turned to flee the university lawns. Then, in turning, she had twisted her ankle, and fallen as the first scuffles broke.

She couldn't remember the trampling. It was now just a hazy blur of screams, anger and desperate groans (she thought the latter might have been her own). She still heard the brutal intensity of hatred in hundreds of voices when she slept. Diane hated the voices heavy-sleep always brought.

She recalled waking to the sight of the white-plastered ceiling in St Bart's. For three months she'd been 'out cold'. They'd thought her 'touch-and-go,' her mother had said. She vividly remembered the burning in her broken shoulders, like raw wild-fire, and the dull throbbing in her head when she'd woken from the coma. Then she remembered the birth of utter-horror as she had tried to raise her hands, to cradle her throbbing head, only to realize they weren't there to lift.

Diane was suddenly brought back to reality as the *Eagle* made, what the reporter termed, 'its final approach and prepared to land on the moon's surface'. She was sure that their eagerly anticipated exit wouldn't bring angry crowds, or

hatred, but had her toes crossed (a logical substitute) just the same. Diane was so absorbed in the incredible live descent that, like the others, she even hadn't noticed the lone abstainer on the other side of the room.

Paul Allan, Patient 0349, couldn't sit with the rest of the group. Instead, he gripped the parallel bars in front of him he'd grown to hate. The crash had shattered both his legs below the knee. He hadn't seen the truck coming. The error had cost Paulie his legs.

Across the other side of the room they sat transfixed, grouped tightly around the television, as the two men finally landed on the lunar surface to spontaneous applause and sighs of disbelieving wonder. With excitement and anxiety tangible in every pair of glittered eyes, they now eagerly awaited those first steps.

Sweat beads swelling, like translucent acne, from his pain-etched face, Paulie gripped onto the wooden parallel bars in front of him, the, alien-looking, artificial legs still unwilling to obey his commands. His thighs burned deeply, agony coursing through what was left of his legs, but he refused to get back into that damned wooden wheelchair. He hated the sight of it.

Paulie turned his mind to the one thing that had got him through this torturous rehabilitation programme. The Jets. 'If the Jets can win the Super Bowl, I can walk again', Paulie determined, as he gripped and squeezed the wooden bars, ignoring the old blisters which burned once more. The New York Jets' victory in the Super Bowl, especially after that ridiculously-bold prediction by quarterback Joe Namath that they could win it, had been the best damned day of Paulie's life. He'd loved the Jets ever since his father had taken him to see 'The Titans' at the 'Polo Grounds'. The first victory in the 'National Football League' for a former 'American Football League' team and God how he'd loved it. Paulie had been on cloud nine for weeks after. Now he tried to replicate the determination his heroes had shown on that day.

If only he'd shown their calm concentration at that damn junction. In fact, thinking about it, he thought he might have been daydreaming about those Orange Bowl victory scenes at the moment of collision. When the lights went out.

When they had come back on, he'd been missing his legs.

He tried for the thousandth time, as the other patients stared at those incredible space-men on the television, to shift his weight onto one leg and take his first unsupported steps since stepping into that car. Arms spasming uncontrollably as they held his weight, sweat dripping onto the blue mats below, agony personified on his wrinkled face, a heavy groan escaped from his tight grimaced mouth. Paulie pulled his right thigh forward, holding his balance on the left prosthetic, almost passing out through the burning pain. With his vision fuzzy, he stared downwards through bulging tears. Exhausted, Paulie planted his new foot down on the plastic mat.

On the other side of the room, Neil Armstrong finally set his own foot down on the dusty surface of the moon to cries of disbelief and wonder.

'One small step... a giant leap' he heard him say.

'Damn right', he panted.

*



August, 1st (It's almost fall)

By Jeslea

As the sun is enveloped by the earth night after night, I am left with these thoughts that are often difficult to express or share with another. I believe I owe a part of who I am to you. It's hard to think without what I have gone through caused me to write. You always told me to write and so that's what I did. Now, subconsciously; that's what I do. Without the swollen eyes, tear drenched cheeks, chapped lips, and empty stomach; I wouldn't have had any desire to take what I held within to something as simple as a page and pen. I am much stronger now. I have learned that, at the time, it was so hard to write about anything having to do with your existence because there was too much to write about. I owe that to you.

I close my eyes and let the winter winds enclose me and weave between each and every particle of my hair. Disregarding the fear of a lion's mane for later. I can feel the skin of my cheeks turning pink because of the stinging chill of the cold. I take off my right glove, and stroke what seems to be frozen cheek. I feel a smile shape over my numb lips; I have practically fallen in love with the cold. Certain thoughts come to mind as they often do; but this time they do not bother me. They are only a past. A remarkable past that is. One of good times and bad, laughing and weeping. I feel no remorse for that time. Only a peace. A gentle peace like water in a creek stirring beneath the rocks, making little noise. When I finally opened my eyes again, I saw him. This was not a familiar face as if from the past, this was now and not then. Signifying a new beginning, a new chapter to my life.

Here's to a new start.

*



Little Red Light

By Suvi Mahonen and Luke Waldrip

BE ADVISED: This submission contains some **explicit content**.

The sun's gone behind the hills by now and tufts of amber-coloured clouds drift high in the deepening sky. It's hot. Every living thing outside looks thirsty. Eddies of tiny insects swirl above patches of dirt and dead grass on the nature strip and the rhododendrons by the mailbox are wilting.

I pull into the carport and turn the engine off. The air in the car stales immediately.

Scott opens his door. 'Thanks for driving Honey.' He leans over and gives me a smack on the cheek. Tannins mingle with hot air.

'No problems wine breath,' I say, pecking him back.

'You said you didn't mind if I had a couple of glasses.'

'Just teasing,' I say. I manoeuvre my belly around the steering wheel.

His gait is slightly unsteady as we walk to the front door. Dry leaves crackle under our feet. He stands back as I find the right key.

'Oh man,' he says. 'Is it ever going to rain?'

His arms encircle me. I smell his cologne. I feel the scrape of stubble against the back of my neck.

'Stop it. I'm trying to open the door.'

He eases off slightly, pushes forward again. The lock turns. The door swings open with a groan of swollen wood. We both stumble in laughing.

He gives my boobs a squeeze then lets go.

'I'll go wash the dishes.'

'Very funny,' I say. I turn around and kiss him. This time properly. I can taste steak and chocolate. 'I just wanted to say "Happy birthday" birthday boy.'

'Thanks.' He hugs me back. 'Unfortunately you should call me birthday old man, not birthday boy.'

'Don't be silly. Thirty-eight isn't old.'

'Try telling that to a twenty-one year old.' He draws me closer to him, his hand holding onto my bum. He kisses my forehead. I feel his breath in my hair.

We stand here in the darkened lounge room. The fridge hums. The clock ticks.

When I move to stroke him he's stepped away. He turns on the lounge room lights and bends down and takes off his shoes.

'Need a hand with yours?' he asks.

'Actually yes.'

I lean on his shoulder.

'Ouch,' he says. 'They look sore.'

I scrunch my toes back and forth on the rug, enjoying the air between them. I look down at my feet, at the thick red indented lines that run across their tops.

'For the rest of the pregnancy I think I'll be sticking to ugg boots,' I say.

'I don't blame you.' He puts our shoes in the chest by the door and heads towards the stairs.

'I'll see you upstairs, OK Hon?' he says.

'OK.'

I stand here. Uncertain.

I go to the kitchen and pour myself some iced water.

I hear the creak of footsteps on the landing. Then the toilet bowl splashing. Moths batter on the kitchen windows' glass. I rinse my cup and put it on the rack and turn off the main lights and go into the downstairs bathroom.

Once I've gotten rid of my too-tight clothes I comb my hair, brush my teeth and wash and dry my armpits. I stare at myself in the mirror. I lean in.



Ugh.

My foundation is caked. Powder has melded with perspiration to form a congealed goo in the centre of my chin. Around my eyes the eyeliner has run into the crevices and flecks of mascara stick to the bags.

I sigh. I wring out the cloth and place it over my face.

The water soothes my skin. I open my eyes. The world's all white. I suck in a filtered humid lungful.

I take it off. I rinse and wipe, rinse and wipe, until instead of being caked with goo, my face just looks blotchy and red.

I make a twisted cone with a clean corner of the cloth and swirl it around in my navel.

I feel a kick.

‘Sorry bub, have I woken you.’

I look down at my belly. My stretch marks are becoming more prominent. Long, thin, irregular purpley lines. Not a lot I can do about them. Not a lot I can do about my new dark brown line either. The one which runs from my mons and up over the curve of my belly to where it peters out just beneath my breastbone.

My nipples and areolas are also changing. From the baby pink they’d always been to a deeper, darker brown. And my breasts are getting bigger too. I already feel uncomfortable with the extra weight.

Ugh! Gross!

I examine it in the mirror. My nose wrinkles.

Double Gross!

I hadn’t noticed it before. A short curly black hair growing just under the left nipple like a refugee pube.

I reach for the tweezers and pull it out.
‘Ouch!’

My nipples harden. I check carefully. There’s no others.

I rub Biodynamic Beauty Lotion into my face and then Supple Skin Soothing Gel over my legs and belly. I finish off with Revitalising Almond Hand Cream and add a dab of Poison to my neck.

I leave the bathroom and go into the walk-in robe of the spare bedroom where I store my clothes.

I choose a pair of black satin lacy panties. They’re way too small.

I settle for a peach-coloured slip that still just fits.

As I go up the stairs I wonder if Scott’s already asleep.

He isn’t. He’s sitting up reading.

‘Boy it’s hot in here.’

He glances at me. ‘You can put the fan on if you want to.’

‘I think I will.’

I walk to the corner of the room. Bend over. Take my time to switch it on.

I straighten up and turn around. He’s not watching. Cool air blows on the back of my legs.

I go around to my side of the bed and get in. I curl up next to Scott and rest my head against his arm.

‘You don’t want the doona on, do you?’ I say.

‘Mmm?’

‘I said you don’t want the doona on, do you?’

‘No. I guess not.’

I kick at it until it lies crumpled at our feet. I curl up closer. The fan hums on and on. Every fifteen seconds or so there’s a faint thunk as it reaches the end of its rotation and turns back the other way.

‘What are you reading?’

He tilts the cover at me, eyes still on the page.

‘What’s it about?’

‘Mmm?’

‘I said what’s your book about?’

‘It’s a medieval whodunit where a monk solves some murders.’

‘Really?’

‘Well at least I presume he does. Aren’t you going to read?’

‘Maybe in a bit.’

I start to play with the course hairs on his thigh.

‘Stop that!’ He jiggles his leg. ‘It’s ticklish.’

‘Sorry.’

I look at the cars on his boxer shorts. I look at the framed poster of Prague on the wall. I look out the bedroom door. Down the hallway in the lounge room I can see the little red light on the TV glowing.

I swing my leg over and press my groin against his knee.

His eyes widen. He looks at me.

‘You’re not wearing undies.’

‘No shit Sherlock.’ I go to kiss him.

He kisses me back but I don’t feel any movement beneath the cars.

He breaks off the kiss, inserts his bookmark into his book and puts it down next to the lamp. ‘We should get some sleep,’ he says.

I touch his nipple. He flinches.

‘Don’t you want some dessert?’ I say.

‘That’s really sweet of you Honey,’ he says. ‘But we don’t have to just because it’s my birthday.’

‘Maybe I want to,’ I say.

He hugs me and scoots down so his head’s resting on the pillow. ‘Thanks Bunny,’ he says. ‘But it’s nearly eleven. I’ll be Dr Zombie at work tomorrow if I don’t get some sleep.’

‘OK.’

‘Plus it’s really hot.’

‘It is.’

‘And our stomachs are nearly bursting. Or at least mine is.’

‘Mine too.’

He stretches for the lamp switch. He stops.

‘You’re OK with that aren’t you Honey?’

‘Of course I am.’

He pecks my forehead.

‘Love you.’

‘Love you too.’

The light goes off. The mattress moves as Scott settles.

I lie in the dark on my back. The lines of the clock radio cast a faint green tinge in the room. I hear the whine of a mosquito trying to get in through the screen.

‘What! The! Fuck!’ I yell. I switch the lamp on. I stand up out of bed and point at him.

‘What?’ He rubs his eyes and squints up at me.

‘You think I’m repulsive, don’t you?’

‘What?’ he says again. He sits up against the bedhead. ‘Bunny! What are you talking about?’

‘You think I’m fat and ugly!’ I scream.

‘Bunny. The neighbours —

‘Don’t you?’

‘No I don’t.’

‘I come to bed willing to make love with you and all you do is ignore me.’

‘I didn’t ignore —

‘Fat and ugly!’ I stomp my feet.

‘Hon —

‘Fat! Fat! Fatty, fat, FAT!’

‘Honey. Stop it. Seriously. You’re skinny and you’re beautiful.’

‘Well why don’t you want to fuck me then?’

‘I’m tired and I had a bit too much to drink. That’s all.’

‘We haven’t made love for ages. Not since ...’ I look at the lamp and count. ‘Not since before the nineteen-week ultrasound.’ I point at him with both index fingers. ‘That’s it, isn’t it. You won’t fuck me because I’m fat and ugly and I’m getting even bigger.’

‘Stop that! Now!’

He gets out on his side and starts to circle the bed.

I back away.

‘You were the one who started it anyway!’ I

yell. ‘How dare you give me mixed signals.’

‘I didn’t Honey.’ He reaches for me. I twist. I’m against the wall. He rests his hands on my shoulders. ‘Now I don’t want to hear any more of this OK? You’re the sexiest pregnant woman I’ve ever known.’

I glare at his chest. I clench my fist and hit it.

‘Ughhh.’ He steps back.

‘You did.’

‘Did what?’

‘You did give me mixed signals.’ The lamp shade is hot against my side. ‘When we got home you were rubbing your dick against my bum and now you can’t even get it up.’

‘Bunny, it’s not like that.’ He glances at the window. ‘Just because I get an erection doesn’t mean we always have to make love.’

I go to slap him. He catches my wrist. I begin to cry. He cuddles me.

After a while he switches off the lamp and we lie back down on the bed. Front to front, face to face, forehead against forehead.

He massages my neck, my shoulders, my back. Our breaths mingle in a warm eddy between us. We kiss again. Properly.

I feel the cars start to move. I hook a thumb around his waistband and pull downwards. He starts tugging my slip up. We get tangled. We laugh and sit up in the dark and sort ourselves out.

The boxers and slip hit the floor with a faint whoomph.

I move my circled hand up and down. He pushes me back on the bed. He nips my neck.

‘Hello boobies.’

His mouth settles on my breasts.

He kisses his way slowly downwards. I let my thighs fall apart. As his tongue runs around my navel I think of the curly hair, the tweezers, the fact I haven’t showered.

‘Ow, ow, ow! Let go of my ears.’

I don’t until he’s back at my level.

‘C’mon,’ I say. ‘Let’s wrestle.’

He supports himself on one elbow and looks down at me.

‘What’s the matter?’ I say. ‘Are you worried that I’ll fall pregnant?’

‘Very funny,’ he says. ‘I’m worried that I’ll squash you.’

‘Don’t be silly.’

‘I’m not.’

‘Yes you are,’ I say. ‘I’d offer to get on top but I don’t think my legs will hold out.’

He kisses me again. ‘We could just cuddle.’

‘Now you’re being stupid.’ I turn away from him, onto my side. ‘We’ve managed positions other than missionary in the past. I’m sure we can manage it again.’

He leans over. He tilts my head towards him. We kiss. He shifts upwards. We kiss some more. He moves. He’s kneeling at my shoulders now. Pushing pressure on my hair.

‘Ahhh ... excuse me.’ I feel it touch my chin. ‘Stop it!’

He does. I can see the whites of his eyes.

‘I thought we were going to wrestle,’ I say.

He goes to kiss me. I turn away.

‘Well?’

‘I just thought ...’

‘Thought what?’

‘Maybe I could have a blow job instead.’

‘Forget it,’ I say. ‘My jaw’s sore.’ I open and close my mouth. It clicks. ‘C’mon,’ I say, dropping my head back down on the pillow. ‘If you don’t take this chance now you’ll miss out.’

There’s silence. I feel him watching me. ‘Just a sec,’ he says. He gets out of bed.

He goes into the bathroom and closes the door and turns the fan on.

He’s in there for ages. I’m just about to go check on him when there’s a flush.

He comes out. Penis erect and glistening.

‘Did you put Vaseline on your dick?’ I ask.

He makes a non-committal grunt and gets back in beside me.

We start kissing again. His warm oily glans presses between my legs.

I roll to the side as much as my belly will let me and place my hands down on the mattress and brace myself.

He tries to stick it up my arse.

‘Stop it!’ I yell. I kick at his legs. ‘What’s the matter with you?’

‘It’s my birthday.’ There’s a slight whine to his voice.

‘So?’

‘You used to let me.’

‘That was years ago. Before we were

married! We’re not going to start that up again.’

Maureen coughs. ‘So what happened then?’

I roll away from him. ‘I’ve had enough,’ I say. she asks me. ‘I want to go to sleep.’

I feel him shift closer. He starts to fondle my bum.

I look at her click clacky balls-on-wire gadget. I look at her copy of *Clinical Psychology* in the bookshelf. I look at the snow globe on the desk.

I slap his hand.

‘We fought some more,’ I say. ‘Then I made him sleep on the couch.’

‘Go away.’

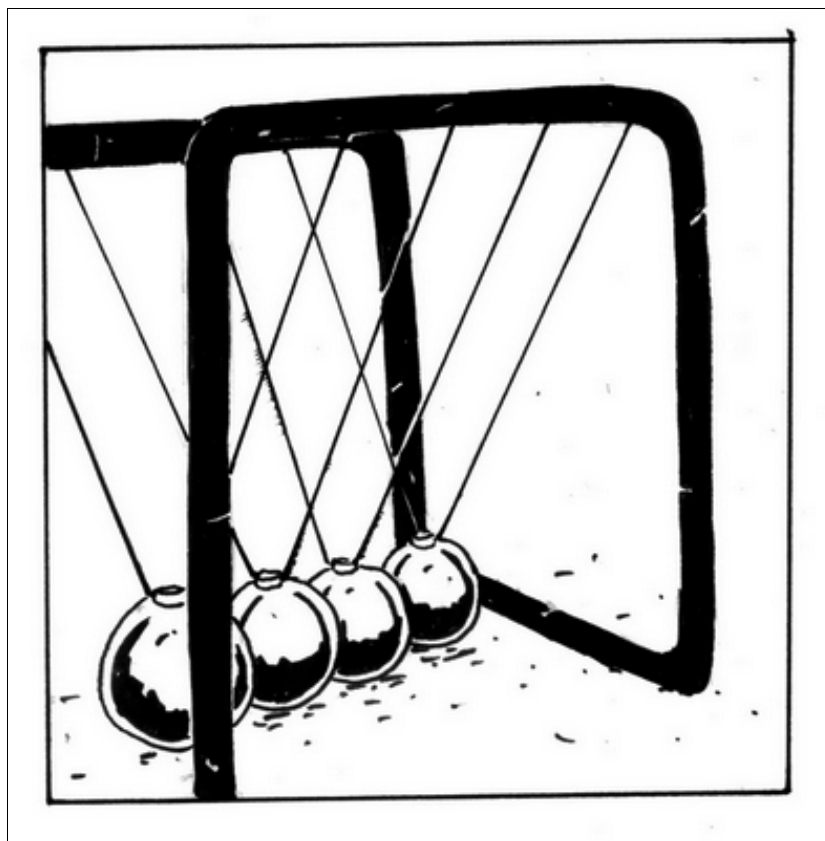
‘How did he take that?’ she says.

He doesn’t. I feel his breath on my neck. A drop of sweat lands on my cheek.

‘He was really angry,’ I say. ‘In the morning he told me about John.’

I reach behind me. I reach for his scrotum and squeeze.

*



【Illustratons by Bantha Fodder】

Vomit

By Jim Meirose

Having had too much to drink in the big Munich Oktoberfest beer tent, Walker makes his way through the crowds on the busy sidewalk, vomiting.

Vomit!

Adelina, said Adolf—look at the stupid drunk. Can't hold his beer—watch it!

He pushes past them roughly, vomiting again.

That was a close one, said Adelina—

I know—look—look at the disgusting puddle of vomit.

I see.

The stinking steaming puddle of vomit says: ***We place the people. We place the people that deserve to be placed. We gather names and place the owners of those names. Justice will be done in the end. Crap on the toilette and Gary will get busted. Make sure your feet are clean. Log in to any portal. The ceiling is up and the floor is down. Wander about the cemetery.***

Stumble along.

Bump into this one, that one.

Queasy—

The carnival ride spins and tilts—

Vomit!

Baldur! said Beatrix—did any of that get on you.

No, said Baldur—but look—look on the sidewalk—

The stinking steaming puddle of vomit says: ***Find your way through the stones. The fence is wrought iron. The fenceposts are concrete. The markers are granite. Lost are the souls here. Lost are the souls who end up crucified here. What a fucking lousy place to end up in. Up the street. The stones are all toppled. Chickens are sacrificed here.***

The town is spinning.

Everything's bleary.

The colors wash across—

He stands on a giant vomit covered painter's easel.

Vomit!

Carolyn! You got some on you—that damned drunk I'll get him—

No, Carl—he missed me.

It's a good thing for him he missed you. I'd deck him—

Look Carl—on the sidewalk—

The stinking steaming puddle of vomit says: ***Candles are burnt down to nothing here. Mad people wander here, at night. The judge is buried here. All the people he judged are dead but none of them are buried here. Down the brook from the twilight. Mistake me not for a judge. Roll out the cannon. The Agony and the Ecstasy. Halt the killing.***

The sidewalk rocks under Walker, like a ship's deck tossing.

He hangs onto a wildly swaying lamp post.

His eyes roll—a piston rises in his stomach

Here it comes—

Dive! Cries the submariner!

Dive!

Vomit!

Dieter, said Dagmar—did you see that—that awful man—

You mean that drunk?

Who else would I mean—he almost knocked me down pushing past.

Look Dagmar—on the sidewalk.

I see—

The stinking steaming puddle of vomit says: ***Crane the neck. She went to the counter and rolled out a handful of coins.***

Beer, she said.

The bartender nodded.

Crazy are those who drink to excess—who do anything at all to excess.

Having let go the lamp post, Walker reels down the street.

He bumps into a man.

A man with the hair of a woman.

Or a woman with the hair of a longhaired man.

He grabs their arm, he thinks he will fall down—

Vomit!

Let go of me you bum, said Eberhard.

Yes! let go of my husband, yelled Eleonore.

She swung her purse at Walker. He let go Eberhard and reeled away.

Look at that, said Eberhard.

God!

The stinking steaming puddle of vomit says: ***It is wrong to take 3 Mg. of that stuff. That's too much to experiment with. Experimental drugs drag you through life and by the tail you are dragged backwards, clawing at the ground passing by under you, screaming No! No! I am a captured cat!***

Walker runs dead into a telephone pole, which whips away and back at him, knocking the wind out of him, nearly knocking him down. He feels better though—

Yes—yes, I feel a bit better—

Oh oh—

Climb the pole—look down—the pole spins.

Vomit!

Franz! shouted Frauke—are you all right—that bum bumped into you.

I'm all right, said Franz—but his spray nearly got me—

Look at it on the sidewalk Franz—look at it

My God.

The stinking steaming puddle of vomit says: ***Behind the library. Ought to bust out of there.***

Ought to come to life and bust out of this God-damned library. Jot down notes. Keep your feet clean. Feel numb. Numbed are you but push on anyway, grab the dragon by the tail, dance to the music, emphatically prose out the words and you will be rewarded. Jittery feet—jittery feet—dance to the music indeed.

Oh my God I am SO SICK—

How am I going to make it home—

I feel like collapsing—dizzy—so dizzy—

A child whirling and whirling and whirling on the grass.

Oh my God—

Vomit!

Gebhard—did he get you? asked Georgina.

No—but he didn't miss by much—here—I ought to—

She grabbed his arm.

No Gebhard—hold your temper—he's just a poor drunk. Thanks god we don't have that problem—

Look, Georgina—look at that—

The stinking steaming puddle of vomit says: ***Caterpillars and bananas. Surge forward. Break the chains. Howard went to the office with a bullwhip. Not being able to play the guitar worth a shit, he took up drafting. Howard was a draftsman. Papa Doc Duvalier employed him. He drew designs for prison cells. Crap at the moon. Holler loud. Holler louder! Crowd in the circus truck. All gathered around him, dancing.***

Ohhhhhhhh—

Urp!

The building Walker leans on suddenly pulls away.

The plane swoops—

He begins to fall—

Vomit!

Hanna—did that man vomit on you, said Hartwig.

I think I got a spatter on my shoe—look—

So you did.

So what are you going to do about it Hartwig?

I don't—hey look. Look down on the sidewalk.

The stinking steaming puddle of vomit says: ***Grudge match, cage match. Eskimos. In the North. He's taking an Eskimo bride. Eskimos. Darn down the lard melting in great gout. Grey are the men—and you like them that way, because that makes you match them. Hah! Qwerty. Rag the zipper, rip rip rip the flickers up in the poster paper house. The poster paper house. We're living in a poster paper house.***

Walker stands in one spot, hands clenched to his chest, swaying.

Oh Lord please help me.

Chill rises.

Heat blankets him; heat, cold.

The piston pushes up—he doubles over—

Vomit!

Ilse did that drunk get you?

No, Isaak.

Hey lay down in the gutter where you belong you damned drunk! yells Isaak. I ought to—

No, Isaak—look down—at the ground.

Why?

Just look.

Wow—

The stinking steaming puddle of vomit says:
My house is made of poster paper. It's stuck together with staples and paper clips. Walk through the convention and spit on the ground. Find a button of the president. Christ almighty! Who gives a shit already? Grown tides spit on the shore. What is that machine?

I can't be sure, says Frodo.

We'll go push the start button and find out.

Oh my God—

Walker pushes past a couple walking arm in arm—

His arms where are his arms he has no arms.

Vomit!

Jan! that man just vomited—how disgusting.

Feel sorry for him Jasmin—there, but for the grace of God, go I—

Hey look Jan! Look down.

The stinking steaming puddle of vomit says:
The buttons pushed and swarms of mediocre penmen come out. Dripping gouts. Grey stalks in the plant pot leading up to green flowering

leaves. Grey stalks play the damned thing don't just sit there. Grant the prize to the closest hound, claw the paw that feeds you. Grip up one, then two, then three—then throw them! Why is the wonder girl here?

Walker sits for a moment on a stoop. It undulates under him.

He farts loudly nearly filling his pants.

A steel band is squeezing round his head.

And another one is playing in his head.

Vomit!

Karsten, said Kasamira—that man just vomited!

What—where—what man?

That man there—that one!

Look on the ground though, Kasamira.

Look on the ground.

The stinking steaming puddle of vomit says:
What are they trying to sell now barrels up the thing is so obvious it should be obvious to all of you that she is the one that brings the barrels up. Greet the fleet. Wave bouquets and yell! Don't try the head, it won't flush!

At last Walker stumbles off the curb, narrowly missed by a Unimog, collapses in the gutter, and passes out to a deep dreamless sleep.

Pity him, they say, those walking by.

Pity him.

Darkness blankets him.

He is nowhere. No more gripping the spinning world.

The sleep of a baby.

Darkness has fallen.

A black car pulls up.

Hey there fellow! says a voice.

Hands grip him.

Hey there fellow! Wake up!

*

Editorial Note:

For more of Mr. Meirose, consider chacking out his novel: Claire, available on [Amazon](#).

A Time of Meeting

By Jason Falcetano

The noise of the party was nothing more than tinsel. Kevin had always loved equating sounds to objects and the murmur of voices was just that, the flashing light crinkles of worn tinsel.

He stood, as he always did at these functions, close to the window. He looked out onto Fifth Avenue, eight floors below, and the people and cars moving rigidly back and forth.

“They fired him for embezzlement,” the man said.

He turned to the person speaking. The man had introduced himself only ten minutes earlier but Kevin couldn’t, if his life had depended on it, remember his name.

“That’s crazy,” he said.

He wanted nothing more than to scream. “I don’t know anything about finance or banking or business and I don’t care! Go bother someone else!” Instead, he sipped the last of his dirty martini and listened to the rotund man with the receding hairline talk about embezzlement.

“I know. The guy’s going away for like twenty years.”

“Like twenty years or twenty years?” Kevin couldn’t help himself.

A waiter came by, a young man about college age probably trying to make extra money for books, carrying a silver tray holding several fresh drinks. Kevin placed his empty glass on the tray and snatched up another without being asked.

He noticed the man stared at him, blinking, unaware of the joke. This is what happened every time he attended one of Tom’s parties. It was all business, associates as they are called.

People who Tom worked with, lunched with, made deals with. He was the odd man out, the writer, the artist, and once word floated through the alcohol soaked walls of the room, people slowly but surely began to seek him out.

“So Tom tells me you’re a writer,” the man said, as if he had read his mind.

“Yes...”

“I always wanted to write myself. Never had the time though.”

“I feel the same about business deals.” The man stopped a second time, obviously on guard against everything he heard, as if Kevin was from another planet and his coded speech needed deciphering, before letting out a high pitched laugh.

“You’re not the only artist here ya know?”

Kevin downed the remainder of his drink, a Long Island Iced Tea. He never liked the sugary ones but anything to keep his blood moving in this stale room.

“There’s a woman here,” the man said. He lifted himself on his toes to peer over the heads of the crowd. People stood in small groups, leaning close to one another and laughing, dribbles of alcohol spilling over the sides of their glasses like tiny tempests.

“I don’t know...there she is!”

He followed the line of his finger. It wove its way through the pack and landed on a young woman. The thing Kevin noticed was not her appearance but that she was the only person in the room with an empty hand.

“Yes. I see her.”

“You should introduce yourself. You two may have some things to talk about.”

Kevin was never one to think that just because two people were in creative fields that meant they would necessarily have anything to talk about but it was an opportunity for escape.

“That’s a great idea.”

He moved away just as the man’s mouth opened to let something fall to the floor only to be swept away in the shuffle of feet.

Condensation coating his palm, he made his way through the crowd. The light trickle of a piano came from somewhere seemingly far off though no piano could be seen. As he walked, it occurred to him that Tom was nowhere to be seen as well. He had only spoken to him briefly at the beginning of the night.

He thought he should just leave, keep walking right to the door and out into the quiet hallway. His eyes moved to a clock on the wall. It was just before midnight. He still had plenty of time to get to Penn and make the last train back to New Jersey. He was about to do just that when she stepped in his path.

“So you’re the writer huh?”

She spoke with a hint of sarcasm but her voice gave way to the sense of an inside joke.

“That’s me,” he replied.

He stepped to his right and the two of them pivoted into a corner, the only unoccupied space.

“Let’s just stay here. It’s better if we stick together and away from these others,” she said.

“I came to the same conclusion just a few moments ago.”

“I’m Jenny.” She extended her hand and Kevin took it in his.

“I’m Kevin. Have you been getting the same spiel as me?”

“What? You mean the, wow you’re an artist? There’s another artist here. You should meet him? No, haven’t heard that one.”

“Yeah. Me either. Nice to meet you though. What is it you do?”

An older couple moved passed them laughing wildly, the woman leading the man by the hand.

“Mostly sculpture but also a little painting.”

“Sounds like fun. Have you been doing it long?”

“Going on eleven years.”

“You must be pretty good.”

“Eh,” was all she said.

Almost a full minute of silence passed between them before one of them spoke. It was Kevin. “Is this the part where we discuss how deep and meaningful art is and how freeing it is to create?”

“I think so. Then we make fun of all the stuff shirts right?”

They laughed. From the corner of his eye Kevin again spotted the waiter. He signaled to him and the man approached.

“Do you want something?”

“No thank you. Recovering alcoholic.”

The honesty of her words froze him. He looked at the empty glass, then to the waiter

slowly making his way toward them and a pang of guilt struck him.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know.”

“Of course you didn’t. It’s okay. The only problem I have with it is that it throws me into a stereotype.” She smiled but her voice gave way to true melancholy.

“Yes sir,” the waiter said.

Kevin looked at him, then back at Jenny, unaware of how to handle the situation.

“Don’t make me stop you,” she said. “I wish I could have a few. Trust me.”

Kevin instead, placed his glass on the tray. “I’m fine for now.” The waiter disappeared back into the crowd.

“Do you want to go get coffee?” he asked.

“That sounds like a perfect idea. I’m starting to get a headache.”

They placed themselves on the same track Kevin had left minutes before. Positioned near the front door was the man who had been talking to Kevin.

“You two have met?”

“Yes,” Jenny said. “We were just going to step out for some fresh air.”

“That’s a good idea. It’s getting a little warm in here,” he said. He ran an index finger around the inside of his collar. “I may step out myself...” but they cut his words off when they closed the door behind them.

At street level the world looked different. The city, more alive outside the apartment than

in, ran as it always did, with the inflexible fluidity of strangers living in such close proximity to one another. A light mist rose from the sewers and mixed with the sweet sour smell of a nearby hotdog stand. A full moon lit the pavement, overpowering even the strong glow of the streetlights.

Despite the smell of traffic and food from nearby restaurants, the air on the street seemed much more fresh. The doorman gave them a nod as they passed.

“There’s a little freedom,” Kevin said. His mouth tasted like metal.

“A little,” Jenny said.

They walked in no particular direction. Neither of them seemed to care as long as they were away from the party.

“So you know Tom?” Jenny asked.

“Yeah, known him for years.”

“You two don’t seem like you have much in common.”

“We went to high school together, before he was Mr. Business.”

They crossed the street, dodging the front bumper of a cab. They stopped on the corner.

“Where do you want to go for coffee?” Kevin asked.

“Eh, not in the mood anymore. Let’s just keep walking.”

They strolled along the sidewalk, unsure of what to say.

“So who do you know at the party?” Kevin asked.

“A friend of a friend.”

A silence fell suddenly over the city. Kevin always thought it was funny how a place so crowded and dense could somehow, in certain moments, become peaceful and serene.

“Can I ask you something?” he said.

She looked down at the sidewalk, a light smile forming on her lips.

“Sure.”

“How long have you been recovering?”

“Just a little over a year.”

“Is it hard?”

“Sometimes. It’s for the better though.”

Kevin caught a sudden whiff of garbage from a nearby dumpster. He scrunched his nose. Jenny did not seem to notice.

“It all happened so fast,” she said. “It kind of came with the success I guess. The more sculptures I sold the more people knew my name and the more parties I was invited to.”

She sat on a bench. Kevin followed.

“There’s not much to do at artists parties except drink. Everyone thinks people talk about art. A lot of people who call themselves artists don’t know the first thing about art. They talk and talk and talk but never say anything. I guess they’re in love with the idea.”

She shrugged, letting her shoulders drop as if in an act of defeat.

“I’m sure I’m not telling you anything new though,” she said.

Kevin said nothing. He knew what she was

talking about. The café dwellers as he called them, trying desperately to live in the Lost Generation despite being born long after that generation existed. He felt there was something to Jenny that he could not understand. Something elevated her. It was not what she looked like or how her voice sounded. He could not point it out but there was something there, forever roving under the point of his finger but never ceasing so as to let him touch it.

“I think I know what you mean,” he said. “It’s brave of you to talk about this with a stranger. The alcoholism I mean.”

“I don’t see it as a big deal. People make mistakes. This is mine.”

“You were brave enough to correct it.”

“I don’t know if you call it bravery. It’s just what I had to do.”

He was struck how, though she seemed happier away from the atmosphere of revelry, her voice had taken on a tone of seriousness. A deep emotion had seeped into it which he had not heard eight floors above the street. Maybe it had been there all along but was drowned out by the din. He could not be sure.

She momentarily stopped paying attention to him, eyeing instead, the people in front of them, a woman walking two dogs despite the late hour, a group of friends coming from somewhere. There was nothing out of the ordinary about them, especially for the city but she watched as if she was not a part of it but a spectator behind a thick plate of glass.

“I’m sorry,” she said suddenly. “I got lost for a minute there.”

She smiled at him. In that instance he realized that no matter how close he had felt to her while sitting there, they were still strangers. There was a distance in her eyes that he would never pass. They would part soon and, despite

the honesty that had gone between them, they would never know each other.

He thought how funny it was that you could meet so many people throughout life but never really know any of them. If you are lucky you may get to know a few, really know them, as they are when no one else is around. It is rare. Maybe it is better that way.

“I have to be going,” he said. It seemed rude and he regretted it immediately but there was nothing else. She had surpassed him long ago and his feelings of inadequacy left him awkward as a person.

“Where do you live?” she asked.

“New Jersey. I have to catch the train.”

“I’ll race you to Penn.”

“All the way to Penn?”

But his words never reached her. She darted down the street and turned left at the corner. She was out of his sight before he could place one foot in front of the other. He watched the empty space where she had run off but he did not follow. Something told him not too. He turned back the way they had come and found a cab. He got in and the driver sped toward Penn Station.

Looking at the clock he still had time to catch the last train. His eyes stared out the window, searching for Jenny as if she would appear on the sidewalk and wave to him. So many faces crowded his view, becoming thicker the closer they got to the station. None of them were Jenny. Even in Penn he looked around him, making his way to the platform under the dull glow of the lights. He boarded the train. He took one last look as it pulled away but there was nothing. He sat back, his head on the headrest and wondered if he had ever met her at all.

*



A Walk in the Fox Valley (Part One)

By Andrew J Hill

The walk on which Finley and Margaret Dilling—two Wisconsin natives—went this particular night was heated with the feelings that had pent up inside them over the past month and even further back for Margaret. The air stood quite still in the heart of the Fox Valley, a conglomeration of small cities and townships situated in the northcentral part of the state. The winding Fox River and placid Lake Winnebago sat in the background, very quiet.

“You know I’ve feared falling into the bland routines set forth by the work-a-day world these past two years, Fin, I just can’t see myself continuing on like this. I know it sounds like I’m exaggerating but there’s got to be more than just . . .”

“Just what?” Finley interposed. As of late, he was becoming frustrated with her.

“I can’t explain it. Above all else, I am restless. I’m only twenty six! Do you honestly expect me to just sit back in the driver’s seat? I want to take action with what’s been set in front of me. I can change my situation,” Margaret insisted.

“What’s in front of you? And how would you change it?” he challenged. “It’s not as if you can wave a magical wand to have whatever it is—and you can’t even name it—you want and tada! You have the perfect life! Besides, aren’t happy with me?”

“Oh, it’s not all about you! Perfect life? I never said such a thing. But why not? I have the family’s cabin to go to. And I’ve saved up money to support us over the next five years. We would have to live frugally, but I think we could make it work. Not forever, dear. Just long enough to gain a perspective outside of the automatic world of economic transactions. We’d have a garden in the summer. The grocery stores would sustain us in the winter. Why can’t we do it? Finley, you know it is possible.”

He listened to her words as they poured out of her mouth, their source from within her soul. She wanted this badly. Not forever. But she wanted the chance to live a life outside the concerns of the stock markets, swaying their

mighty hands across New York City’s sky scraper landscape. They looked at each other. Before responding, he hesitated for a moment which seemed a lifetime.

“We do live in Wisconsin. It isn’t New York. Why do you insist on going even further from civilization?”

“Civilization is grotesque in the marks it’s made upon me.”

“How so, Margaret?”

“Oh, Fin, you know what I mean, don’t you? After all the time we’ve spent together, can’t you see? I’ve got a nail in my chest. A giant wound. The mass anxiety of modern people isn’t for me. I don’t want to be dopped up. No medications. And it isn’t the nature-ideal that I’m appealing to. It’s human nature I’m after. I get so sick of hearing about the apparent split between humans and nature. Get back to nature? Harumph! What a load of nonsense. Humans are nature. But humans have changed nature. Look at the lakes.”

“Honey, I know what you mean, and I agree. It’s just extreme to uproot and move away just like that. What about your mother? What’ll she do, much less think?”

“She’s not bad off, she’s healthy. Why we’d only be gone a few years at most. Then, we’d come back to Menasha or somewhere else.”

“Somewhere else? Where?”

“Oh, I don’t have all the answers right now!”

“The few years that we would be gone would pass quickly. You know that! Then what?”

Why do you complicate matters? We ought to stay here to raise a family.”

“What about us? What about me? What about you? It’s not as simple as you’d like it to be.”

“I know, I know . . . but it’s not as complicated as you’d like it to be.”

The couple were now a block away from their home. Expending so much energy discussing their thoughts left them both feeling fatigued. As they approached the yard, they saw their lamp post dimly lit and its shadow cast upon the lawn, the green bushes partially in this

light. A rabbit jumped out of the bushes to scurry across the lawn to the neighbor's. Night was falling quickly in their serene neighborhood. Inside, they were churning.

As of late, Finley did not agree with Margaret's notions of what the future held. While the future is truly unknowable, they both had their feelings about it and their plans for it. For the moment, neither feelings nor plans coincided. How might I convince him? Margaret would ponder, turning her thoughts over in her mind. What would win him over? What would make him want to move to my Minnesotan cabin? She asked herself. When will she change her mind and be more reasonable? Finley questioned. She has gone a little south, he thought to himself but never saying it outloud. Contrary to Margaret's desires, no big changes occurred in the next three months. They continued going to work in the insurance office. Margaret worked in the marketing department for a boss she did not particularly get along with. And Finley worked for the office's lawyer whom he genuinely respected. Mainly, they were administrative assistants, quietly working their way up the corporate ladder by gaining valuable experience.

A coworker at the office turned out to be the turning point for the couple. In the past month or so, Margaret had made a new acquaintance at work: Matthew Cuthbert. He was the man in charge of the office. Whatever he said or wanted got done. If not, then you were high and dry and looking for another form of employment. However, it wasn't entirely his work spirit that enamored Margaret. It was his big personality, one that Finley initially mistook for outright pride. He had inherited his position at the company from his father who was equal to the task of running a successful business. His eldest son Matthew was destined for the same. And his father had guaranteed his son's fastidious business dealings, his cut-throat mentality of "my way or the highway," and his forcefulness of seeing something through to the end no

matter what. While at times the forcefulness ended badly because of his unrelenting and refuse-to-compromise nature, the world of business eventually rewarded his way of going about his work. He had done well, his father remarked, patting him on the back.

One afternoon in the throes of completed transactions and agreements in the making, Matthew asked Margaret if she had finished the latest such-and-such report.

"Just a couple more days, Matthew."

"Aw, call me Matt, will ya? It kills me that you haven't yet called me Matt. We work together, right?"

"Yeah, but you're the boss. I can't assume."

"Well, go ahead, from now on. Anyway, you said the report'll be ready on . . . what would that be? Thursday? No . . . uh . . . Friday, right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you just call me sir? Stop it, really, Margaret. Call me Matt."

"Matt," she forced out, "I'll have the report done on Friday. On your desk. In the morning. Seven or never."

"Oh, you are great, you are. . . say, would you and your husband like to come down to Chicago with me to see the ballet? I go down twice a month to watch a ballet, an opera, or something or another. It's important to me. Was to my family growing up too, and I've never gotten out of the habit. Being somewhat successful, I can afford to. I'll be driving. What d'ya say, Margaret?"

"Well, I'll need to ask Finley."

"You do that, and let me know what the verdict is sometime this week. The show is Saturday night, alright?"

"Alright, well, it's getting to be that time again. I'm off work in half an hour. I've gotta send off a couple of emails and get my things together. I'll see you tomorrow, Matt."

"That's right, call me Matt. I like the way it sounds when you say it."

She blushed.

"Have a good night."

He smiled.

"You too."

As Margaret went about her end of the day

routine, her insides were popping with excitement. She was going to the ballet! She remembered when she was young once going to the opera, but to the ballet? Never before. This would be her first time. She was to see Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* in less than a week!

At dinner that night, Margaret mentioned to Finley that Matthew had invited them both to the ballet on Saturday evening in Chicago. He wasn't flattered.

"I don't get where he comes up with these ideas. He doesn't even know us. The reason he wants to take us is because you are good-looking to him."

Hurt, Margaret countered,

"It's not only that. It's something else."

"Something else? So you admit he finds you attractive?"

"Oh, Fin, stop it. You are being unreasonable."

"Well, when is the ballet?"

"Saturday night. He's driving us down to Chicago."

"In his car?"

"What else would he drive us down in?"

"Will there be other people along?"

"I'm sure of it. Aren't you a little bit excited?"

"A little bit," Finley responded coolly.

"I am, and I assume we'll all be staying down in Chicago for the night. Maybe he'll give us Monday off, and we can stay an extra day."

"*Harumph*, wishful thinking," Finley responded.

"We'll see, honey . . . we'll see. I'm off to get ready for bed."

"Sweet dreams. I'll be up in a bit."

"Sweet dreams to you."

Finley looked at his watch. It was time for bed. But he could not easily relax himself. His wife's excitement had wound him up. He didn't see it the same way. Was he making his own wife happy? Why was his life centered around making her happy? What about his own? What made him happy? He could not answer his inner questioning. Ah, I'm off to bed! He tried to shake it all off. He was letting it become bigger

than it really was. It. This "it" was growing and growing. Why must I wrestle with these doubting thoughts? We took the vows . . . in sickness and in health. Not all was healthy between them for the moment. Healing was needed but not the kind that medicine would take care of. She was right. Time away from civilization. That is what they needed. For the moment though, these silent musings remained unspoken. He would have to wait for the right moment to tell Margaret that he agreed with the move to her Minnesotan cabin.

(END of PART ONE)

*



POETRY

Untitled

By nikolas khge

a word is like a shroud, its object a corpse, its audience a plot of shaded ground

the meaning of the purpose of the significance of the trouble oscillated across the surface of its own image, each wave emitting an impression of ever greater force into the minds of the now attentive crowd. little by little each witness there settled upon a reason for the incident that would satisfy anyone who thought and felt and lived exactly as he or she has. across the field were birds, some trees, and the hanging sun, which at some distance away burst with a ferocity that would have belied its indifferent, almost indulgent remove from the scene, a courtesy quietly lost on the moment's guests.

their stillness, however, appeared to reach a passable return gesture.

"only waning things," they seemed to be breathing.

they were forgetting.



People assume from how I speak that I am 'a junkie' and it gets kinda tedious sometimes

By LRR

Faced with accusations apropos
his over-heightened sense of loss,
a life comprised of dregs and dross
and dogged dread of all things floss

He spoke in fractured dithering,
his flimsy fricate slithering
vocal chords all crack'd and withering,
its hardly a surpise.

If acoustic-folds acutely mould
Representations, as I'm told,
of class and character, he's mold;
he sounds so young, and looks so old.

From his speech one could deduce
no substance but substance abuse,
any potential's lost, put to misuse,
must've swallowed a fair few flies.

Of course, the source is natural
The product of a course run full,
that head's brim-stuffed with unspun wool,
to say nothing of his eyes.

I guess he'll die.



Thursday Afternoon

By J.R.M.

Drunk on a Thursday
Afternoon, waiting for something
Or nothing
To happen. I feel so sleepy,
So awake,
Wishing for a nice place to sleep
And a soft hand
To wake me up later on.

Drinking on a Thursday afternoon,
Passing and
Pissing

Away the time. Wanting something
Nice, something sweet like warm candy
That you've kept in your pocket. Sleepy afternoon,
Drifting off,
Slipping through the cracks
On a Thursday afternoon.



Dawn's Draining

By Kieran Hunt

my midnights drip down drowning dawn smears
on hill (and heaven) tops brimming blank
with scarlet flourish

lines of white on offwhite wash
whence midnight left
create cracks seen by none.

My midnights deem a dreary drizzle coats
of silver sheen off pavement hues
refract midnights lights
- haunting hollow sights -
 shades of shale made candide

my midnight's skies sigh colour until my midnights die
sweeping mauve, and indigo
to some far off in between
leaving only inkish strains
 to a fading milky wake.



regard me, regarding you

By Kieran Hunt

robins eggshell blue
embraces atop her collar bone
fabrics layers, and strings askew
abreast her ample bosom

imperfect skin invites side glances
(gazing on her pinkish self)
to meet old waiting V
at the crease of cease

less shadows.

Alluring vacant azure eyes
glide up to greet the ceiling
copper curls skip instep
as she walks on with her day.

Poetry is Done

By basedpoetry

all of it

and the total sum
in soft sheets and brown paper
tied crisply with frayed twine and hangs like an apple from a tree or maybe
man/a man

who am i/who i am
your number one
and it is hard to estimate
though if i had to guess it'd probably be in the third
standard deviation

because there is still a gap
which is
a final tenth of a percent in either direction
the heartbeat oscillating millimeters
that seem so

they seem so—



INFORMATION

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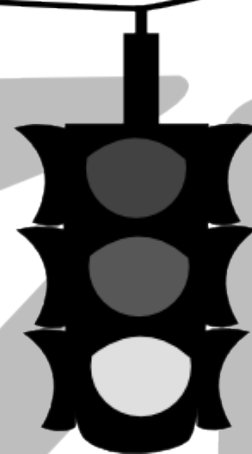
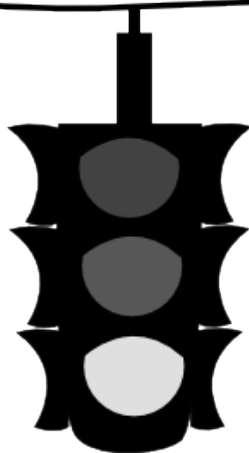
We sincerely thank all who supported this release – the volunteers, whose selfless aid is always cherished and appreciated; the writers, whose charity of talent and effort make our work truly rewarding; and the readers, whose feedback and comments are the life of TAR.

In addition, we extend our gratitude to those that gave feedback on our print copies. We're going to continue experimenting with different printing and binding methods, and are looking forward to getting more print prototypes through mail orders.

Liked **Vomit**? Want more of Jim Meirose? Check out his novel, Claire, on [Amazon!](#)

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What's that? You were expecting spooky Halloween-related puns?
Too bad.
(Sorry.)
GIBSON FONT ROCKS