

THE APRIL READER  
ISSUE 24

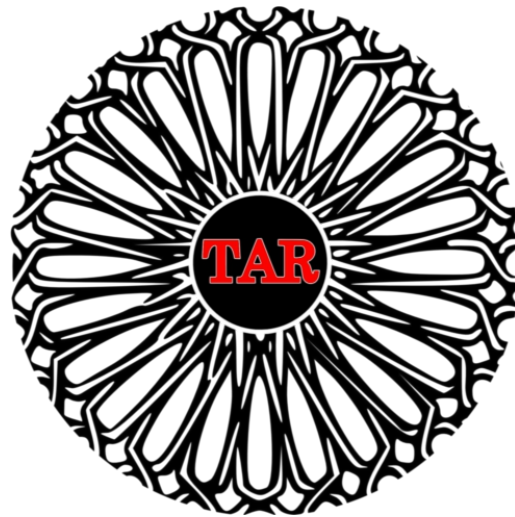


# THE APRIL READER

{ a literary journal }

## ISSUE 24

March 2013



theaprilreader.wordpress.com

theaprilreader@gmail.com

# IN THIS ISSUE:

4

Preface & Editorials

## Fiction

6

Infringement Stephen Thomas

13

Teaching Miyuki Emma Rhoids

21

Bleed the White Noise Dry Zackary Kiebach

25

Empty anonymous

26

Boris The Tentacle Beast Some Pervert

37

If Only We Met at Steak and Shake Taylor Bryant

## Poetry

39

Chris Shaeffer Let's Date The Protector of the Commonwealth!

41

Nicolar Eckerson Our Own Private Ice Age

42

Paul Olexa Woth-Lessness

43

Sarah A Williams loving too hard

44

A Valentine Asstrophil and Swella

45

Information & Credits

## Preface: What is TAR?

The April Reader (TAR) is a monthly online publication of poetry, prose, essays, and other user-submitted content. With its origins in 4chan's literature imageboard, TAR now aims to distribute the work of its contributing authors to a wide variety of audiences and communities. Ideologically, TAR hopes aid developing authors in becoming a voice for their generation. Practically, TAR aims to link its authors to a wide variety of readers, giving the former a chance at receiving critical feedback from many perspectives, and the latter a good set of reads.



\* \* \*

You can find our **distribution website and archives** at [theaprilreader.wordpress.com](http://theaprilreader.wordpress.com)  
You can send **submissions, comments, and suggestions** to [theaprilreader@gmail.com](mailto:theaprilreader@gmail.com)

\* \* \*

## Editorials:

For the few months that I've been working on TAR, I've seen good submissions both accepted and rejected. This month has of course seen the same course of events, but there is something different about this month's issue. It's not any better than earlier issues, in my opinion, but there's something about this month's submissions that's very relatable. I don't mean to make this issue more than what it is, but there is some consistent theme throughout this issue. What I see in it is a mosaic of human emotions. There is sorrow, defeat, joy, ecstasy, longing, and more in these stories and poems. This issue is the human issue.

Michael

With the advent of March, Winter (hopefully) gives way to spring; and TAR is going through a similar metamorphosis. Our esteemed founder and editor, Prole, has taken a short leave to find the Thoreau within himself. Speculations persist as to whether his *Walden* is a pond or a couch, but we wish him a rejuvenating rest all the same.

However, there is a more spectacular change going on in TAR's grimy gears: community aid. Several readers and writers have volunteered their efforts and talents in improving the quality of the Journal throughout the month of February. In the future, contributing authors can expect to receive quite a bit more feedback on the submissions they send to TAR, regardless of whether the piece gets published or not! In addition, we've begun receiving visual arts from talented photographers and illustrators, who will undoubtedly change the look of TAR into a more polished product. With planned efforts of coordination to happen in March, it is a collective hope that the quality of TAR improves for both readers and writers.

As always, TAR owes unending degrees of gratitude towards the online writing communities at large: readers, writers, artists, and editors – so many diverse talents congregating around the simple joy of literature. It's my sincere hope that TAR can continue to be a part of this exciting, thriving world.

And so, we hope you'll enjoy your afternoon reading through what the March Issue of TAR has to offer. Human emotions, or copyright infringement, or tentacles, or taco bell – this issue has what no Saturday night is complete without!

With Love,

Dmitriy



A large 'v' had been cut from the photograph, from the top edge to a point just below the shirt collar of the figure made headless by the incision. I looked through the other photos. Almost all had been cut similarly, some lacking half of Miyuki's face, a stray arm, a child's waist. Those photos which features three bodies pressed tightly against each, and thus made cutting difficult, had been attacked with a ball-point pen until its dark ink lay thick and glutinous in the deep grooves.

**Zachary Kieback** **Bleed The White**  
**Noise Dry -**

**- Teaching Miyuki Emma Rhoids**

The manager had wild eyes. I remember his eyes were a vivid green. It was a clear sort of green, the kind of green that reminds you of Native American pow-wows on an ancient plain; a grassy plain, albeit one with a certain sense of misreality, a plain with a kaleidoscope sky, fractals abound, a green kaleidoscope sky, green and white, green and white.

# Infringement

“How much will you give me for it?”

“Well you see Mr. Johnson, our budget has been...”

“How much?”

“Well we’d like to offer you more, but...”

“Just tell me what I can get.”

“100 credits.”

His jaw dropped. “That’s it? Really?”

“Like I said, Mr. Johnson, as of this month, our budget has been effectively...”

“Just give me the contract.”

The Corporate Manager of Internal Ideological Management snapped his fingers, and the young male secretary emerged through the sliding aluminum-alloy doors. He slid a thin, transparent sheet towards Reid Johnson.

Reid stared down at it blankly, looking over the finely printed words that filled the page, but couldn’t read them. He caught himself phasing out and attempted to focus intently. Phrases like, “hereafter all intellectual property,” “license may be revoked,” and “hereby resign claims to all profits” struck him as he tried to understand

the intentionally complex document stuffed full of legal jargon that said a lot, but meant very little.

He bit his lip and gripped the pen that had been resting beside his hand on the silver and white desk. He held the pen nervously above the line that was labeled “Signature,” and as the tip hovered lightly above the plastic sheet, it darkened below it, drawing the magnetically charged iron particles towards the tip of the pen. Someone cleared their throat, and Reid looked up to see both men staring at him intently. He put the pen down, and licked his lips, preparing to speak, but he couldn’t.

“Mr. Johnson,” the manager said, “we’re being very generous here. Think of your family,” he almost pleaded. “Think of how far 100 credits could go for them.”

Reid grimaced and set the pen down.

“Now, Mr. Johnson, don’t be rash...”

Reid stood up.

“Mr. Johnson, you don’t want to walk away from this. It will be your *only* offer. You know that.” His look was serious, but Reid didn’t waver.

“You’re making a mistake,” the Secretary chimed in, as Reid politely pushed the plush red chair back into place and crossed the room to retrieve

his faded brown trench coat from the coat rack.

“Alright, alright, fine,” the manager said, freezing Reid in place. He re-opened his ears to suggestion, gripping the soft fabric of his coat tightly, holding out hope.

“Two hundred. Two hundred credits.”

Reid continued his path to the door and donned his well worn fedora as he turned to open the door. He tipped it to the open-mouthed gentlemen, and exited with emphasis.

He sighed as he found a seat on the transport, looking up at the glowing white building, menacing and oppressive, looming over the city. He fished around in his dirt filled coat pocket, trying to scrounge up as much change as possible. Eight credits. Just eight. It wasn't a lot, but it was enough. He smiled, rubbing the coins with his thumb and feeling the satisfying ridged surfaces depress his skin.

“Stop here,” he called into the universal intercom system, signaling the remotely piloted vehicle to come to a stop. Here he exited, and entered the small souvenir shop perched at the outer limits of the city. All around were tiny trinkets and vials and posters with various words inscribed, organized in sections. “War” and “Courage” and “Honor” were all together. A sign hung above them read: “Great for boys!”

Reid waved to the owner and went over towards some light colored glass figurines. “Cute” and “Pretty” were close to what he was looking for, and he pushed them aside, then picked up a small pink, glass dog.

“Ah,” he smiled broadly as he read the words printed on the side: “Sweetness.” He carried the dog to the front of the store and nodded gregariously at the owner as he set it down on the checkout counter.

“That'll be six credits, Mr. Johnson.”

“Woah woah woah, six credits, Fred? They only used to be four.”

“Copyright cost went up two full credits, Reid. Sweetness has been selling like hotcakes, and you know they want their cut,” he said disgustedly, jerking a thumb toward the general direction of the city.

Reid shook his head and handed over the coins, knowing he'd have to walk home. But bus-fare was not worth the disappointment that Serena would display if he broke their little custom. “Here,” the shop-keep said, opening his palm and revealing a small glass penguin. “Don't tell anyone, but this is my own little idea. I call it ‘adorable,’” he beamed.

Reid tried to choke down his surprise and stay as calm as he could. “Are you selling that without a copyright?” He asked flatly, in shock.

“Yeah, just until I get it licensed though.” His eyes darted and he finished wrapping up the little figurines, and placing them in the brown paper bag as he spoke. “No harm in making a little on the side without IIM knowing, right?”

Reid avoided the shop-keepers conspiratory glance and took the bag.

“Just don't get caught. You know what they'll do to you, and you know

how set I am in my ways. I'd hate to have to find a new shop."

The owner chuckled and waved goodbye, and Reid turned up his collar against the encroaching cold as he disembarked for home.

"Say hi to the wife and daughter for me, Reid," Fred called out the door.

Reid turned and nodded, propping the door open. "You do the same now, Fred." He paused before leaving, a thought flashing across his mind—"how's er, Sam doing in school?" The common courtesy felt a little forced, but was sure it would be welcomed, nonetheless.

"Doin' just fine, top of his class at last checkpoint. They say he's real smart... they want to take him to the academy. They say he's really excelling in his propaganda studies class. 'Maybe he'll be the chief minister of propaganda someday' they keep telling me... but the kid's only 12. He can't know what he wants yet." They paused, and looked away from each other examining the shoddy, weathered boards of which the shop was constructed. "Aw hell. Maybe it'll turn out alright. Anyhow, I'll see you later Reid."

Reid touched two fingers to the tip of his hat and left the shopkeep to ponder over his son's future alone. It grew dark, and as the final rays of the sun faded over the horizon, he passed the last few hovels before his own, lighted, glowing—warm against the darkness of the night. He pushed open the creaking door of rough wooden planks, and was immediately attacked.

"Daddy!"

Reid let out a grunt of surprise

as Serena nearly tackled him. He smiled and wrapped his arms around the little girl. "Hey there," he said endearingly, pulling her up onto his hip, the little blonde bundle of joy.

"Did you get me something from Fred's daddy? Didja?"

He chuckled and pulled out the little dog, placing it into her eager, open palm. She giggled and squirmed, and Reid let her down so she could go play with her new Idea.

He looked toward the kitchen and smiled as Arianna eyed him with a coy grin.

"What?" He smiled back at her playfully.

"How did the trip go, O starving artist husband of mine?"

"Oh you know..." he trailed off.

Their smiles fell, and both looked over Serena, playing gleefully, lost somewhere in her imagination, mumbling words, voicing imaginary friends and inanimate objects. Her light blue dress, simple, plain, and practical, lay crumpled and wrinkled underneath her in her juvenile disregard for appearance.

"I got you something too," Reid said trying to lighten the situation.

"Oh?" she asked, raising her eyebrows in interest.

"It's Fred's own," he said, handing her the little penguin. "He calls it 'adorable'."

"Oh my," she smiled in delight. "It's very nice. I wonder how much Fred



got for it from the IIM?”

Reid bit his lip. “I don’t think it’d be polite to ask.”

“Oh I wasn’t asking, just wondering out loud, I guess.” She looked him over. “It didn’t go well, did it?”

“They offered me a hundred.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” She slapped a hand over her mouth and looked to see if Serena had overheard. She continued playing with her idea, gleefully oblivious to the world that existed outside of her mind.

Reid rubbed the back of his neck. “Yeah. There was no way.”

“You mean you didn’t take it?” she said in an excited whisper.

“No.”

“You walked away from them?! No one walks away.”

“I couldn’t do it, Ari. You know how long I’ve been working on this.”

Arianna pushed strands of brown hair out of her face and rubbed her eyes. “What do you intend to do, Reid? We need both of our incomes to stay afloat. My job at the factory isn’t going to hold us over.”

“I know!” Reid yelled, much louder than intended. Serena turned to face them, and Reid sighed, calmed himself, and lowered his voice. “I know, honey. And I know we haven’t been getting much money from my Ideas lately...” he trailed off, expecting Arianna to interrupt him. She pursed her lips, and allowed him to continue.

“...I just need a break. I need a good appraiser, someone who knows a great Idea when they see one.”

“Reid, you’re not going to find one. This is the third time you’ve pitched an idea this month.”

He frowned. “Well. I’ll make it work. I need to make it work, for you and Serena.”

“Just...”

“Yeah?”

“...don’t try and sell it without a license,” she said pulling him close. “I don’t want to lose you.” He nodded solemnly. “She needs you too,” Arianna said, nodding towards Serena who had long since resumed her play. “She doesn’t love me the same,” she said mournfully.

“I understand.” There was a silence, and Reid spoke again. “I’m going to go to bed, darling. Maybe a good night’s sleep will renew my luck.”

He kissed her lightly, and kissed Serena on the top of the head as he passed by her on his way to the bed.

“Sweetness,” she said, smiling up at him.

“Sweetness,” he said, returning the smile.

\* \* \*

When Reid awoke, he was terrified. He wasn’t sure why. His sleep had been dreamless and calm, which was even more disconcerting.

He stood and took the few quiet steps to Serena’s small hammock, and

was reassured that at least she was still fine. He pulled the glass dog that hung precariously from her small fingers, and she stirred a little in her sleep before settling again.

He looked around, peering through the darkness in his shabby little hut, chewing the side of his cheek. The rough, but worn floorboards felt firm and resilient beneath his feet, but the draft flowed up through them, cold and unforgiving. He rubbed his forearms and shifted his weight.

He was trapped. He couldn't take the risk. But he had to. Serena needed a father, but the family needed more than a single family income. He couldn't keep pouring his soul into ideas that only gathered a hundred credits.

He ran his thumb over the smooth glass, and placed it on the rough shelf behind her hammock. He put on his coat and headed towards Fred's shop, Idea in pocket. He would have to risk it. He had let his family down, and he had to make it up to them.

His breath hung, thick and frosty in the frozen air of the night. He felt conspicuous, no matter how he tried to hide it. He was alone in the dirty slums, and it was not likely that the Force would be patrolling. He wouldn't be caught—there was no reason to be this on edge. But he was anyway. His logic didn't seem to help dissuade the fear. He knew what the consequences would be if he were caught.

He began formulating an escape plan. He could use the small, disorganized groupings of alleys between the huts to confuse any pursuers—they wouldn't be able to follow him through his home streets. They could never track him with the hoverships, either,

because it was too crowded and dark. But where would he go after? What would he do as a wanted man? He could run, but what then of his family?

Ari was tough. She would do whatever it took to make it work—that much was clear. She had put up with his floundering and artistic blunders for all these years, working more than her share, and bearing the burdens of the family on her back. She would stick by him. But Serena. He stopped, paralyzed in thought. He followed the trail of steam that emitted from his mouth as it ascended skyward, and lost himself among the stars, among the almost unnatural silence and peacefulness of the night. He thought of Serena. Of course he did. But he thought of other things too. He wished he didn't have to sell his ideas... didn't have to lose everything he held dear just to continue living.

His mind returned to his current dilemma—returned to the consequences, the realities, away from pleasant thinking. He shivered, and shrugged it off as the cold air sneaking underneath his jacket. It wouldn't happen. They wouldn't catch him, and he didn't need to worry. He continued his walk, and redoubled his resolve. As he neared the trinket shop, he saw the lights, and he found himself staring blankly into them.

The shop was ablaze in artificial light, bright as noon, by the rays of blinding fluorescence that streamed from the hoverships. Reid dove back into the alley and peered around the building, unable to suppress his curiosity. He blinked a few times, attempting to get adjusted to the light, and took in the scene. Fred was on his knees, his hands cuffed behind his back. Someone was talking to him—an enforcement officer.

The light buzz of the ships made it impossible to make out the words, droning them out in their dull mechanical whirr. Two more officers emerged from the front of the store dragging his protesting wife, and one followed with his pre-teen son flung over his shoulder.

The officer shouted at Fred, mouth wide, saliva flying. Fred shouted back, his face contorted in a horrible mix of disbelief and indignant rage. Fred tried to stand up but was shoved back down, into the dirt. They shot his son, and the spray of blood and brain matter darkened the light with a small tuft of red. The boy sank down peacefully to the ground, giving up control of his body. Fred's wife turned to fight, and took only a few steps before crumpling down, falling flat after the small spurt emerged from her back. They pulled Fred to his feet, broken and limp, and he marched solemnly to the boarding port. Reid knew he'd never see him again.

He was unable to look away, and unable to react. He shivered, and the words "copyright infringement" ran through his head.

He returned home, kissed his daughter gently in her sleep then laid down quietly beside his wife. She stirred, and he pulled her close, stroking her dried and weather beaten hair softly and lovingly.

"Reid, hon, where were you? You're cold."

"I was just talking a walk. Bad dreams, that's all." He kissed her softly on the cheek. "No need to worry." But the words felt empty as they echoed through his chest, and a dull pain sunk into his heart.

The word had spread by the following morning—Fred's wife had left him, and he had sold his shop and left to live in the countryside with his brother. The ones who had seen wouldn't talk, and the ones who hadn't seen didn't want to know. As such, everything maintained its order.

Reid gathered his drawings together hastily and gave his wife a quick peck before rushing past her toward the door.

"Daddy!" Serena called from the bedroom doorway, halting him in his tracks.

He turned and smiled at her. "Hey there sweet-pea, it's awful early for you to be up!"

She rubbed her eyes sleepily and proceeded across the floor, hugging Reid around his waist.

"Where are you going in such a hurry, Reid?" Arianna asked, putting a hand on her hip.

"The city," he said, running his hands through Serena's soft, bountiful hair, kneeling down to her level to give her an Eskimo kiss. "I had some new ideas, I think they might just sell," he said looking back up at his wife, lighted by beams of early morning sun that streamed between the slats that composed the walls of the shack. Her eyes were weary, with wrinkles that continued to grow every day from the corners.

"Will you visit Fred again, Daddy?"

"You know, Serena, everyday you're getting prettier and prettier. One day, you're going to be as beautiful as

your mother.”

“That wasn’t what I asked daddy!” she said sulking.

He chuckled to cover his discomfort and stood back up. “Honey, I’m not sure Fred’s store is open today, and I just got you a new Idea last night.”

“Pleeeeeeease?”

He sighed. “Don’t give me those eyes,” he said in a half hearted reprimand, then softened. “I’ll see what I can do,” he smiled down at her.

\* \* \*

“So here’s what I’ve got,” he said spreading out the voluminous amounts of paper across the silver and white desk. “Honor,” he said, separating them out, organizing the designs as he spoke. “This one is about being true to the ideals of our great nation.” He shuffled a little bit, pulling one sheet out from the bottom of the stack and placing it on top. “Duty—this one’s about doing what’s necessary to get by. For your family, for the nation—Duty will be a virtue for years to come, I’m sure.” The man nodded, and grunted, releasing mild signs of approval.

“Lastly,” he coughed, clearing his throat, his muscles tightening all over his body in anticipation, “Family. This one is a little strange, I’ll admit, but unique. This one will be aimed at young teenagers—keep them with a mind towards their familial duties and their overall duty to create the next generation of workers for the nation. We can’t underestimate the power of a strong family structure in our society.”

“I see you’ve finally learned

something from all those rejections, Mr. Johnson,” the officer of the IIM grinned down at him. Reid swallowed heavily and nodded. “Well Mr. Johnson, this has been a most rapidly entertaining presentation—I like these ideas, I really do. You’ve finally brought us something we can work with...”

Reid shifted in his seat.

“We can offer you, oh, I don’t know... 500 credits for them as a set?”

“That’s...”

“Now, before you say anything, Mr. Johnson, consider that this is including all the costs deducted for your previous waste of our time...”

“I was going to say that’s fine.”

The officer raised his eyebrows and shrugged. “Ahem. Well then. Sean, contract please?”

Reid signed and took his coins. But he refused to surrender to them his idea, his true idea. He kept his masterpiece somewhere close to his heart, to share only with those he loved, and those who deserved it. He couldn’t live the way he wanted, but he could try—he could exercise this small rebellion, feel these small freedoms every day.

# Teaching Miyuki

I got the job straight after leaving college. It was to be, in theory, a short-term thing, a sort of elbow-in-the-bathwater of adult life. I'd decided that the 'real world' I'd been warned about by my older male relatives had to be approached gradually so as not to leave me totally incapacitated and forlorn.

My first student arrived at the adult-learning course long before anybody else had showed up. I was sat reading a copy of Nabokov's *Pnin* that had been assigned in college, and which I could now enjoy without the pressure of having to scrutinize it in order to pass the class. It was a release to say the least, and I barely noticed as the short figure entered the squat room and took a seat at one of the front desks.

The strained hum of the janitor's floor-cleaner stuttering into motion pulled me from my reading and I glanced at my mobile phone to check the time, hoping my class hadn't taken a look inside, seen me hunched over the desk and collectively refused to be taught by this Western kid, this goddamn gaijin.

Miyuki wore a thin red cardigan over her small frame, which was petite and as slender as that of a teenage girl. Her lips spread to form a curious, uncertain smile, furrowing the otherwise smooth skin and confirming her age.

She bowed slightly, her black hair shimmering from the hostile glow of the fluorescent lights, and I returned the stooped gesture as is the custom. I felt it

was decisive which language I should greet my pupils in. I cursed myself for not asking the advice of the eccentric Mr. Green, a long-term second-language English teacher and my mentor for the brief training course I'd attended. I longed for some sort of telepathic language which I could employ to bridge the divide between Miyuki and I.

Luckily she decided for me, offering a reserved, softly-spoken 'hello' and resumed her smile. Before long others arrived; businessmen cradling phones against their ears as they quickly took their places and checked their watches without acknowledging my welcome. A pair of giggling married couples, all dressed in plastic ponchos and each one a different colour, tentatively entered the classroom and formed a line before offering a friendly bow like a row of bobbing parrots.

The rain was rushing sporadically at the window behind the drawn blinds. I parted two slats with my fingers and peered out into the parking lot of the highschool in which the class was held. No headlights could be seen through the darkness, only distant traffic lights throttled by the wind, blinking wildly as they swung back and forth.

I checked the time and decided to begin, addressing the scattered individuals with a pre-planned enthusiasm which soon dissipated, and I ended up spewing the standard lesson plans that Mr Green had suggested.

The class ended after an hour. Papers were placed in clicking briefcases and anoraks were communally donned by the laughing rabble of spouses at the back.

Again the men in suits, heavy rings lightly bruising their tired eyes, resumed their busy phone calls and marched from the room. They were followed by the two couples, who repeated their routing with seemingly indefatigable enthusiasm, then a man in oil-stained overalls, and finally a pair of buxom young twins insistent on shaking my hand ("no, no, sir, we learn American way!").

Miyuki was the last to leave, slowly packing a notepad into her small leather backpack and zipping up her jacket. I threw the leftover paper into the trash can and turned to the sound of Miyuki saying her quiet 'goo-bye', stepping backwards into the darkened corridor, her symmetrically parted hair disappearing into the the unlit hall.

I restored the whiteboard to its original state; wiping away diphthongs, scratching at hyphens and finally erasing the casual greetings written in thick block capitals. The janitor could still be heard whistling away above the sound of his machine as I stepped out into the billowing clouds of rain. A wisp of smoke from around the corner suggested one of my students was waiting for a ride. I raised the hood of my jacket and briefly glanced across at the straggler, expecting to see one of the suited men sucking away on his cigarette, maybe he was waiting on an important call from across America, where markets would be preparing for the day.

It was Miyuki standing there, beneath the domed light fixed to the wall. I could only make out her profile from the glow; the age-thinned lips and the rivulets of wrinkles deepening and fading as she took a lengthy drag on her rolled cigarette. I shouted goodbye through the rain and saw her slowly turn and acknowledge me, no smile this time, a

blank look as if she had not recognized me from fifteen minutes ago.

The rain crackled on the hood of my jacket as I ran to my car, closing the door and wriggling from the wet material. Ahead of me the few remaining lights were extinguished within the single story school building. The slouching old janitor could be seen locking the main doors, disappearing across the slowly flooding car park with the thick bundle of keys catching flashes of light now and again. I watched Miyuki in the yellow raincoat, the plastic hem rigid like that of a well-starched skirt, as she stood, staring out into the night, occasionally allowing smoke to drift from her mouth, all the while distanced from the thrashing rain.

Her thin figure against the schoolhouse stone, she invoked memories of my younger years, of sitting on the school bus as it stood vibrating, waiting to swallow the children who were streaming in from all directions. I thought of Kelly who would stand smoking with the popular kids, waiting until the first bus to depart until she took her place at the back of mine. She'd grown up in a house not too far away and we'd spent long summer days playing among the housing development nearby, chasing each other through giant cement cylinders and telling each other second-hand ghost stories until the sun lowered to the point where we were inclined to believe they were true. We found a turtle and she got to keep it, eventually throwing it in the trashcan because it wouldn't be happy for her.

My apartment was on the outskirts of the city, two stops into the commuter zone. Its large parks and relatively quiet streets were a welcome contrast to the jarring inner city. I spent much of my free time at nearby Nirohito Park,



either taking long walks beneath the shade of the tall pines or sitting on my favourite bench which overlooked the manmade lake, reading or listening to music, thinking of home, watching the wind-blushed children stumbling after the swans which wintered in the area.

Two months of teaching went by, and I soon replaced my initial quixotic enthusiasm, which I guess all teachers experience, with the well-rehearsed routine I'd originally distrusted as orthodox and restrictive. I barely bothered to learn the names of my students, many of whom would fail to turn up weeks on end, arriving back to hold up the class by inquiring about last week's lesson. Miyuki turned up each Thursday, as I hoped she would. She seemed as though she were always conscious, always thinking, judging, determining, always with that tender, barely-there smile warming the small whitewashed room. It definitely wasn't lust I felt for her, but rather something I can only call a curious sympathy, an unspoken alliance of minds.

One Saturday on the train back from the city centre where I'd gone in search of an English bookstore, I sat reading my newly-purchased Thomas Wolfe novel, my knees tucked up and resting on the seat ahead. The next thing I knew a small boy, moon-eyed and thick-lipped, was tugging at my arm as if to wake me up. He was soon beckoned back to the seat adjacent to mine by Miyuki, riding the 3:15 train back to Hotarujaya. I sat upright and closed the book, half-bowing to Miyuki and smiling at the boy. Upon leaving the train, Miyuki and I walked together down the long platform strewn with brown maple leaves, the boy ambling along ahead of us.

"You live in Hotarujaya?" she asked as

we walked along the fenced boundary of the park near the station.

"Sure, I have an apartment in the Mitoio complex, rented of course" I replied, watching the child squat down and examine a damp cigarette snubbed into the pavement.

"This is Shunsuke," she said. "He is, how you say, nine years old." She looked at me waiting for an acknowledgment that her sentence was grammatically correct. I smiled and nodded.

We drifted under the high ornamented gateway into the park near the station. The early winter sky hung ominously overhead, an uneven slate curdling dark clouds. I was surprised at how good her English was, and she thanked me, telling me she had begun learning it many years ago but had abruptly stopped, allowing its syntax to go first, followed by certain pronunciations, until only random words remained with no invisible thread to tie them together with.

"Does your husband work in the city?" I asked, guessing it was he who came to give her a ride home after each lesson.

After a pause she told me her husband had died some eight years ago soon after Shunsuke was born. He was born in America after the war, his father having been detained in a camp there with other Japanese-Americans. He had spent his early childhood in California before his parents relocated to Japan to show their devotion to rebuilding the country.

He had found work on the docks, loading cargo aboard trade ships, mainly American due to his ability to speak English. One day a rookie crane driver had dropped the container he was loading from twenty feet. A simple mistake she was told, and one which led

to no compensation, as stated obscurely in the lengthy contract he had signed without fully comprehending.

She didn't complete the scene but left me to fill in the narrative between a falling shipping container and a husband and father below. I felt honoured at being let in on something which was likely a secret, but at the same time I got the feeling that she may have been going through the story in her mind, without thinking too much about the fact that her thoughts were transmitted out loud. Even worse than this, I worried that by emphasizing her tragic and gruesome history she suspected that I was like the other Western males that could be seen on the streets of Nagasaki after dark, using their hands and eyebrows to translate their intentions to the city's prostitutes, and was trying to erect some sort of boundary. I sincerely hoped that the former was the case.

"I'm sorry" was all I could offer.

"No, it's okay, I am happy yet. I worry only now for Shunsuke."

"Does he miss his father?"

"No, only at school, his friends sometimes say about his father. He cannot play in the baseball game between father and sons. This makes me sad, more than him I think."

We had walked alongside the lake and descended among the pines where the path led to the east gate of the park. Raindrops began spiking in the growing puddles and I left Miyuki and the boy, telling her I'd see her in class. She bowed farewell, her head briefly leaving the security of her swiftly-deployed umbrella and catching a stream of water cascading from it. I left for home, jogging through the tight streets with my jacket over my head, unwittingly dropping my new book at some point in the process. After switching on the mini-heater I stripped to

my underwear, curled up on the sofa in the dark and waited for the storm to arrive. I watched the elderly woman who lived in the apartment opposite hurriedly collecting the clothes from her small washing line, her mouth filled with wooden pegs, her husband sitting in his underwear with a vest inflated by his paunch, caught in the glare of the television screen.

Far away my mother would be in the latter stages of sleep by now, my younger brother beneath his comic-book bed covers with his mouth wide, dribbling down his pillow. My father would be at work still, sitting in his small booth listening to the radio and completing crosswords, occasionally pacing the darkened corridors of the office building's ground floor. Others my age, people who had walked across the same crowded stage on graduation day, who appeared to have had their life's script written out and memorized in time for their lives after college. In the first few years of college I couldn't imagine my generation, guys my age, becoming husbands and fathers and settling either side of the same political divide which I'd identified with my parents' generation. In the last year, in those final months I looked around and noticed that a lot of girls were wearing wedding rings, overheard couples talking of first homes, mortgage plans, financial security, lists of top ten family-friendly cities. I heard and saw all this and knew I had to get away, for better or worse.

Miyuki had changed to Friday evening classes. She had taken work at a textile factory in nearby Shinagawa and worked into the evenings, Monday to Thursday. How nice it was, before the weekend, the blinds of my small classroom open to let in whatever pale, smoky light dared enter, to see somebody



who came closest to resembling a friend. Rather than wait for her usual ride after class, on this first Friday I saw her set off on foot, her small figure weaving through the traffic of the nearby highway.

I pulled up alongside her and rolled down the passenger window.

"Miyuki, would you like a ride home?"

Her response came as carefully as usual. She smiled at the ground and removed her hood and gloves, turning away to unzip her jacket, raising a handkerchief to her face. When she took a seat I saw that she had been crying.

"Miyuki, what's wrong?" I noted the tone of my voice, pedagogic and fatherly. I coughed and looked ahead, turning right at the traffic lights.

"Shunsuke does not like to go to school any more" she said after five minutes of silence, her face down and her grammar frayed. From the little I had learned of Miyuki, she would soon organize her thoughts and explain the situation further. I pulled up into the extensive car park of a pet store nearby and turned on the heaters, waiting for Miyuki to explain.

Her shaking hand opened the latch to her small leather backpack. She handed me an uneven pile of photos of various sizes. I looked at her for an explanation but she turned to look out the window, sobbing and wiping away the mucus glistening in the groove beneath her nose.

I recognized Miyuki in the first photograph, standing abreast a solid oak chair, resting her hand on its high back and smiling wide. The face of the boy perched on the knee of the sitting figure was that of Shunsuke, confused and looking just left of camera, small

fingers intertwined over his thick woollen jumper. A large 'v' had been cut from the photograph, from the top edge to a point just below the shirt collar of the figure made headless by the incision. I looked through the other photos. Almost all had been cut similarly, some lacking half of Miyuki's face, a stray arm, a child's waist. Those photos which features three bodies pressed tightly against each, and thus made cutting difficult, had been attacked with a ball-point pen until its dark ink lay thick and glutinous in the deep grooves.

"That is Masahiko" she explained, drilling curled fingers into her eyelids. She told me how Shunsuke had been involved in a fight in school during baseball practice earlier that day. He had failed to catch a high ball, blown around by the wind and obscured by the grey clouds. Just like your father, one of the boys had said, doesn't see what's above him until SPLAT! The boy's father was good friends with the headmaster. Shunsuke was told to apologize for staining the third base with the boy's blood.

I took Miyuki's trembling hand and we sat silently together, the loud heaters of my car only challenged by the occasional truck streaming past, the winter night leaking through the sky. Miyuki gripped my hand tighter and looked up through tear-laden eyelids. The tears had travelled along her wrinkles and raked down her pale cheeks. I turned on the ignition and drove away. After a while she exhaled shakily and cleared her throat.

"I promised myself I'd be both mother and father to Shunsuke," said Miyuki, swiftly dabbing the stray tears squeezed out by her sudden good humour. "I'm trying very much but I

know Masahiko never cry like this." We both laughed and I pictured my father, who had cried twice in his life, patrolling the dark office building. I felt glad that he was awake at that moment.

I told Miyuki that I'd like to drive her and Shunsuke to the zoo before next week's class. I'd been planning on visiting there myself at some point and figured Shunsuke might enjoy the extra company. Perhaps we could all learn something; it was a historic zoo. She thanked me and was laughing as I pulled up to her home, telling me she'd bring sandwiches and tea if I erased the dirty messages from the dust at the car's rear. She must not have known I could barely read Japanese.

I waited outside as Miyuki went to stand at the foot of the wide steps leading from the entrance to Shunsuke's school. He finally sidled out after the wave of children had left, laughing faces descending as it tumbled down the steps and broke among the scattered crowd of adults. Miyuki walked up the steps and stroked his hair, squatting down to button up his coat. After several seconds he stepped into view from behind Miyuki, his eyes searching and finding me as I sat warming my hands on the heater. He ran across the street, tapping on my window and laughing, saliva wetting his lips and then my window as he pressed his nostrils down on the glass.

The journey would take around an hour to complete through the empty rural roads under grey skies. Miyuki put in a Pyg cd and we drove on down the busy highway listening to 'Flower, Sun, Rain'. Miyuki and Sunshuke sang along together, smiling at each other via the rear-view mirror, the boy swaying from side to side, enveloped by his

puffed raincoat. It was obviously a song they both had enjoyed, and by Shunsuke's enthusiasm I judged that it hadn't been enjoyed in a long time.

At the zoo we walked between the small enclosed areas where the various animals were kept. I carried Sunshuke on my shoulders so that he could see the toucans at eye-level. Each species of bird we came across seemed restless, as if their innate desire to migrate had been frustrated by the cages. The parrots were the ones most obviously upset at being confined. A group of young staff members, each wearing the same dark green fleece inscribed with the zoo's logo, stood near the tall parrot cage smoking and occasionally yelling to the frenzied animals, prodding their rakes onto the cage wall and shouting. One of the darker parrots flew towards us as we passed and squawked something which made Miyuki blush.

We passed a sign which read in English "see macaque – monkey" and followed its pointing arm to a deep enclosure where a macaque, a snow monkey of the north, sat wrapped in its own arms. It sat atop a hollow, artificial rock overlooking a green pool which appeared to be iced with a gently oscillating layer of decaying leaves and candy wrappers. Its eyes darted up at the thin crescent of spectators above. It too seemed to be suffering from the same inner turmoil affecting its avian cousins.

I looked at the solitary animal, staring back at us across the pond, across the fence, across a distance which I couldn't fathom, wondering whether it had companions somewhere living their lives in the northern wilds, whether it had been dragged here against its will. Perhaps it had strayed from its small group to see what the next valley offered,

or had been compelled by some strange instinct, driving it down into the forests, unable to return. I remember as a boy I was convinced I could telepathically communicate with domestic animals. I let my grandmother's old and senile Shetland know I was aware that he was the reincarnation of the grandfather I'd never met, trapped inside the dog's body, even if nobody else did. I felt the urge to try this with the macaque but thought better of it.

Miyuki was also staring into the enclosure with her eyes glazed in thought. What could she possibly gain, I wondered, by coming to my lessons. Was she hoping to go to America? Perhaps she was looking to get a job in the city which would allow her a higher income, some infinitesimal percentage of the profits which were rising each year as new trade deals were struck between the Japan and the United States.

The monkey started masturbating in front of us, maniacally baring its teeth and rubbing its ass on the artificial scenery. Miyuki laughed and we walked over to Sunshuke, who had climbed down from my shoulders and ran over to look at the otters. The handful of onlookers began booing the macaque and ushering confused, captivated children away from the enclosure.

The sky had remained a blank canvas for hours, occasionally specked by crows chasing one another across the deep white dome of the sky. Clouds had now formed, and before long a thick snowfall began falling and settling all around as we trudged carefully in no particular direction. Sunshuke spotted a door to a nearby building. We stamped our shoes and entered a small barn. A teenager sitting inside a small booth near the door pushed a baby's

bottle filled with milk towards us on the counter without lifting his eyes from his comic. Miyuki took it and opened a short wooden gate to a pen nearby. I followed and sat on a bale of hay next to three sheep, a large mother laying on its side its raised head looking at us disinterestedly while chewing her food, the two lambs tentatively moving towards us across the bed of golden hay.

I could see the snow settling on the small window above the pen, the wind now driving it in various directions, thick lumps flattening against the glass and sliding downwards. Shunsuke stood between his mother's knees and they both held the bottle to the lamb's mouth. They seemed happy, Miyuki guiding her son's finger across the lamb's soft scalp, his eyes turning to her for approval. I felt like leaving them there, maybe going to get a coffee or to make an attempt at conversation with the kid in the booth. I felt like rushing to the airport and getting the first flight back home, longing to be home again, aching with a sudden dread that I could not go home again, could not return and find things as they were. I wonder if astronauts have that same feeling as they look down at earth separated by so far a distance, worrying if it was worth it, whether they would be happier back home, safe and content on the ground.

Still the snow fell, the sky so white I couldn't separate the snow from the sky. Miyuki must have noticed I was thinking. I felt her hand on my shoulder, a bottle being pushed into my hand. I looked at it, then up at her face. Shunsuke appeared from behind and straddled himself on my knee, taking my hand as if to show me how to feed the lamb which was standing directly beneath me with its dark glassy eyes fixed above the quivering nose. I decided that the real world couldn't be any more real than it seemed at that

Emma Rhoids

moment.

After a while the lamb withdrew its mouth and hiccuped. It raised its face towards mine and leaped into a thick pile of hay like garbage piled in the corner of the pen. I couldn't be sure, but I think it was happy.

# Bleed the White Noise Dry

8/12/10

*“Get out of my house, you stupid sonofabitch.”*

*Door slamming.*

*I get up and walk away.*

*Blood on the pavement? There’s blood on the pavement. The pavement is bleeding all over me. The pavement falls up to me and sleeps.*

8/03/10

I hate high school. I hate school spirit days. I hate football. I hate the arbitrary measuring of intelligence - hacking open your skull, removing your brain - unravel, unravel, and lay the *strands of pink spaghetti* across the cheap plastic table in the front of the classroom in order to quantify your intellect, quantify your being for the sake of *success* - businessmen and doctors succeed because they have the *longest spaghetti strands*; their spaghetti is boiled in a cheap metal pan on a cheap plastic stove so it can get softer and softer and softer until it eventually deteriorates into nothingness.

I hate personified. That probably makes me worse than anyone here. I attend the pep rallies. All of them. I hate high school. I hate pep rallies. But I’m addicted to the *sound*. I’m addicted to that feeling of detachment I get when I close my eyes.

When I listen with my eyes closed I can travel to Nowhere.

8/10/10

I’ve decided to become normal. I tried talking to some kid at school today. He was a hispanic guy in my English class that always wore a plain purple t-shirt, purple gym shorts, purple socks, and a pair of dirty, oversized purple

sneakers. People seem to think he’s funny. They like him because he’s *charismatic*. When I went up to him and said hello he gave me a weird look. Then he said hello back and gave his head a little shake. He had a group of friends standing behind him. They were shooting me weird looks. I decided to keep going and said hello again. The guy just looked at me. I asked him what I should do if I wanted to become normal. He told me that I should eat more Taco Bell. One of his friends guffawed. I don’t know what he was laughing at. I said thank you and walked away.

Being normal is hard. My family has a dog named Spot. I guess that’s pretty normal. We’re also pretty normal financially - on a superficial level we could be classified as a typical middle-class suburban family with a typical middle-class suburban house and minivan. But it goes deeper than that.

Why do things always go deeper anyways? What’s with all of these damn *layers*? If everything was one-layered it would all be so much simpler. I remember the movie *Shrek* talking about layers. The main character said that ogres are like onions and have lots of layers. I hate *Shrek*. Everything has layers, not just animated ogres. I don’t want to think about layers anymore. That’s not normal. *Shrek* is normal. I should probably start watching more *Shrek* movies.

8/11/10

I ate Taco Bell for the first time today. It was good. It was the first time I’ve ever eaten any type of fast food. I stole some money out of my Mom’s purse and bought myself a Burrito Supreme. It was so good that I ordered

two more after finishing the first one. While waiting in line I noticed a white slip of paper labeled WARNING: FOOD MAY CONTAIN CANCER-CAUSING CHEMICALS. The manager of the establishment saw me staring at it and told me that it was a bunch of bullshit that the Jews made up to take away money from good, hard-working men. He then went on to tell me that the government was secretly run by Reptilians in man-suits.

The manager had wild eyes. I remember his eyes were a vivid green. It was a clear sort of green, the kind of green that reminds you of Native American pow-wows on an ancient plain; a grassy plain, albeit one with a certain sense of misreality, a plain with a kaleidoscope sky, fractals abound, a green kaleidoscope sky, green and white, green and white. The man's eyes took me to Nowhere. I felt as if I could hear thousands of voices behind that green, shouting out, all screaming with the need to predominate the color. I could almost hear them, hear the crowd, see the crowd with my ears closed and my eyes open. I could go to Nowhere. I wondered if most people noticed this man's eyes. He certainly wasn't an attractive man. His uniform was crumpled, he was overweight, his hair was thinning, and his face was covered in pockmarks. But his eyes were beautiful in that frantic, maniacal way. They shone out of his gross human meat-sack, redeeming his soul with green and green alone.

The man seemed to have taken a liking to me, or at least to my appetite, so he came over and sat down at my table. He told me some more about the Jews and the Reptilians, and said that he was glad I ate Taco Bell because if you eat Taco Bell that means you aren't a Jew or a Reptilian. I listened politely and nodded at the correct points, which seemed to make him happy. I couldn't

stop myself from staring into his eyes. His wild green eyes. I had another outlet. It was beauty amidst chaos. I could float free again.

He talked to me for about an hour and wrote down some books I should read on the back of my receipt. He said that if I read these books I would understand how the world really operates. After I walked home I looked at the receipt and realized that his writing was indecipherable. I didn't mind. I just knew I needed to keep talking to this man. I needed his eyes.

**8/20/10**

I watched myself vomit the half-digested burrito into the clean white toilet. I felt detached – in a different point of view.

He got up and wiped his mouth on the sleeve of his t-shirt. He sighed. More retching. The toilet no longer looked very clean. He had his face a few inches from the bowl, his body limp, his arms flailing in a fishlike manner as he regurgitated a weak creamy liquid with the consistency of a milkshake. He thought about what flavor the milkshake would be. Vanilla. No. More like Cookies and Cream. He wondered if he could buy himself a milkshake at Taco Bell.

After a few minutes he got up and again wiped his mouth on his shirt. His face was gaunt and his hair was in disarray. He flushed the toilet and stumbled over to the mirror.

I already felt like eating another burrito.

**8/15/10**

The man with the wild green eyes became my friend. Friends are things that normal people have. I am normal. Everyday at 3:40 PM I show up at the Taco Bell. He is always waiting for me. I no longer even have to go through the hassle of ordering food - he



simply hops over the counter with an armload of steaming burritos and sits at my table. And then we eat. And eat. And eat.

I love Taco Bell. The man with the wild green eyes loves it even more than I do. He worships Taco Bell. He revels in his own inflated caloric intake, proud to simultaneously be an employee and a consumer. Consume. We consume. We fill the void that exists in place of our hearts with meat and fat. We don't need hearts any more. Disgusting, unnatural hearts. Hearts of cheap plastic. We have high-fructose corn syrup instead of basic vitality, basic livelihood. Stimulation. We have mass-produced corporate hot sauce in favor of blood, running through our veins; the blood keeps us alive, the blood flows and renews and cleanses our obesified souls.

I'm growing dull. The man with the wild green eyes keeps talking about Jews and Reptilians. I can't hear him. My ears are closed. I just keep staring at those wild green eyes from the depths of my burrito-induced stupor. His face shifts. It grows dull. Everything blurs. I feel consumed by static, a white buzz infiltrating my eardrums, I feel Reality slipping, I feel the Dream slipping, I feel Nowhere coming, coming closer.

A man behind me is talking about his work. I hear an incomprehensible stream of scientific terms. Psychosis. He said something about psychosis. I look behind me. He's dressed in white and does not appear to be eating his burrito. He sees me watching him and stiffens. I turn away. I eat more burritos. I watch the man with the wild green eyes. I leave Nowhere.

8/12/10

*I feel the pavement pulsing beneath me. The pavement is alive.*

*I don't think I'm alive. I think*

*the pavement is more organic than me. I'm going against nature. The pavement's heart beats. Slowly. Its chest expands with the heat of the day and contracts with the cold of the night. It inhales and exhales with the Earth. That's more than I can claim.*

*The pavement is a river. Concrete river. Flowing, flowing. It carries the last few dregs of humanity along with it. The pavement is more alive than me. That's why it's bleeding. Bleeding rivers of blood. I caress the pavement. The pavement is everyone I've ever known. The pavement says goodbye. I can't reply.*

9/11/10

The man with the wild green eyes came in late on Tuesday. He was never late. But I checked my wristwatch against the purple, chihuahua-adorned Taco Bell clock and realized he really was late. He was never late.

I sat and waited for an hour. I passed the time by slowly eating my burritos and comparing myself to all of the other normal people in the establishment. I was normal too, I felt. A lukewarm, sluggish sense of contentment assailed my body as I shoveled down my tortilla-wrapped cancer-meat. I knew it was unhealthy for my body. I tried not to think about that too much. It was easy not to think about it. It was easy not to think. It was easy. I closed my eyes. The noise was soothing, the clamor engulfed me but I didn't go to Nowhere because I was now, somehow, *part* of the clamor, *part* of the crowd, *part* of Nowhere itself.

The door jingled and the room went silent. Annoyed, I opened my eyes. The man with the wild green eyes stood there, smiling. Why was everybody silent. I shook my head. My head was still muddy. I looked at him again. Something was sticking out of his chest.

It was a knife, a Taco Bell-themed kitchen knife, a purple Taco Bell-themed kitchen knife with a cheap, plastic, disembodied chihuahua head at the end of the handle, the plastic chihuahua head was stained with Taco Bell hot sauce - no, blood, yes, blood - stained with blood and blood and blood and blood and blood.

The man with the wild green eyes staggered over to me. His steps were sporadic. He stumbled. Hit a table and pushed himself back up. Staggered. Walking. He came over to my table with excruciating slowness. He stopped. He fell into my lap, blood everywhere, blood on me. He looked into my eyes and I looked into his. The wild green was fading. Dimming. He was fading from the world as the ocean tide rose and swept his name from the sand. I called out his name. I screamed his name. His eyes were just green now. He coughed. Drew in a deep breath. He said:

“Let me tell you, boy, how I came to love Taco Bell. I am three years old. I am ugly and bad at sports. Momma won't buy me new clothes and my Granddaddy just OD'd on heroin. I steal money from Momma's purse and buy myself a Burrito Supreme. I buy myself three Burrito Supremes. I am five years old. Momma's going on about how Jews are taking over the country. I don't have any siblings or friends. Taco Bell allows me to escape it all. I am fifteen years old. It's my birthday. Mom shoots herself in the head with Grandad's old single-action revolver. It's my birthday. I find her dead, take all of her money, and go to Taco Bell. I don't feel any pain. Taco Bell numbs me. Taco Bell saves me from the pain. I don't go to her funeral. I'm twenty-one. I'm a high-school dropout working at Taco Bell for minimum wage. I get free burritos. I have a chihuahua named Gidget, after the Taco Bell chihuahua. I live in a run-down apartment. There's a kid with a

bunch of pet lizards that lives across the hall. I think he's a Reptilian and and a Jew. I have no money. I have no friends. I just have burritos. I'm thirty-nine now. I killed the lizard kid, even though he wasn't a kid no more. I killed myself. I still love Taco Bell. I was going to kill you, but I think I already did.”

He collapsed onto the cold tile floor, blood pouring from his chest, waterfalls of blood pouring from his chest.

“You're dead now, boy.”

He died. His eyes were still wide open.

His eyes now had no color at all.

A group of bespeckled men in lab coats came and dragged away his body. They were all dressed in white. Everything was white. There were no longer any bloodstains. I was consumed by white. I was back in Nowhere.

I noticed an old television positioned directly in front of me. I was strapped to a hard metal chair.

I watched the snowy television and dreamt of white noise.



# Empty

**W**ith a nod and a sigh she said goodbye and through the misty night drove until she could drive no more. She thought of nothing as she passed through the neon city lights between towering walls of countless windows. Her mind was blank and for once she was neither happy nor sad, neither up nor down. Violent swings had brought her to this point, this fleeing faux reality, and this emptiness could only bring her deeper.

With the crush of gravel she came to a stop under a red glow and as if in memory stepped into the cafe where she saw him. There sitting alone in a corner booth he sat with dust bunnies dancing about him in the halo-like glow of the buzzing florescent. He spoke to her between sips of his steaming cup but the words came out like the buzzing of the bright florescent and she could not understand.

A waitress in black approached her with a note on which was written “he is dead”.

She sighed and scribbled back to the waitress, “but he is here in front of me”.

The waitress moved away and the buzzing grew louder. He moved his mouth but she could no longer hear him.

They left together and moved swiftly through the streets. Behind his door she removed her clothing. The dim light shining through her fragile hair created an aura around her soft body and she

came to him, embracing him like she once had, yielding to him in every way. They lay in silence until night ran into dusk spiraling back into itself and for once beauty had a name. Renown words no longer had subjective meanings and she smiled to herself letting the cool mist from her mouth glide across her stomach.

# Boris The Tentacle Beast

\* This story contains **EXPLICIT CONTENT** \*

(Also, the lord's name is taken in vain!.)

## PREVIOUSLY:

Rachel falls prey to a tentacle beast, and the consequences become apparent when she lays an egg several days later. Having escaped from its laboratory, the creature ravages a second girl, Jessica, in the interim. Amy, the student responsible for the creature, leaves her department late one evening, and is abducted.

\* \* \*

Jessica watched the time display on her mobile roll over to 08:57, then returned it to her pocket. She hadn't managed to sleep at all, and now everything felt cold and bright and slightly fuzzy. There was nobody else in the waiting room besides her, and it didn't seem that the nurse had arrived yet. She ran a clinic on-campus on alternate days. There was a notice board on the wall opposite Jessica, which bore posters about a wide variety of issues. Among others, they included posters about stress, procrastination, and STDs - everything a university student could possibly suffer from, except being forcibly violated by tentacles in a dormitory bathroom. Did tentacles have a collective noun? Jessica didn't know. It seemed unlikely.

The nurse arrived, a professional-looking woman somewhere in her forties. She looked down at Jessica while unlocking the door to her office.

"I can see you in a few minutes," she said, and disappeared inside.

Jessica picked a leaflet up from the table beside her. According to it, she could have a free movie ticket if she turned up to one of the student union's chlamydia testing sessions. Something about the whole business seemed vaguely distasteful, and she returned the leaflet to its stack.

The nurse's voice came from the other side of the door.

"Come in, please."

The nurse didn't look at her when she entered, focusing instead on her computer screen.

"Name?"

"Jessica Sanders."

"Date of birth?"

"April 19th."

"Ah, yes. From 'D' dormitory, correct?"

"That's right."

"And what can I help you with today, Jessica?"

The nurse finally looked at her, interlacing her fingers and placing her hands on the desk in front of her.

"I was-" Jessica realised how her story was going to sound, but actually saying it made her doubt herself even more. "I was raped by something," she said.

"Something?"

"I was in the bathroom," she said. "And something came up out of the toilet. With tentacles." She looked down at her feet. She must sound completely crazy, she thought. The nurse took a while to consider her statement.

"Tentacles," she said, finally. "Like a squid?"

"I don't know, I guess so."

"And they came out of the toilet and raped you, that's what you're saying? I want to be perfectly clear."

"Yes."

"That is definitely what happened? That's why you're here?"

"Yes," Jessica said quietly.

The nurse closed her eyes, and rubbed her temple with an index finger.

"Are you under a lot of stress right now, Jessica?" she asked. "How's work?"

"It's normal, I guess," Jessica said, "What does that have to do with anything?"

"Problems with your friends? At home?"

"N-no, everything's fine, look-"

"I just want to reiterate what you've just told me, Jessica - you've come here to tell me that some kind of 'tentacle monster' has raped you?"

"I know it's hard to believe," she said. "But it happened."

"Look at me, Jessica." The nurse took

one of Jessica's hands in both of hers. Her expression was serious, but not unkind. "I don't know why you feel that you need to tell stories like this, but it's obvious that you're having some kind of problem. I can't help you unless you tell me what's actually going on."

"It happened! It did happen!"

"It's all right, Jessica. You don't need to raise your voice, just try and be calm."

"I can't!" she cried. The tears came suddenly, and all at once. The nurse withdrew her arm, looking startled, and Jessica buried her hands in her face and let out huge, heaving sobs.

"It was horrible," she said. She could only get halfway through the next sentence before it turned into more gasping sobs. The nurse held out a box of tissues. Jessica used three of them, and somehow managed to calm herself enough to take a few, deep breaths. She looked up at the nurse, and sniffled.

"All done?" said the nurse.

Jessica nodded. She would have appreciated some more compassionate words. The nurse pulled out a small, white card from a drawer, and pushed it across the desk.

"I'm referring you to this psychiatrist," she said. "He's very good. He deals with students a lot. Call this number and get an appointment."

"You don't believe me," said Jessica.

"Regardless of what I believe, this man will help you more than I can. Please make an appointment as soon as possible."

"Why would I lie about it? Aren't you supposed to help people?"

"Jessica." The nurse's voice was suddenly stern. "We're done here. Call them for an appointment. And for God's sake, try and get some sleep. You look exhausted."

Jessica grabbed the card, not looking back as she left the office and slammed the door. She crossed her arms tightly and set off across the campus towards to her dormitory, but she barely had the energy to walk. The encounter had left her in complete despair. Nobody was going to believe her about what happened.

She dropped down onto a bench alongside the path, and swallowed hard against the lump in her throat. Her vision went blurry again. As students hurried around her to their various lectures, Jessica sobbed quietly, watching her tears drop onto the grass between her feet as she held her head in her hands. Nobody even looked at her as they walked past.

\* \* \*

Amy didn't know how much time had passed since the helicopter ride. They had taken the sack off from over her head once they were airborne, and replaced it with a blindfold. Nobody had said anything to her for the rest of the flight. After landing, she had been escorted across a surface that felt like tarmac, and down several flights of stairs to a room where she was told to sit on a bed and wait. She had asked if they would take the blindfold off, and they told her that they wouldn't. Amy had protested that the plastic zip ties were cutting into her wrists, and somebody replaced them with fabric restraint cuffs, binding her ankles in

the same manner.

It sounded like somebody else had been in the room with her for some time, although they never said anything. The only noises had been the sounds of breathing, and the occasional rustle of paper. Amy lay on her side, wondering what was going to happen to her.

There was the sound of the room's door opening. A voice said, "here she is." There were at least two people, by the sounds of the footsteps.

"Are you going to tell me what's going on yet?" she ventured. She sat up, and faced towards where she guessed the noise to be coming from.

"In time, Miss Peterson. But first, some questions."

Something scraped against the floor. The cuffs were unfastened, and Amy raised her hands to remove the blindfold. Before she could do so, someone grasped her by the shoulders, and guided her to sit in a chair. There was a click, and she felt radiant warmth on her face. The blindfold was removed. Amy squinted into the glare of a lamp that was pointed at her face. She tried to stand, but the hands remained firmly placed on her shoulders, holding her down.

"Why are you doing this?" she said. As her eyes adjusted, she began to make out the form of another person standing behind the light.

"We've got some questions about your research, Miss Peterson." The voice was female, her accent neutral. Something vaguely British.

"Is this about Boris?"

"This is about the creature B-zero-R-L-five, transferred to your supervisor's laboratory in June of this year, Miss Peterson. We believe it might have managed to escape from the laboratory. Do you know anything about that?"

Amy was clearly in serious trouble, and probably didn't want to be on the wrong side of the sort of people who had access to helicopters for abduction purposes. She decided it would be a good idea to cooperate.

"It escaped three nights ago," she said. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean for it to happen! Please don't tell Dr. Bryant."

The other voice whispered something to another person, out of view behind the blinding glare.

"Miss Peterson, what's the extent of the physical contact you've had with the creature?"

"Just... just normal work," she said. "We were told that there wasn't any danger of pathogens, so we aren't taking any really special precautions."

"Could you please describe the events that lead to the creature's escape?"

"It flushed itself down a toilet," she said.

There was a pause. "And why the hell it was able to enter a bathroom outside of the laboratory environment? What were you doing?" The anger of her voice increased over the course of the question.

"I don't know!"

"You don't know?" her interrogator seemed to be losing her temper. "You

were working on an extremely rare, valuable, and highly mobile animal specimen, and you 'don't know' what you were doing when it escaped? What kind of a scientist are you?"

"I'm only a grad student!"

"Exactly!"

There was a sigh, and the other voice was quiet for a while. Amy still couldn't see anything past the glare of the light, although she could discern the sound of a pencil writing on paper.

"Miss Peterson, the release of this creature into the wild represents a serious risk to the environment, and possibly to humans. We don't know how it responds to people, and your own notes on the matter are, I see, quite sparse. It seems from your presentation the other day that you believe the creature's reproductive cycle involves depositing eggs in hosts, correct?"

"Yes," she said.

"And your evidence to support this is...?"

"I did some experiments," Amy said. "On animals. Pigs." She had said as much in her presentation. How were they to know what she'd actually done, anyway? She always made sure that nobody saw her taking Boris from the enclosure for one of her 'sessions'.

"We'll need all the data. It doesn't appear to be in your most recent lab notes. Actually, there's no mention of the work anywhere."

So much for that idea.

"I... I haven't written out the experiments yet," she ventured.

## Some Pervert

"Oh for Christ's-!" The other voice didn't even bother to complete the sentence. There was the sound of more scribbling, terminated with something being underlined emphatically.

"So the egg hypothesis was just wild speculation?"

"Well, not exactly..."

"So you did actually do the experiments?"

"Sort of," said Amy. She shifted in the chair uncomfortably.

"Get to the goddamn point!"

"I- I let it fuck me, all right?"

The pencil dropped to the floor. It rolled until it came to rest against a table leg.

"There, I said it. I did the experiment, on myself, all right?. It fucked me, and I know it lays eggs because I had to take them out afterwards."

There was a protracted silence, and then a follow-up question, delivered very calmly.

"You let the creature deposit its eggs inside you?"

"Yes," she said.

The pencil was retrieved. More scribbling ensued.

"All right, sounds like we'll need to examine her." The voice was addressed to whoever was standing behind Amy's chair.

"What? No! There wasn't an egg this

time, if that's what you're looking for. He- it didn't lay one."

"This time?" Just how many times have you let this happen?"

"I don't know. Ten or so, maybe fifteen? I wasn't counting."

"Jesus Christ, Amy."

"I took them out afterwards! It's fine! I haven't got sick from it, or anything!"

Her interrogator turned to the other figure. "I want to be thorough. Go and tell them we need a full MRI scan."

"Yes, ma'am."

"I'll make a start with the more basic examinations."

Despite her protests, no part of Amy's body was left unexamined over the hours that followed. They blindfolded her again, and strapped her down to a bed. Latex-gloved fingers probed and inspected her with excruciating thoroughness, after which some sort of endoscope was forced down her throat to examine her insides. Then they performed the same investigation from the other end. They removed her clothes, and gave her a hospital gown to wear instead. She endured an hour in the claustrophobic confines of an MRI scanner. They had taken samples of everything it was possible to sample, treating her more like a specimen than a person.

She was eventually returned to the room, and told that she should rest for a few hours. She tried the door, but of course it had been locked from the outside. She lay down on the bed. Despite her anxiety about what might happen to her next, exhaustion prevailed,



and she quickly fell asleep. As a result, she had no idea how much time had passed when she was suddenly woken by someone shaking her roughly by the shoulders.

"Wake up," a voice was saying. "Wake up."

Her eyes were hurting from fatigue. Amy blinked, and the shape before her resolved into the face of a severe-looking, bespectacled young woman.

"Get up," she said. "You're going to tell me everything you know about this 'Boris'."

\* \* \*

Lucy and the others watched as the youngest member of the girls' second-division field hockey team jogged towards them - she was called Anna, and was a first-year. Like the rest of them, she had changed into her kit beforehand, and was wearing shorts and a jersey. Alongside Lucy, Sarah crossed her arms and gave a very deliberate sigh.

"Would it kill her to be on time, just once?"

"She was probably hanging out with her boyfriend again," said Lucy.

"Oh god, she's still seeing that guy? The one who wears that trench coat all the time? Fedora guy?"

"Yep," said Lucy. "I just wish I knew why. There must be something seriously wrong with her that we don't know."

"Maybe he's secretly got a massive dick, or something."

There were cackles of laughter from the other girls in the group.

"Or wait, I know, I know," said Lucy, "maybe he finally convinced her to join his World of Warcraft guild."

More laughter. "Ugh, I bet she would, too. Next thing she'll be hanging around with those guys who dress up and hit each other with foam swords. What were they called? 'Larpers' or something?"

"Shh, she's getting close!"

"Hey Anna! Glad you could join us! Finally!"

"Sorry!" she called. "I had a lecture, and stuff. You know. Why are we practicing in the middle of the morning, anyway?"

"That's when the pitch was free. Hurry up, we need to go and get the rest of the kit."

The girls made their way across the wide-open sports field towards the astroturf, the domain of the field hockey team. It was enclosed by a wire fence, and alongside it stood the equipment shed: a squat, cream-coloured building with a corrugated steel roof that had been built rather too large for the meager equipment that was stored within it. Lucy set the pace as they jogged over, the first part of their warm-up. With today's practice attendance at seven members, it was going to be another session of drills and exercises. The prospect didn't fill her with enthusiasm.

The remaining functional lights illuminated the shed as Lucy entered. Their equipment was piled to the left of the door: a bin full of hockey sticks,

plastic marker cones, and other paraphernalia. The rest of the shed was largely empty apart from a stack of boxes in one corner, and some ladders laid along a wall. Everything smelled of dust. The cobwebs in some of the corners were thick enough to be completely opaque.

To the right was a doorway that led into a shower room that was seldom used by anyone, principally due to the lack of any hot water. By the sounds of it, one of the shower heads was still leaking - there was a steady beat of droplets impacting the tiled floor. Lucy lifted a hockey stick out of the bin, freezing halfway through the movement at a noise that seemed to have come from within the shower room. She held her hand up, and told the other girls to be quiet.

"Um, why?" enquired Sarah.

"Sshh! Didn't anyone else hear that?"

"I don't think so, Lucy."

They waited for ten seconds. Sarah rolled her eyes, and as she opened her mouth to say something there was a distinct squeaking noise from the other room, the sound of stressed metal.

"I told you," Lucy said.

"So what? The shower's even more fucked. Big deal."

"We should probably check it out. If the leak gets any worse then it's a pretty big waste of water," said Anna.

"Fine. Go and check it out, Miss Environmentalist."

Anna headed over to the shower room while the rest of the girls sorted

through the equipment. There was a gap of perhaps three seconds between when she entered, and the sound of her screaming.

They ran over. Anna emerged from the doorway but tripped, barely breaking her fall with her hands. She was wide-eyed.

"Help me! It's got me, it's fucking got me!"

She was jerked through the doorway, back into the room.

The girls exchanged glances, before hurrying inside.

"Oh my god."

"Don't just stand there! Fucking help me!"

There was a three-foot wide hole in the centre of the floor, and there were pieces of broken tile and plaster strewn about the place. Upon the hole's rim there was a soft mass of something blue and white, from which there radiated a number of flexible limbs, each the thickness of Lucy's forearm. Three of these limbs were wrapped around Anna's body, the remainder flopping about on the floor or slithering around the pipework like huge, pale worms.

The girls' reactions were variously terrified or incredulous. Lucy realized she should be helping Anna and stepped forward, raising her hockey stick to strike at the nearest of the creature's tentacles. Anna was hysterical, her body thrashing as she tried to escape the creature's grip, which only resulted in the tentacles coiling tighter around her thighs and chest. She attempted to scream again, but the constriction of her ribcage made



the noise into a feeble mewl.

The five others, three of whom were screaming, appeared to draw the creature's attention. A slit opened on the central, bulbous body to reveal a single eye, which gazed at them ominously. Hannah, the furthest back among them, turned to flee. One of the free tentacles darted between the girls' legs, stretching like rubber, and snapped around her ankle. It yanked her backwards and she fell over hard, her head meeting the tiles with an audible smack. She was unresisting as the creature reeled her limp body towards itself.

"Someone get help! Go and get help!"

Lucy brought her hockey stick down on the nearest tentacle. It was surprisingly yielding when she hit it, as if it were made of clay. The implement left a visible dent, turning the white skin of the creature dark purple. The creature let out a high-pitched shriek, the wounded limb uncoiling from Hannah's ankle and retreating to the central body.

"How'd you like that, you little fucker?!"

She raised her stick again, and sprained an arm muscle as she tried to swing the it downwards. She looked up to see that two more of the limbs had wound themselves around it. The creature wrested it from her hands effortlessly. Lucy looked about for other weapons to improvise, but there were none. Alongside her, Sarah clutched desperately at a tentacle that was tightening around her neck. Two more girls fell to the ground as their legs were pulled from under them.

The creature forced Lucy to the

ground using the hockey stick, and another tentacle pinned her in place. The tip of it bore down on her sternum with a weight that seemed impossible for its liveness. As if to taunt her, the creature snapped the hockey stick like a twig, and let out another shriek. It discarded the splintered wood, and then both of the tentacles it had used lunged towards her.

All around her were the sounds of screams and cries from the other girls. Lucy looked about to see that nobody had managed to escape. Anna was being pinned against the ceiling, and the creature was staring up at her with its single, hideous eye. The wounded tentacle returned to its prey now that it sensed the danger was past, slithering around Hanna's leg and dragging her across the floor. The other girls were likewise ensnared. Those whose hands were still free were beating ineffectually at the tentacles as they coiled around their bodies. The creature seemed to be having trouble grappling all of them at once, but the length of its appendages meant that one tentacle was easily capable of wrapping itself around two bodies at a time. Screams gave way to breathless gasps as the girls struggled for air against the constricting grip.

Sarah's cries were muted as the tentacle around her neck forced its way into her mouth, pushing her head back. She gagged and retched, and orange-coloured ooze escaped past her lips and dribbled down her chin. Her knuckles were white as she gripped the assailing limb. One of the tentacles that had taken an interest in Lucy seized her, jerking her up into the air by her arms. The other slipped away to snake up beneath another girl's jersey.

By this point, the creature had a very good grip on every one of the seven girls,

its tentacles coiled about their chests. Some of them had been too slow to move their arms out of the way, which were now pinned by their sides. At least two girls were choking on tentacles that had entered their mouths. The neon-coloured mucus that the creature secreted seemed to be having some kind of sedating effect - Lucy could see Sarah's struggles becoming weaker as the tentacle bulged and disgorged another payload of ooze into her. Her cheeks bulged, and orange goop trickled from her nostrils.

The creature was drawing all of the girls towards itself, slowly but inescapably. With remarkable dexterity, it began to transfer the girls between tentacles, squashing them together in order to free up some of its limbs. The grip around Lucy slackened for a brief moment, and she found herself face to face with Amanda, a girl two years her junior who had only joined the team the previous week. Amanda's cheeks were wet with tears. Her expression was one of complete, uncomprehending fear. A single tentacle coiled around them both, squeezing their bodies together.

"Oh God," Amanda was crying, "why me? Why?"

Something cold and wet slithered up Lucy's shorts. It hooked around the waistband, and tugged them away. She could see the same thing happening to one of the other girls, who was screaming and kicking her legs to no effect as her bottom was exposed. The tentacle slipped along her inner thigh, and her screams took on a different character as it entered her. Lucy realised the same thing would happen to her, and clenched her thighs together as hard as she could. The tentacle butted against her knees, wriggling vigorously and squirting her with more

of the apparently endless slime. Of course, she was unable to tense her muscles forever, and at the first sign of a slight relaxation, the tentacle forced its way up and inside her.

Lucy groaned through gritted teeth as she was penetrated. The tentacle was fat, but the smoothness of its skin and the ample lubrication meant that it made its way inside easily. It writhed within her while she tried to get enough breath to scream. Either some of the girls had already given up, or they had been completely incapacitated by the sedating mucus - the creature was handling them like rag dolls, jerking them around roughly as it violated their every orifice. It apparently devised other plans for Amanda, lifting her up and holding her upside-down by one ankle. The position made her legs hang open, and another, opportunistic tentacle burrowed into her. She moaned weakly.

A torn scrap of material fell across Lucy's face, the remains of someone's shredded panties. The creature was tearing their clothes away like wrapping paper. She was dragged closer to the central body, and another girl collided with her as the creature consolidated them into a heap of helplessly struggling bodies. Lucy could feel a hand grasping blindly somewhere around the small of her back. Her face was mashed into another girl's buttocks, and as a result her cries were smothered as one of the creature's free tentacles forced its way into her own behind.

The whole pile of girls lurched as the creature repositioned itself, and the mucus-slick buttocks were shifted from Lucy's face just as she thought she might suffocate. Three inches away, she saw a tentacle slide in between them

and do to their owner what had just happened to her. Somewhere up above her, there was a whimper. A minute later, the very same tentacle withdrew and turned towards Lucy. She clamped her lips together as tightly as she could, but was powerless to prevent the tentacle's entry. The limb slid down her throat, and fed her another dose of warm slime.

There was very little struggling from any of them now, only defeated moans and gasps. Lucy found that she was barely able to move her limbs - her whole body was going numb. The tentacle around her released its grasp, and even though she was now completely unrestrained, none of her muscles seemed to be responding.

"Is... can anyone still move?" she said. It was difficult to form the words; she slurred as if she were drunk. Somebody responded with a groan.

"What ... what's it gonna do..." somebody wondered. "It... it's looking at me... oh, shit. Ow. Ow."

The girl who had been speaking was hoisted into the air by her armpits, and the creature held her against the wall. Its other tentacles began dribbling copious amounts of mucus onto her - a different consistency this time, white and gelatinous. It seemed to begin thickening the moment it was exuded, and it soon became apparent that the creature was using it to glue the girl to the wall. It smeared another glob across her mouth, which quickly set into a rubbery membrane, only narrowly leaving her nose uncovered. Lucy could see panic in the girl's eyes.

By the time the creature was finished, the girl was swathed in a slimy cocoon, the weak movements of

her body just visible beneath the thick membrane. She was shaking her head and sobbing. Lucy was next, and the creature chose to stick her to the ceiling. She was able to take a long look at the girls lying on the floor, sprawled haphazardly, orange slime coagulating on and around their bodies. The creature saw fit to squeeze out a large quantity of its adhesive onto Lucy's face - fortunately she managed to close her eyes before the tentacle covered them. Now blinded, she could only listen as the same fate befell the rest of the girls. A while later the wet sounds ceased, as presumably the creature had finished immobilising the last of them. The silence was now only broken by an occasional groan or sob.

A tentacle stroked Lucy's face, and the creature made a satisfied purring sound.

\* \* \*

Rachel still had no idea what she should do with the egg. Having spent the last hour staring at it, she had decided to take a walk and clear her head. She had tried once to dispose of it, holding it over the sink with the intention to crush it and wash whatever came out down the drain. And yet, despite the horrible circumstances that had surrounded the egg's appearance, she felt that it would be wrong to kill what was presumably growing inside. Some instinct told her that it needed to be protected, and was her responsibility.

In fact, she had felt quite guilty as she carried it back to her room afterwards. She had carefully placed it upon her pillow, where it remained while she sat and looked at it and wondered what to do. She had hidden it out of harm's way before leaving, nestled amongst her clothes in a

## Some Pervert

drawer. It would probably be a good idea to tell someone about it. Later, she decided.

There weren't many students around campus at this time in the morning - it was half past ten, which meant anybody on a serious course would be in lectures, and the arts students would still be asleep. It reminded her that she did still, technically, have studies of her own to attend to. In the days since her encounter with the creature, she had decided to deal with her feelings by simply not thinking about them. More recently, the memory of the initial trauma had been supplanted by the experience of actually laying the egg, which, whilst certainly strange, had not been entirely unpleasant - quite the opposite, she thought. She had even caught herself wondering if she might experience it again somehow.

Her reverie was interrupted by a snuffle from someone to her left. Rachel turned to see a girl sitting on a bench near the side of the path, her eyes red from crying. From the looks of things, she had been doing it for a while now. They made a brief, awkward moment of eye contact, before the girl covered her face to her hands and hunched over, her back shaking with the force of her sobs.

Rachel sat beside her, saying nothing. The girl calmed down after a couple of minutes, and wiped her face with a tissue that Rachel offered her.

"Thanks," she said.

"Want to talk about it?" said Rachel.

"No. No, it's fine," she said. "You wouldn't believe me anyway. Nobody will." She sniffled, and tried to laugh at her comment.

"Try me. I've been through some pretty messed-up stuff myself recently. I'm Rachel, by the way. What's your name?"

"Jessica," the girl said.

# If Only We Met at Steak and Shake

I stared up at the burly man whom I just rear-ended, his bulging pecks almost bursting out of his v-neck t-shirt. He was so sexy and terrifying I started sweating from sheer confusion. His truck compared to my car wasn't even a matter of debate. I left little more than a tire scuff on his while my entire front bumper was hanging like Droopy the Dog's jowls. Still, he towered over me, ready to jump me...I hoped. "Um, can I have your information?" I said trying to give him my best puppy dog eyes. The man's forehead produced a vein bigger than my thumb. I realized his temper outweighed his sex drive. A tense silence followed, "Actually, I think I can fix this myself." I drove off as fast as I could, my bumper dragging the entire way.



**S**nows recede in ways leaves and rain know,  
with wrappers and butt ends and duds,  
runoff clot of dim snow at the statue end  
of a walkway— some founder in stone  
where people lean to talk on phones.

**Our Own Private Ice Age**  
by Nicolas Eckerson

**O**liver Cromwell said:  
*My mother told me not to listen to boys  
Who try to lure me into an alley  
To look at Real Poems.*

**Let's Date the Protector of the  
Commonwealth!**

By Chris Schaffer

# Let's Date the Protector of the Commonwealth!

By Chris Schaeffer

Consider the poetry equivalent of Oliver Cromwell  
Moving along the line snatching Leveller pamphlets  
From the helmets of the soldiers—

Like AWP but with more executions--?  
I'd like a job that's also a metonymy  
For 200 years of blathering lyric readings,  
That's also a grand gesture  
That convinces people to pay me,  
Cite me, and kiss my enormous ruby ring.

Some people rolled their eyes  
When Robert Lowell said  
*This is the end of running on the waves*  
Because they'd had enough  
Of masculine epiphanies and feats of magic flexing,

Books with shoddy binding,  
Straight dudes making fascicles  
With beeswax on their testicles,  
And needles upright in their teeth.

I said to Oliver Cromwell:  
*Don't trust a text that doesn't blow up  
When you approach.  
If you walk near the image of the text,  
And it doesn't turn out to be three or four  
Disparate items arrayed in a rough  
Visual approximation of a text, run,  
Don't walk, on the waves to your closest barricade.*  
Oliver Cromwell said:  
*My mother told me not to listen to boys  
Who try to lure me into an alley  
To look at Real Poems.*

I liked the starched collar peeking over his armor.  
I liked the cut of his Pilgrim hat. His fly and open throat.  
I gave him R. Franklin's variorum edition  
Of the *Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson*  
For Valentine's Day, marked with a peacock feather,  
His birth-mark in the shape of a book assigned to scattering,  
And PS, that's not lipstick on the rim of his pamphlet,  
That's blood, dude! Really! Remember?  
From the *Eikon Basilike* we bit in half together!



# Our own private Ice Age

By Nicolas Eckerson

*“When viewed on multimillion-year time scales,  
Earth is presently in a glacial interval”*

Untimely melt of winter days.

Snows recede in ways leaves and rain know,

with wrappers and butt ends and duds,

runoff clot of dim snow at the statue end

of a walkway— some founder in stone

where people lean to talk on phones.

Colleges and the recreational twenties

track the current ice age stage passover

wiping brows with sleeves

rubber bracelets tough with reminder

underneath saying we are proud alive

better than watches could.

Something about our driving on

keeps the four seasons alive. Or flip that.

They sigh and drag showing tardiness

a new spirit. Depressed, finally feeling useless

with all that’s developed in place of a bare face,

the four wait to graduate into one set state.

So humor the four of them as if they were a band

mid classic discography lines, mid world tour,

fulfilling some contract.

*Stuck inside these four walls, sent inside forever...*

*Drove my Chevy to the levee, but the levee was dry*

*Them good ol’ boys were drinking whiskey and rye, singing...*

*For the band on the run, band on the run, band on the run, band on the run*

# Worth-Lessness

By Paul Olexa

What does he keep, right on him?  
A wallet plus some keys;

yet glancing down, nothing  
stands worth walling bar  
this wall itself, latching  
within carved pigskin shelf  
obscene plasticard, art belied  
discarded worth's lost dream –

checked, invisible checking.

What does she lay, left on her?  
A purse minus one lock:

undisputed want accommodated,  
discombobulated, rein lent without  
measured oscillation, only  
hamstrung wheels spinning, zipped  
ahead, pursed lips sped  
over shoulder-shoulder,  
gauging peered lockstep  
growing ever bolder,  
panic wracking stillness lacking –

check in, invisible checking.

On borderlines they meet –  
a wall, found its centerpiece;  
a purse, at centers  
peaced together.

– checked, indivisibles set.

# loving too hard

By Sarah A. Williams

he drags his nails down her back  
creating trails of white where the blood has left the skin  
raising red and angry lines when the blood returns  
he bites down on her skin  
perforated circles leave violet trails up her inner thigh  
in the morning they are blue, black, bruised  
love bites  
'i love you' fights  
she likes them  
but they hurt to touch  
    she is scarred from loving too hard  
he glares and spits behind their backs  
leaves saliva running in trails down her face  
she wipes it away before anyone turns  
he strikes hard against her skin  
a rosy glow upon her cheeks; slapped cheek; fifth disease  
she tells her mother she's under the weather  
just a fever  
but he is hurting, not just touching  
    she is scarred from loving too hard

# Asstrophil and Swella

By A Valentine

A butt is just a big ol' mound of meat-  
but only if the sun is just a torch:  
illuminating passions with its heat  
to flare, to toast, to sizzle-and to scorch.

To Helios all fit men raise their spears:  
its perfect cleft, the firmament's desire.  
A stellar map of hot, gyrating spheres  
must then all soldiers' lusty brays inspire.

Why must Apollo's gaze be sole, aloft?  
Diana's eyes should also oft descend.  
The red-cheeked herd he whips into a wroth  
could under her hand yearn to strut-and bend

The center of our universe entwined'  
a binary: my sun your butt, yours mine.

# INFORMATION

Distribution **Website**: [theaprilreader.wordpress.com](http://theaprilreader.wordpress.com)  
Send all **submissions, feedback,** and **suggestions** to: [theaprilreader@gmail.com](mailto:theaprilreader@gmail.com)

\* \* \*

## Credits:

Prole !XDERDXUpqQ	- Conception; Editor; Layout; Various Art
Michael Pietrobon	- Editor; Visual Art
Dmitriy Shakhrya	- Various Art; Layout; Proofreading
Daniel Li	- Photography; Feedback; Critique
Bantha_fodder	- Illustrations
R. C. Bertritt	- Proofreading; Feedback; Critique
Tom	- Proofreading; Tumblr Editor; Critique
Monad	- Proofreading; Feedback; Critique

**COVER BY Daniel Li**

\* \* \*

## Disclaimer:

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

