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SHAMPOO
HONEY FOR ALIENS
BUZZ

THE REPRISAL
POET ON CANNABIS
NEUTRAL IN THE SKY

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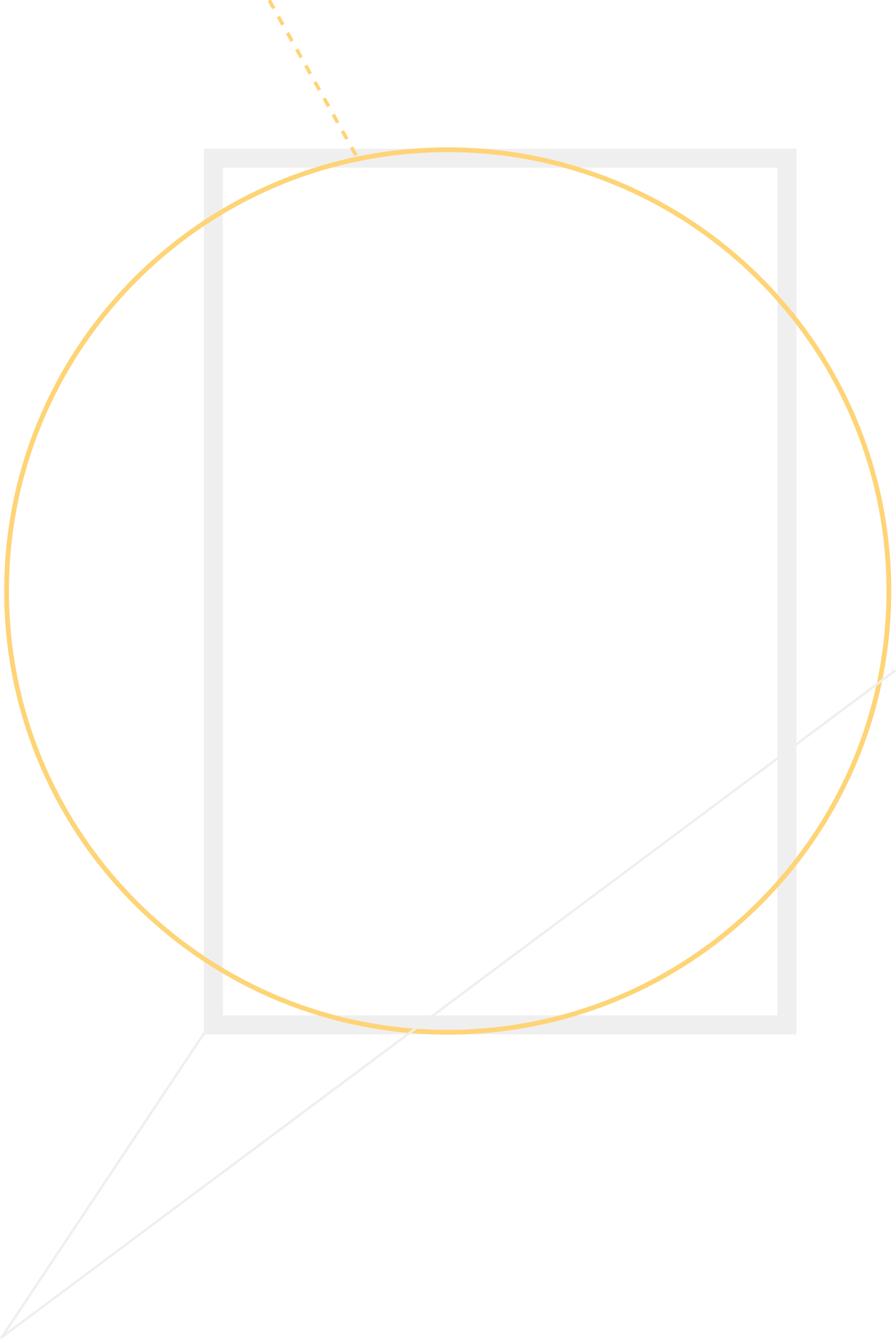
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PROSE

SHAMPOO

“You give me blood and I give you freedom.’ That’s what S.C. Bose said.”

“Wow, I could run an advert campaign for sanitary pads with that line,” I said.

“Really, you ought to show some respect for them freedom fighters.”

“Mr. Bose. The guy wanted nazism and nearly got it. Bengalis can be such masochists.”

“You fascinate me.”

Here I was, heart of the city, Nathu’s Café, drinking the finest iced tea I could get for miles, talking to this little

JNU academic. Nineteen, wearing salwar kameez, sunglasses, light make-up, dribbling Marx, torn chappals, post-man-style bag, inquiring and enthused face, already pseudo-intellectual, Bengali. I love reducing women to cultural stereotypes. She was a serious woman. And seriousness was fashionable.

“I think the number of road accidents have really gone up in this country.”

“Yeah? The iced tea’s real good.”

“Just yesterday I was reading in the morning papers, there was a major one in your hometown.”

“They don’t make such good iced tea in Bombay. These guys first make hot tea, then cool it with ice. Now, that’s original.”

“I’ve a friend doing a psychological study on the relationship between masturbation and car accidents.”

“Your friend, she’s a woman?”

“It’s all so morbid. There’s this think tank paying her a lot. They’re into risk-analysis and insurance or something.”

Parallel lines. They say that those things never intersect. Conversations, too, can fall in the same category. Heck, she wasn’t all that bad. It’s just that I’d benchmarked the perfect woman to be Diane Keaton and I thought I’d meet someone like that, and given my luck, that wasn’t gonna happen.

The jazzman was playing quietly in the corner. It was one of those very different eat-out places. Didn’t see too many of those. She’d discovered the place, and my, wasn’t it a swell place. I really dig low-key lighting, the one where only silhouettes can be seen. There was this noisy privacy, with small inward-facing tables giving every couple their own espace propre – giving

it a very relaxed feel. I was a sucker for good atmospherics. She knew that.

“I’ve been hearing some wild stories about you. The kind of things you do in Mumbai.”

“Uh-huh. Who’s this you been speaking to?”

“Arvind Desai.”

“I can imagine. Must’ve told you that I’m a pothead, right?”

“No, that’s news. He told me about this elder femme, though. She’s been seducing you, he says.”

“Haha. Actually, its the reverse in Mumbai.” I lived this thing about being an outsider. I was a Delhiite in Mumbai and a Mumbaikar in Delhi. Anguished étranger for life. I could speak with authority about either city to the other audience. “In Mumbai, the old are seduced by the young.”

The trumpet had just kicked in, muffling most of my last enunciation. Or ‘croak’ if her description of my voice could be trusted.

“Oh, I’m reading Jung myself. Memories, Dreams and Reflections.”

“Actually I said Neil Young. You know, the guy who had a blob of coke

in his nose at the Last Waltz.”

“Well, what about him?”

“This guy sounds like him, that’s all.”

I prided myself for managing to change the topic so subtly and unintentionally. Why did my friend have to be such an asshole? Didn’t he know I had some intentions with Ms. JNU sitting opposite me, here, cheerfully chattering about perfume and pax syriana. She was a quixotic commie.

“You know, sometimes I’m quite attracted to the Muslim culture.”

“The Muslim subculture? My, they’re worse than the RSS, I tell you.”

I leaned closer to her, with my hand supporting my chin. To quote the old Rolling Stoners, I was just a kiss away. I was a hopeless romantic. And she was a hopeless academic. I was in a mood to tease her conventional PC-type attitude today.

“No, I mean I’m serious. I think fundamentally Islam has strong foundations.”

“Yeah, but there’s no foreskin in Islam. What’s the point of the foundation minus the façade?”

“Was that some kind of joke?”

“No, no. Its just that I couldn’t consider a foreskin-less object to be a fellow male-creature, that’s all.”

“You’re very trippy today, ain’t you? Alright, let’s drop that topic. Tell me about this Bombay femme.”

“Huh?”

“Tell me.”

“She’s dead.”

“What!”

“She’d gone to France for a holiday. You know how pathetic her accent is. She ordered poison instead of poisson. You can understand what happened.”

“Oh, coz that just happened. Where do you con such juvenile jokes from?”

“Conned it off a grammar I been reading.”

“I’ve always wanted to learn a different language. A regional one, especially.”

“You know there’s this famous saying, let me paraphrase. To learn a language you need a girlfriend who speaks that language. To learn Hindi, go find a girlfriend in Sasaram, Bihar. To learn Bengali, go find a girlfriend in an aquarium.”

“Something’s fishy.”

We laughed. There’s something very touching about self-deprecating humor. I feel very close to people who can laugh about themselves.

“You know,” she said, “I’m becoming less serious in your company. I don’t know if its a sign of becoming frivolous or not.”

“Now that’s a very serious thought.”

We went to Paharganj the next day. Its like the Greenwich Village of Delhi – loads of little shops selling odds and ends, street-side bookstores that sell stuff by the kilo, and allow you to bargain on top of that, funny-faced stoners, lost expats always suffering from Delhi Belly because they’re silly enough to eat whatever is put out in front of them, strange bands trying to make it on the scene with the street gigs, and a famous brothel at the turning before the station. Going to this place was my idea. Being the high elite, Ms. JNU had never visited this place before. My Delhi pot-source was here, so I knew this place better than most average Delhi folk.

“Really, where’ve you got me.”

“Heart of the city, missus. If this was Italy, they’d have shot La Dolce Vita here and immortalized this place with their hype.”

“Luckily the Trevi fountain isn’t a glum pile of rust covered with bird merde, with hippies lying around everywhere.”

“Don’t knock on hippies, they’re good people, I tell you.”

“Aah, narcissist.”

“Well, I’ve always indulged in self-pity.”

“Wait, you told me there are good bookstores here. All I can see is trash. Says a lot about your literary taste. What have you been reading these days?”

“Um, I’ve given up all the theoretical JNU stuff, you know. Now I’m into more practical things.”

“Uh-huh. Like?”

“Like...I’ve been reading the Kama Sutra now. I earlier I read the Burrrp Food Guide, some G-man comics. Also read this curious book called the Perfumed Garden.”

“G-man? Now how’s that practical?”

“Well, I hope to be Edgar Hoover someday.”

“Best of luck on that front. What’s happened to this city?”

“Exactly,” I mimicked, ‘its dying because of the hippies. Where are all the them IITians and all the smart graduates? Surely they all ain’t looking for their Mrs. Robinsons.”

“Let’s get out of here.”

“Where d’you wanna go?”

“Saket. That mall.”

S’ket. That’s the way the Delhi folks pronounced it. Sucking your breath in at the “S’k” and extending the “ket” till eternity. S’ket was the big mall, with every transnational corporation brand that you could imagine. You got your Crocodile tapered pants, Alligator long sleeved shirts, Puma flexible shoes or any other animal you liked.

“How about Hauz Khas. We could sit by the lake. I skim stones pretty well, I could show you the art.”

“I’m not really into stone skimming.”

“Really? I’m actually quite an expert at it. Plan to take part in the event at Rio, 2016. Olympics.”

“S’ket.”

“The caves are awesome as well. And the trees, and ooh, the forest.”

“S’ket.”

“They’ve hyenas there as well. Wild deer, too.”

“S’ket.”

S’ket it was. Stubborn little urban kid that she was, she had her way. She had a way with words, however monosyllabic they were. Within an hour, we were in the middle of nowhere.

“What’s all this junk.”

“It’s shampoo. I really want the orange flavored one. They don’t seem to have it. And I’m tired of green-apple. Which one do you want?”

“I wanted the ginger-garlic one. They don’t have that either.”

“Try something more mainstream. Try green-apple, or I bet you don’t even know what that is.”

“Actually I do. I’d bought a

green-apple Durex once.”

“Search for the orange, will you?”

Heck, what was I doing here, anyway? In a goddam shampoo shop.

“We’re going to your place after this, right?”

“Found it. Finally. My place? No, I got other commitments.”

“Indeed. A date with Mr. Shampoo?”

“You’re crude. No, I gotta function to attend.”

“It’s not going to become a malfunction if you don’t attend. Get your priorities right.”

“Quit your nagging, will you. I’m going to be in this place till eight, then I gotta bounce.”

“But we’ve been here an hour already. That’s some fixation you have with shampoos.”

“I know, right? Nothing can come in the way between me and shampoo.”

“I wish they’d play better music.”

“I quite like Lady Gaga, actually.”

I’m something of a music snob. There are these moments when everything becomes intolerable and this was one of those moments. Call me neurotic if you want. I judge people by their music tastes.

“You just blew it there. I hope you know that.”

“Something of a dénouement, right?”

“More than that. I’d say, it’s the conclusion.” That’s something of an ending.

“You’re juvenile.”

“You’re shampoo.”

“I exist.”

“Go to hell, will you?”

REST ASSURED: I DIDN'T SLEEP WITH YOUR MOTHER

As confessions are necessary for any final e-mail, I'll begin mine now: I sold the iPad you gave me for \$300 and used the money to pay our outstanding electric bill. I also bought a used Segway off Craigslist for \$200. I will graciously subtract my net gain of \$300 from the \$500 that you still owe me. However, I do think it's only fair that you cover Rudolf's vet bill of \$72.98 because it was your hemp soap that got him so sick in the first place. This brings us to a grand total of \$272.98.

Before I continue, I'd like to update you on a few things around the apartment. Rudolf has gained a considerable amount of weight and

has been meowing constantly. He's starting to lose hair on his forehead and his whiskers have turned a rare shade of yellow. Hemp poisoning is no laughing matter, and it's nothing short of a miracle that he's still alive.

The left side of our bed still holds the imprint of your body and a spectral version of you continues to move freely through the apartment. I'll wake up in the middle of the night and see you next to me, the blanket to your waist and your freckled shoulder illuminated by the soft moonlight. I'll slowly turn you over to kiss your forehead. You'll meow at me and lick my nose with your sandpaper tongue. Sometimes you even scratch me.

With my newfound freedom, I walk around the house naked and fart as often as I'd like. This beats holding it in all night until my stomach feels like the insides of an over-inflated hot air balloon. Other changes: I use the restroom with the door open these days. I keep the toilet seat up and burp as loudly as possible whenever the urge strikes me. I drink like *Homo erectus* from the gallon of milk in the fridge and beat my chest with both fists whenever I'm frustrated.

You might like the more primitive me. I've grown my beard out and begin my mornings with one hundred push-ups and fifty sit-ups exactly. I've quit brushing my teeth and have started an Inuit diet. In my spare time, I've created a variation of the Gangnam Style dance that incorporates elements of the Harlem Shake and have watched my YouTube views soar to the double digits. I've also picked up sex toy origami and can now make a dildo out of a single sheet of paper. I will open an Etsy account soon.

Still, my life isn't the same without you. Sometimes I pretend you're in the shower next to me. This usually ends with me using the handheld showerhead in a way that I probably shouldn't mention here. Other times I have a mock fight with you

so the neighbor's won't ask questions regarding your whereabouts. I don't want them to think I killed you or something.

I suppose I should probably confess something else: I slept with your younger and arguably more beautiful sister after last year's Christmas party. I think you know what inspired this.

Remember last Halloween when you went out with your girlfriends to those trendy bars in Manhattan? Well, one of your friends explained to me in vivid detail that you went home with my friend Eric that night. My suspicions are confirmed every time I get drunk with Eric and he says something along the lines of: "Look, I slept with Melanie after last year's Halloween party. It's cool though, we're bros. My bad, man. Bros before hoes, for sure. I just figured I'd tell you. I don't want that shit on my conscience."

What Eric doesn't know is that we're not bros. He also doesn't know that I also slept with *his* sister in the weeks following my rendezvous with your sister. For me, revenge apparently comes in the form of sibling adultery. I'm not saying it's the right way, but it sure feels good to get revenge without resorting to violence or name calling.

Let's review your tally again: I will concede a little on the money owed to me in lieu of the fact your sister and I fornicated. From the principle balance owed to me of \$272.98, I will subtract the \$52.64 that I spent on the hotel room the night your sister and I hooked up. I will also subtract the \$24.37 that I spent on drinks at the bar before we went to the hotel, as well as the \$14 spent on breakfast at McDonald's the following afternoon. I will, however, add the cost of the morning after pill (\$70) to the total owed to me because it's your fault I cheated on you to begin with.

So, from the principle balance owed to me of \$272.98, \$91.01 will be subtracted, followed by the addition of \$70 for the morning after pill. This brings the grand total owed to me to \$293.99, which I'll go ahead and round up to \$294.

I guess this would be a good time to make a final confession: I seriously contemplated suicide after your sudden departure. Yes, it's true, and no, I'm not proud of it. However, with so many different ways to kill myself, I ran into great difficulty deciding on the best way to go.

I thought about going the autoerotic asphyxiation route, but

quickly realized I couldn't afford the trip to Thailand without selling off my 401K. Besides, I've never been that into bondage. Also, I hate closets and like Rudolf, I'm allergic to hemp. Being a movie buff, I also played with the tried and true method of wrist cutting, like in the scene from *The Royal Tenebaums*. I've since decided against it though, because I really couldn't see myself parting with my brand new beard and I'm also not a big fan of Elliot Smith.

Realizing I had no other options, I turned to the internet for suicide advice. On a blog, I found a recipe to make hydrogen sulfide. I was able to obtain the necessary calcium polysulfide from an insecticide I found at that little Mexican hardware store two blocks from your favorite bakery. You know, the one that always smells like onions and *frijoles refritos*. I stole the necessary hydrochloric acid from a forgotten bottle of toilet bowl cleaner in Eric's bathroom.

Wearing goggles, as I didn't want to get any of the chemicals in my eyes before I finished mixing, I carefully prepared the ingredients in the living room. Just then, your sister called and I took the call in the other room. In the meantime, Rudolf drank the toilet bowl cleaner because he was drunk.

From what I remember, I was drunk too.

I regret to inform you that Rudolf is now dead. I buried him two days ago under the guise of night in that wild strip of green that separates our apartment block from the Cuban sandwich shop. You can find Rudolf's grave there if you wish to pay your respects.

I also attempted to kill myself using my recently purchased Segway. I originally thought the best idea would be to drive the Segway off the top of our building. This would've created nothing short of a fiasco for our bastard of a landlord. In an interesting twist, it would've also paid homage to the Segway CEO's accidental death. Two birds, one Segway. I gave up on the idea after I realized how difficult it would be to get the damn thing over our building's parapet.

Waiting until it was dark and the drunks were out in Brooklyn, I rode my Segway around shouting racial slurs and swerving in and out of traffic. This proved to be highly ineffectual. Growing tired of the angry mob that had started chasing me, I ducked into the subway leaving my Segway behind. I went to retrieve it the next day and discovered

that my Segway had been severely vandalized. I blame PETA and the Occupy Movement.

Regrettably, the cost to repair the Segway nearly exceeded the initial cost of the Segway. And being that it was your fault I'd been trying to kill myself in the first place, I think it's only fair that you also cover the cost of the Segway. Since the Segway cost \$200 dollars, this brings the total owed to me \$494.

My failed suicide attempts led me to consider hiring a hitman to finish the job I apparently couldn't do myself. This raises a very important question: Is it still a suicide if you hire someone else to kill you and feign agreed upon ignorance during its happening? It sounds outlandish, but it definitely could work.

You'd think in a city as big as New York I'd be able to find a hitman easily. I routinely checked the bulletin boards at the coffee shops in and around Williamsburg, but I'm not quite as up on the hitman lingo as I used to be. Most notably, I had problems distinguishing the difference between Help Wanted ads and hitman-for-hire ads. Aren't they basically the same thing? In the end, I was unsuccessful.

Again, I should stress to you that the \$494 dollars owed to me should be easy to come by. People you could ask include your mother, whom I recently saw at the Manhattan Mall. She was raving madly about a new face cream made of bee venom from New Zealand. She asked me if I'd like to try it out. I obliged, and as your mother slowly worked her freshly manicured fingers into my forehead, our eyes met and I felt my skin tighten.

Rest assured: I didn't sleep with your mother. I don't know if she was drunk (possible), or just generally happy to see me, but she wine and dined me for the next three hours as we made our way around the mall. Apparently, you'd forgotten to mention our breakup.

Your mom bought me a pair of cheap headphones at RadioShack and a Dead Sea facial scrub package from a mall kiosk manned by a hot Palestinian woman. She also bought me Chinese food, vanilla ice cream, a pair of boxers from The Gap, and one of those fifteen minute mall massages.

In total, she ended up spending well over a hundred dollars on me, but who's counting? Regarding your mother's generosity, I've kindly decided to deduct the total she spent on me from the principle balanced

owed to me by you. I'm now asking for \$394 dollars from you and not a penny less.

People you shouldn't ask for money include your former lover and my former best friend, Eric, who recently invested the little money he did have into a meth lab that has yet to produce any meth. If in the near future he starts actually producing meth, he would be a good person to ask for money, as long as you don't "fuck with his supply." These are his words, of course. I have no idea what that means, even though I've watched the first three episodes of HBO's *The Wire*. My drug lingo is about as good as my hitman lingo, which is why I have problems getting high and having people offed.

Since this is my last e-mail to you, I feel like I should be totally honest, as if you were the detective and you were shining a bright light on me in an interrogation room, as if you were the priest and I was the penitent.

Without further ado: Rudolf isn't really dead and he never came close to dying. Your mother never bought me a fifteen minute mall massage. I haven't actually started that Inuit diet I mentioned. The Segway suicide portion of this e-mail was completely fabricated (although I did consider it). I didn't quite sleep with Eric's

sister but we did make out and I'm pretty sure she slipped her hand into my corduroys. I shaved my beard into a nice mustache three days ago. I've been consuming unholy amounts of glühwein and it's starting to make me irritable and argumentative. I'm a compulsive liar, but you already knew this. Your sister and I are taking our relationship to the next level (more on that soon). Eric didn't sink all his money into a meth lab. He did, however, blow most of it on coke and is now planning to blow the rest of it on rehab.

All confessions aside, I almost did it one week ago. *Edward Scissorhands* was on TV and something about those scissor fingers of his triggered a perverse response in me. As the movie played in the background, I went to the kitchen and grabbed a fillet knife from the Home Shopping Network set that your racist aunt bought us two years ago.

Dropping to the floor, I pushed the knife against my flesh, counted slowly to three, and winced as it started to sting. I took another deep breath and began drawing blood. As a teardrop of blood appeared on my skin, I thought about what you'd said as you slammed the door, as you entered a new world without me, as you left me and

Rudolf to fend for ourselves in this crazy world of ours: "Honey, I'll be back in two weeks. Don't do anything stupid while I'm gone."

Two weeks passed, then three, then a month, followed by a month and a half. You never contacted me no, matter how many e-mails or Facebook messages I sent you. The only reason I didn't contact the authorities was because of your sister, who assured me that you were still alive and that you just needed some space.

At the beginning of the second month of your prolonged absence, I got a goddamn postcard from Sao Paulo. The postcard informed me in your perfect little handwriting that you were breaking up with me and had taken a Brazilian lover. At that very moment, the moment the knife drew blood from my arm, I realized that while I had my faults, you were definitely more horrible than I could've even imagined. You were the Voldemort to my Ron Weasley.

Tossing the knife onto the floor, I came to the decision to curb my suicidal tendencies. At that very moment, Rudolf burst into the kitchen and began licking the blood off the tip of the knife. I drew my knees to my chest, watching his little cat tongue work its magic.

Since you are in Brazil and I'm stuck in New York, collecting the \$394 dollars owed to me will prove exceedingly difficult. Now before I finish, you might protest saying that you only owe me \$194 dollars in lieu of the fact that the Segway was a senseless purchase, and never truly in need of repair. I've decide against adjusting the amount owed to me for sake of clarity and to avoid confusion. Also, the emotional damage these two and half months have caused me is worth well over \$200. You're lucky I'm not asking for the full \$500.

By the time you read this e-mail, I'll

be on a plane to Sao Paulo to meet you. Your sister will be joining me. We'll be staying at the Grand Hyatt in room 137. Please bring the money owed to me in US currency. I'd rather not deal with exchange rates. You can leave it with the concierge if we're not there.

Attached is a photo of Rudolf, your sister, and me wearing matching red tuxedos. Cute, huh? Also, your sister and I are planning to marry in Brazil. Destination weddings are all the rage this year. Any chance you would like to be a bridesmaid? Thanks, and I'll be seeing you soon.

THIRD RED DEBT

They say that Grizzly Crough was fathered by the mountain and that his mother was the river. They say Crough sleeps atop a pile of cold iron coins, that he's taken more men than the gallows, and claimed more women than love itself. They say he can't be killed.

He damn sure felt as cold as dead. Crough spat over his shoulder, worked his tongue behind sour teeth and squinted through the night wind. He shook his arms and wiggled his fingers, trying to coax a bit of warmth back into his hands to no avail. Crough crested a rocky outcrop and tucked in behind a large pine in an

effort to shield himself from the passing icy gales. Mud and rotten leaves clung to his boots and the hem of his ruddy overcoat, stretched tight about his broad shoulders. His ears were numb. Crough flipped the collar of his coat up and rubbed his hands together, peering around the tree to gain some sense of direction.

He stood on a sloping plateau high above the valley in the mottled cover of a few scattered, spindly pines. Past a handful of upturned stones, over the high precipice, and far down across the river lay the town of Montesperro—squatting unimpressively in the cover of the mountains on three sides.

He pulled two plain iron coins from his pocket and studied them for a moment with tired anger before tucking them back away. Crough grimaced. He could be in town by dawn if he kept moving, but his back still hurt to twist and the strap on his rifle was rubbing the bandages around his shoulder raw and lopsided. Still, the way he figured, he could keep moving or freeze. Not much choice at all, in that.

Crough tugged his sash tight about his waist, stretched the knotted pain from his back, and set off at a careful pace alongside the ridge. Brown needles crunched beneath his heel and the mud sucked at his boots.

He knew the mouth of the valley opened up below on the distant side of town, though too far by the frigid cover of night to be visible past the stain of glittering lights, smeared across the narrow plain. The river itself carved a thin, red canyon through the mountains and separated Crough from Montesperro as it stood. He shrugged his overcoat up and trudged on along the tree line, keeping near the ridge.

Crough always found it surprising how much time a man spends staring at his feet while he's slogging through

the rocks. He trudged on for hours, heavy eyes flicking from stone to stone moving one foot after the other; the jar of each step prickled painfully at his back. Tiny ice crystals clung to his beard, quivering in his laboring breath. His lips had long since cracked apart, but he reckoned he was too cold to bleed any at all.

He pressed forward beneath the green needles and murky starlight, mind wrapped securely around the debts he owed and those were owed him. If Grizzly Crough was anything, he was a man to make good on his debts.

There was no telling when it started, but Crough was eventually mindful of a low hum issuing from within the pines as he walked—a drone as deep as was rarely ever heard. He could feel the creeping tone of the forest's edge shaking his bones just audible below the frozen gales. Crough wasn't a superstitious man when it came to the forests, but most folk were. Every now and then he might come across a cloud of mist that just wouldn't disperse, or a twig that made no sound when it snapped beneath heel, but that was as far as he'd ventured. He'd never heard the drone this close before, and that almost unsettled him.

The noise put a warmth through him that he was well wary of, yet in no position to refuse. It felt like he was standing just too far away from a cozy fire, begging to bleed the cold away from his fingers.

He sank into the trees, passively enticed away from the edge of the mountain by the sound. As he pressed on Crough found the drone grew marginally louder from within the scattered pines. The moan of the deep forest, his father had called it. Crough ground his teeth.

Some distance away nearer the ridge, a worn path slithered down the mountainside and wound precariously amidst the stones, leading to the near side of the river. Crough had plunged a good distance into the pines and nearly missed it. He peered out through the trees at the distant the precipice, not wanting to submit back to the cold. The drone was a strange sort of comforting, stoking warm coals to life in his chest the nearer he got. He slumped down, back to the trunk of a nearby tree, and resigned himself to a few more moments of the forest's murmuring hum against his better judgment. Crough wrapped his fist around the iron in his coat pocket, and closed his eyes.

When he opened them again, he felt a sobering chill take his spine and set him back to shivering. Not fifty strides away, seated at the base of a great pine was a spindly man with skin like black mud, staring back at him through the darkness. He lowered the end of a twisting mast of wood from his lips. The drone died away. Crough's head was full of the wind now, cold and biting, it scraped at his cheeks and stole the breath from his chest.

"Not me, friend." He croaked, reassuring himself. His words scratched at the back of his tongue. "Not yet." One freezing hand found its way to the haft of his axe, hanging from his sash beneath his overcoat. He stood, glared over at his silent company, and retreated through the trees toward the ridge. Crough began his descent, leaving the pines above and behind him, though all the while keeping a cautious hand on the scarred weapon for assurance, if nothing else.

Saul della Cohen dropped heavily into a tall chair at the counter and his pockets jangled cheerfully under the weight of fresh coin. His hands had taken a slight tremble as of late—nothing altogether too noticeable, yet the exact sort of thing Cohen re-

sented. A Warren should keep steady hands. A Warren should keep a steady fist, even if the Mountain himself drew near. He fussed with a button on his royal blue cuff; the thread had started coming loose around it, to his frustration, and he was only making it worse. He puffed his cheeks and abandoned the effort, reaching instead for a drink.

Cohen tilted a small glass to his lips, and drained a mouthful of brown to warm his tongue. Sweating ice clinked softly around in the swirling drink. He flicked a coin onto the countertop, promptly stolen up by the barman.

“Heard talk there’s a Mud around town.” Cohen looked up. The barman nodded ominously toward him, and cast a searching eye over to the square lattice windows; shedding muffled amber light over the floorboards. Cohen’s eyes slid sideways toward the door. A damn Mud was the least of his worries.

“That so?” He said dismissively.

“It is.” The barman peered at Cohen, and managed to gather that the Warren wasn’t a man to delight in banter at the moment. He moved out from behind the counter and disappeared down a back hall,

muttering to himself. For the moment, Cohen sat alone in the brewery to his relief.

He reached over the bar and retrieved the bottle of brown, poured himself another glass, and set to tapping his fingers impatiently on the grimy countertop. After a few restless moments Cohen tossed the hem of his short coat back, and set a shaky hand on the polished handle of his revolver. He tilted it to catch the light. Six shots gleamed in the cylinder. Should be more than enough—and he wouldn’t even need to draw weapons, would he? The Clerics would be to town soon, and he’d make even all right. All he had to do was buy time—then he’d get what he was owed. If there was one thing could be counted on when matters came to Saul della Cohen, it was someone owed him something.

The doors to the brewery slid open to the side, and Cohen glanced round; blood thumped loudly in his ears. A filthy, wiry man ambled in off the porch and gazed stupidly around the establishment. His eyes drug longingly over the array of glinting bottles shelved behind the counter, as though it was stocked with pretty young women all calling desperately to him. His gaze fell unsteadily on Cohen.

“Warren.” He offered a forced grin and a poor, shallow bow.

“Get out of here, Ellis, leave me be.” Cohen snapped. Ellis raised an eyebrow, and decided to head for the counter anyway. He swept a grubby hat with a rather large gouge in the brim from the top of his head to expose his burnt, balding pate.

“Come on, Warren, can’t even have a drink with you anymore?” Ellis scrubbed at his cheek and snorted. Cohen let the uncomfortable air in the room swell, and still it didn’t take Ellis long to gather the courage to speak his mind.

“You’re puttin’ us all too far under. We’re about to be set to the legions’ taxes when they move in. The both of you will drive us all to shit.” He inspected the dirt beneath a fingernail, picked at it for a moment, and glanced up at the Warren. Cohen made an exasperated noise and shook his head. Not his concern.

“You not hear me? I said get out.” He spat. Ellis stopped a few strides from Cohen. He looked unsurely toward the doors, and wrung his hat nervously in his hands. Cohen decided it might just as well have been frustration, though it hardly mattered.

“Warren—“

“Unless I’m mistaken,” Cohen interrupted, peering indolently up at Ellis from his chair, “I have your name on my ledger, just a handful of coins away from being eligible for duty. Now,” Cohen raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips, lending Ellis a mockery of his consideration, “unless you want to be called to labor—setting pick to rocks for the next few years—or have your name handed off to a Bookkeeper, you’d best do as I say. You can’t afford that drink. Get gone.”

“I’m going to Bower.” He said.

“You’ll have to get in line if you want to waste your time with him. Bower won’t cross me, never has.”

Ellis left, defeated. Cohen swished a mouthful of brown around his teeth as the door slid shut, and felt it numb the back of his throat. He sat back in his chair returned to nervous waiting.

After some time, the doors to the brewery scraped sideways again. Cohen tightened his grip about the glass, grinding the bottom of it into the countertop. He held his breath and listened grudgingly as slow, heavy footsteps knocked at the air in the room. Thick boots rapped on the slim floorboards and set them to squeak-

ing pleadingly beneath heel. Cohen furrowed his brow. It's a strange thing to kill a man and have him walk up beside you again.

Only a few strides away, Grizzly Crough squeezed his enormous bulk in between two chairs, and leaned laboriously over the countertop. He pilfered a dusty black bottle—nearly empty. Cohen pressed his hands flat on the bar to quiet the slight tremble, and thought absently about reaching for the handle of his gun. Crough relieved his rifle from his shoulder and set the worn thing on the countertop without much consideration. Next he plucked a rather large hand-axe from his waist sash and set it likewise on the bar.

Crough thoroughly inspected the bottle, then poured himself a thick, black swill and leaned with his back to the bar, examining the brewery. He did a double take, having caught a ragged poster bearing his name and a reward pinned amongst a mess of others on the wall opposite.

His inked face smiled cheerily across the room at him from atop an impressive number offered in payment. Crough studied his poster for a moment, and returned the grin.

The Warren wasn't smiling. Crough shook his head lightly and gulped a black mouthful from his glass.

"You're dead." Cohen spoke first. One corner of Crough's mouth turned up. He grinned, baring a set of dirty teeth.

"That a threat?" He growled, lumbering over to where Cohen sat. "Or a dashed hope?" He glanced up and away for a brief span, raised a bushy eyebrow and added, "Or a question, could it be?"

Cohen plunged his hand behind his coat—to hell with handing Crough over to the Clerics alive. He'd killed him twice before and he'd kill him again, damn him. His fingers only grazed the handle of his revolver before Crough was on him. Crough's hand struck him hard inside the forearm, making it too difficult to close his fist and he plucked the gun from Cohen's hip with ease and surprising precision.

Crough pressed Cohen back into his chair with a forceful palm to the chest like a father chastising his child and chuckled nastily to himself. He examined the revolver between his thumb and forefinger—it looked like a toy in the hands of the Moun-

tain. Crough flicked the release and opened the cylinder, exposing six rounds. He shook the gun, emptying all six straight into his glass of black whisky and set the gun down on the countertop in front of Cohen. He tilted the glass to his lips. Sweating ice and ammunition clinked softly together in the swirling drink.

“Tell me something, Crough.” Cohen said, rubbing the frustrating pain away from his arm, “How do you see this ending?”

Crough grunted, and pulled a sizeable knife from the folds of his overcoat. He planted it in the countertop with a heavy thud near Cohen’s empty gun; the steel rang uncomfortably in his ears.

“I’m going to take you in the gut with this knife,” he flicked the hilt lazily with his index finger, causing the steel edge to ring again. “And walk out the front door. Eye for an eye.”

Cohen forced a laugh. “That so?”

“It is.” He growled. Crough took another mouthful of his black drink; Cohen watched the cartridges swirl behind his fingers. He examined the massive knife with hesitance; it was of simple make, the line of steel tang glinted between two layers of pinned,

polished wood at the handle. A dull brass cap finished the pommel.

“You should seal your ammunition, boy.” Crough added, licking his cracked lips. Cohen scoffed, tearing his eyes away from the blade stuck in the countertop.

“No need. Weather’s too dry.”

“Some need.” Crough raised his thick brows and jingled the glass before the Warren’s eyes. He gave another sour grin.

“You should have died at Hastings.” Cohen said crossly, leaning back in his chair and studying Crough’s expression.

“And yet here I sit, alive and majestic as ever you’d remembered me.” He swept his arms out to both sides in an odd comical gesture.

Cohen was quiet for a moment. Crough scratched roughly at the bristles of his short, untamed beard and shifted in the chair. It creaked sharply under his movement as though threatening to give way at any moment. He was at least two heads taller than Cohen—who wasn’t a small man by any measure—and Crough slouched. Crough smoothed his wild mane of black hair with thick

hands, managing to wrestle it back into a tough bun, showing streaks of grey underneath. Cohen eyed him. The Mountain drummed his fingers on the countertop for a short span before speaking.

“How many men d’you bring to Hastings, thirteen I figure?” He grunted.

“Seventeen.” Cohen lied; examining the dirtied red sash Crough had tied around his waist with disdain.

“Huh. Seventeen emptied rifles?” Crough grumbled, shaking his head as though he thought he

should have died at Hastings as well. Cohen nodded.

“There wasn’t anywhere to get to. No way out of the house, nowhere to run, no cover to sneak off behind, broad daylight.” Cohen recounted.

“Almost no place to get to.” Crough corrected. “You boys shot that damn place all to splinters.” Cohen tucked a hand in his pocket, and tapped the rim of his glass. He recalled with blistering annoyance the heat of the sun on his face...

*To be continued in the
next issue of The Metric*

HONEY FOR ALIENS

You wake up in the morning covered in honey as though you were the new born child of a giant plastic honey bear like they sell at wholesale clubs. Your sheets are stuck to your body, and in your mirror you look like a mummy. You peel back the white layers to reveal your shiny golden skin and on your walk to the bathroom, you are Midas turning everything you touch to sticky gold. Sweet floral scents trail you.

You were watching a show on the History Channel yesterday, and learned that honey was the food of aliens. It's their nectar, their ambrosia like the Greek gods

you learned about in school, but mostly remember from *Clash of the Titans*, the original. Honey is the only food that never spoils, you learned from the balding man whose British accent provided credulity to his thinly connected narrative of assumptions. And aliens, a woman with hair like a lion and a voice like a mouse, have long been exploiting the Earth's honey supply as bees do not exist in space.

You were sitting on the couch with a girl named Maryann, who you wanted to be sexy yet wholesome like the character in *Gilligan's Island*, but who was instead as drab as her grey

cargo pants and acted like your babysitter. She was in your Medieval Lit class, and you were supposed to be dissecting some poem about a snowman or a plowman. Instead you were dissecting a cold chicken leg, pulling apart the fibers as though a bullet might be lying beneath, while Maryann flicked through the television channels you got because your housemate Charlie rigged something off the neighbors' cable that you couldn't begin to understand. She stopped on the History Channel to tell you that you really ought to be doing the assignment. But her nagging was pointless, you were already enthralled by the egg-headed green men holding a beehive in the animation on the screen. You shushed Maryann and watched the program to its conclusion, taking in even the synthetic organ music of the closing credits. The sound technician's last name was Puffman. You laughed, and even pointed it out to Maryann so she could share in the humor, but she did not think it was funny. She stormed out of the house, grumbling something about how you were the worst partner. Before the dorm slammed shut, you forgot Maryann had ever been there.

You called your mother, and asked if your father had watched the

program. He was on leave from his job for medical reasons, though neither he nor your mother would tell you what they were, and you highly suspected he had lost his job. He had always shared, probably imparted to you, your love of space and aliens. Now that he had nothing else to do, he spent the whole day surfing every channel in his very expensive cable package for something supernatural to watch. Your mother asked you about school and classes and you mumbled things you thought would please her. Then she shouted into the family room for your father. It took him a few minutes to get to the phone. He asked if you were staying out of trouble. You replied by asking about the show, which he had, of course, seen. He said he was going to put a bowl of honey in the yard and watch for aliens. You talked a little bit more before he wanted to see a news story about mysterious symbols on a building in Wichita.

You went to the kitchen to find the plastic bear full of honey. The first plastic bear you found was full of something greenish black, and you thought the program lied because this honey had clearly gone bad. But on closer inspection, you realized this was Charlie's weed. He always kept it in the kitchen, a fact which both-

ered you because you thought it was rather in the open and would be found immediately in any situation in which the police might be entering the house. On the other hand, you could borrow it without really asking, as you had already several times during the day.

The bear you wanted was curiously located in the cupboard with the pesticides and stuff from the great ant infestation of the previous summer. You didn't stop to wonder how it had gotten there. You rinsed out an old cereal bowl, squeezed out every drop of honey you could, choking the life out of the bear, and put the bowl out in the yard amidst the mostly dead grass Charlie had promised he would water dutifully.

You weren't really sure what to expect or when, but somehow it seemed only a matter of time before the aliens came for the snack you had so thoughtfully left for them. They'd be like little green Santa Clauses, and you wondered what they would bring for you. Watching the motionless grass matted to the dry dirt for signs of life and seeing none terrestrial nor extraterrestrial, your thoughts wandered to Maryann. You thought of her long brown braid and wondered if you could climb up it and rescue her from the tower of boredom that

trapped her in her life. Her blue eyes were bright like your favorite cerulean crayon and told you that if you just wore her down as much as you used to those crayons, she would be your soulmate. You picture the children you'd have, them all wearing her baggy grey pants and having your curly blond hair. Charlie is there, too. He's telling Maryann that you're no good for her and she should be with him. You punch Charlie.

But really you'd punched your own upper arm. It was dark outside then and there were lightning bugs highlighting the fact that no aliens had claimed their honey. You checked the bowl and picked out the flies that had sunk into sweet death. It was a warm night toward the end of April, and you laid down in the hammock strung up between the only two trees in the yard, diminutive dogwoods with sloping dead branches. Cicadas whirred all around you, or at least it sounded like cicadas. You thought of the girl with the matted brown hair and old Braves baseball cap you knew in high school who brought a box of cicada carcasses to your Biology class. You thought of how repulsive you found it, the layers of crisp tissue paper skin peeling away to reveal a present you didn't want. Like the sweater your Aunt Donna gave you for

your thirteenth birthday, that purple and turquoise striped nightmare that you now wear to sleep in the winter. Or to laze in the living room watching your stolen cable.

But somehow you have woken up in your own twin bed, a race car shaped plastic haven transferred from your childhood. You always turn the wheel at the foot of the bed four times to the left before you get out, for good luck, or maybe just out of habit now. But before your hands reach ten and two, your head feels larger and heavier. You bring your hands instead to your face, noticing on the way that they appear like melting hand-shaped candles. You write it off to grogginess.

Your hands adhere to your cheeks, and it is then that you notice the slimy stickiness. You remember gluing your fingers together with Rubber Cement when you were required to have that instead of regular Elmer's in the second grade, and feel glad you never tried it on your face.

Moving your hands to the back of your head, you feel your pillow stuck to your hair like a giant tumor. You think of all the times you sat in uncomfortable chairs at movie theaters, in lectures, even at restaurants musing on just how nice it would

be to have a pillow attached to your head. Yet, here you are, wish granted, plying the goose-down filled cotton sack from your skull.

Safe from the Blob-like encroachment of your pillow, you look around and realize your whole body is covered in something sticky, clear, and golden. It looks like the wax that Kelly, the girl you dated in high school because she lived next door and didn't have acne, used to microwave and spread on her below-the-waist body with popsicle sticks. You remember the way all her facial features moved toward the black hole of her nose when she ripped off the fabric she had laid over the wax. And you remember the other times when she made that face, and how she didn't look very pretty.

You smell your arm, and it is sweet. Meadow sweet. You lick your arm, and it tastes like honey. You lick it again just to check. It is definitely honey. You think of Maryann and the History Channel. You remember the show and Puffman. You remember finding the honey and the bowl, and you remember setting it in the yard. The hammock was a little damp when you rested in it. There ends your memory and the comedy is finished.

Like a creature from a lagoon somewhere, you ooze down the hall to the bathroom. You look like you, like you covered in honey. You were expecting something different, something alien. But it is just you, golden and wet, your stained undershirt and boxers clinging to your body in a way you decide to think is seductive. Were you abducted and subjected to some alien honey ritual aboard their sugar-powered ship? Did they shrink you and dip you into the very bowl you left to tempt them? You don't know. You are still a little bit high, and find that the drooping bridges of honey between your fingers make you feel like Spiderman. You are Bee Man. Honey Man. You wish there was someone around to share this with, to roll around in the honey with.

You call for Charlie, but he doesn't answer. He isn't home very often, and even if he were, it would be unlike him to exert himself enough to call back. You don't want to trail honey all over the house because you do value a certain amount of cleanliness, and if there were a line, floors covered in honey would be way over it.

Showering has never been your favorite activity. There is something institutional about it, the heaviness of the water raining down like a

punishment for being dirty. The water is hot and the honey melts as it slips from your body. You are still wearing your underwear because you didn't think it would be a good idea to put honey-covered clothes in with the regular laundry. There is no special honey cycle at the laundromat. It smells wonderful, the steam carrying the honey to your nose. And you start to wonder. Where did all the honey come from? How did you get into your bed? You wish you'd been awake to see the aliens, how big they were, how many, their ship, and all the other millions of questions you'd had since you watched E.T. with your parents, and your dad told you it was a true story.

With your body free of honey, you turn off the water and change into a similar, but different ensemble of boxers and undershirt. The boxers have little pictures of farm animals wearing Santa hats and jingle bells. It isn't Christmas, and it isn't even July, but you always thought holiday dates should be more subjective.

You think that you will get some breakfast, but as you walk down the staircase something feels strange. You seem bigger or the stairs seem smaller. Your feet crash down onto each wooden step. You swore they were

steeper. At the bottom of the staircase you decide to try going back up. It always winded you to run up the stairs. But this time, you are taking the stairs in bounds like a deer over fallen trees. You reach the top feeling as unstrained as if you had taken an elevator. Your thighs do not burn, your knees do not ache, your lungs do not beg you to stop smoking so that going up the stairs would not feel like climbing a mountain. Maybe you have special powers now, you think, but you push it out of your mind.

You descend the stairs again, and they seem more familiar. In the kitchen you reach into the cabinet for a bowl. This action reminds you of the bowl you left in the yard last night, and you decide to go and see if it is there. You do not see it from the back porch, but it seems there has been a thunderstorm overnight and some leaves and branches were shaved from the trees and left to litter the yard. You pick up a few small branches around where you are certain that you placed the bowl, but do not find it hiding there. Charlie could have taken it in. He has an odd, though sporadic, duty to the yard, and you have on occasion seen him plucking living weeds from the dead foliage.

There is a bowl in the sink. It's

filled with clean water. Could have been washed. You rinse it out again, just to be sure, and fill it with Captain Crunch, strawberry milk, and two spoonfuls of Splenda. Using Splenda allows you to believe you are being healthy, or at least conscious of the fact that there are some things which are more healthy than others. That you incorporate one such thing into your diet makes you feel more positive about your choices.

Normally, you eat standing up over the sink so that you don't have to worry about spills. Your mother always told you that you were a messy eater, and that a trough would have been more suitable than a plate. But today, you are feeling civilized, and unlike Huck Finn, you want to embrace it. You sit down at the table and pull one of the newspapers from the pile of paper recyclables that no one ever seems to take out. It's from last month. Last month of last year.

But news is news, you reason, even if it isn't new.

Strawberry milk Pollocks an article about wild fires in California, which you only read halfway. In the "strange news" section, you read about a naked bank robber, a nun who strips for Jesus, and a man who says that

aliens gave him the gift to turn on anything electric with his mind. The article provides no evidence for the validity of the man's claim, and is written in a rather skeptical tone. You, however, cannot resist trying. You stare at the coffee maker, the microwave, the toaster, the weird George Foreman grill-looking item that makes cupcakes, but none of them seem to turn on. You reach to pick up your spoon, and it shocks your finger. You smile to yourself, momentarily convinced that this was your doing.

Charlie walks into the kitchen wearing a poncho and a kilt. You only wear that sort of thing on laundry day, but Charlie doesn't believe in laundry. He just finds "new" clothes. You remember complimenting a hat he wore once, and him telling you that he found it by the urinal at a rest area somewhere in Virginia. Charlie nods at you. You nod back because you know that when Charlie nods, Charlie does not want to talk. You are lucky he is acknowledging you at all.

You watch him drink from a mysterious carton of juice in the refrigerator and place two slices of white bread in the toaster. And then you can't wait any longer. You ask Charlie if he washed the bowl you left in the yard, if he covered you in honey.

He looks at you. You look back. The toaster dings, and the barely golden bread pops up. Charlie takes the toast in one hand and the juice in the other. He lifts his hands as though weighing which holds the heavier item, and he shrugs at you. "What?" he says. Then he disappears back into the hallway.

You eat the last soggy bites of Captain Crunch and think to call your father. He said he was also putting out honey. You return your bowl to the sink, and pick up the phone. You know that your mother is at book club, a book club. She goes to different ones every day so that she always has something to read and discuss. She once told you your father wasn't very interesting to talk to.

Once you hear the phone click to indicate that it has been picked up, you ask your father if anything happened to him last night, anything strange. He asks you what you mean, and you just repeat the word "strange" in different tones. He tells you no, but that he did see an interesting program this morning about crop circles. You remember when you had to make a diorama for art class in elementary school, and your father insisted that it be of a strangely imprinted field and a big white farmhouse. You remember using real grass, and how it

was all brown by the time you turned it in.

You ask your father if he put out a bowl of honey like he said he would. He says no, he forgot, he fell asleep on the couch. You imagine his hand rising in exaggerated frustration to his forehead, a gesture he had taken up when he stopped working and didn't need to remember things. You ask him if he will tonight, and he says absolutely.

The rest of the day, you spend contemplating what happened. And napping. You decide that you will also put out a bowl of honey tomorrow. You will see what happens to you and your father. And if you wake up covered in honey again, you will not put out any more bowls. And you will warn your father that the same could happen to him. But you know he'd think it would be interesting.

BUZZ

“I think...”

The station looked kinda dioramic from behind the inside of the glass tunnel of the bridge. Small and unreal underneath the black sky.

“I think that maybe...”

He could see their reflection in the window, pale and puzzled faces. Their eyes were a warm sort of pink but seemed smaller and darker when reflected back. He thought: she is next to me.

“I think that we should... maybe...”

A phone rang. They seemed at the centre of something, like the middle of this bridge was the zero-point on the cosmic axis. In his hand he could feel the cup, holding it at his side like some small animal found in the rain, a creature he had pitied and picked up to take home. A man walked past them, a brisk beige peripheral shape. The man asked if they were enjoying the view and laughed. They had been, he remembered now, at Burger King. Her phone, the ringing.

“I’ll...”

It was hard to look past their reflections, now that he had noticed them.

“... leave it.”

They were staring in the same direction at the same nothing, and had been for like who knows how long. The lights beneath looked wet and bleary. The phone had seemed like such a hopelessly small sound in the fluorescent emptiness of the bridge.

In the line at Burger King all he could hear was this buzz from behind them, the buzz of a line of people all talking at once, a weirdly wordless mash of voices. And then what if, he thought, what if behind them that whole line of people were actually just staring straight ahead and staying totally and terribly silent because what if.

She was looking at the phone now, her phone. He could tell because her reflection was this electric blue. She looked, in the glass, like something computer-generated. He thought. His mouth felt ‘dry as fuck’. He only ever said ‘fuck’ in his head. The man had asked them that and laughed to himself and carried on walking. Five minutes later they would be outside the station.

And, you see, the sound, that wordless chatter, what if it was just being pumped into the room via speaker, like every night someone behind the counter queued up the sound file of casual customer talk and hit play. Such a terrifying thought that there was no way he had the mental strength to turn around and verify, in case all he saw was a line of silent faces all silently staring at him and the dismal buzz playing from above.

A train moved underneath them. The sky was almost unbearably infinite. Later they would kiss on the bench outside the station and he would forget the cup in his hand and pour Fanta over her back.





POETRY

FROM THE WALKWAY
BENEATH THE
LAUNDRY WINDOW



The landlady is also the laundry woman.
Her daughter's breasts are soft and low,
polished in the steam, breathing
through a wide-necked dress
or blouse (I don't look very closely,
just the breasts).

My hands grasp her hips,
still clayey and new, from far away.
Watching her coarse black hair unraveling(
mountains of it, valleys, shorelines, a tundra;
a body like what light should be but never is)

I am smoldering:
defeated, pristine.

THE PATROL



In the dark houses,
they are neither female or male,
just bones and furniture,
rooms empty of children,
a heavy silence that even the wind can't shift.

It's like this on every street.
Patrols wish for blindness, dumbness.
Not disemboweled cars,
drivers fused to wheels.
Not beds with charred blankets
and families sleeping dead.

Night after night,
they no longer ask,
who are they?
but, who are we?
Step over a corpse to get to
a shining cross.
Crack open the one wine bottle saved,
drink a heart harder.

It's their job.
There's looters to be shot,
survivors to be comforted.
Unexploded bombs
are isolated and diffused.
Pity and compassion
are rounded up like strays.

THE REPRISAL



My lover has opened herself and lain thickly,
suffocatingly close in the dark.
Her arms spread wide over me.
Waiting in the pink air, prowling through the clouds,
Night makes ready to revenge herself upon me.

Her claws come crushing into the earth
as she drags her body down through the storm.
Lightning burns in her chest
and her thunderous voice condemns me.

There is no mercy; no rain falls.
The seas swell and thrash insatiably.
The heat is electric.

POET ON CANNABIS

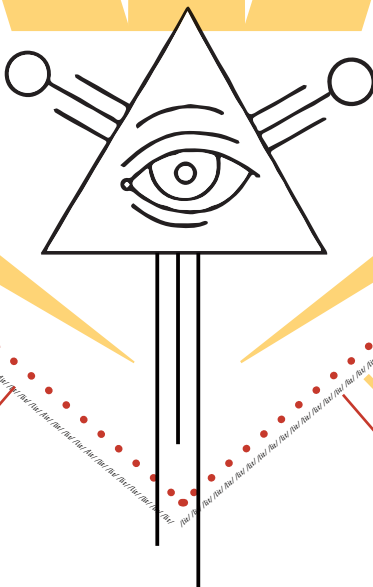


The mathematical osmosis
of obtuse adrenalines ululating
in an immaculate collaboration
between maximum greens
like epiphytics in tall osmunda.

NEUTRAL IN THE SKY



The stars hung neutral in the sky,
Twinkling on the murders below.
And I whispered to a girl in the gloom,
Trying to make her believe in me,
Whilst all the angers of the earth stalked me,
Bunching like grapes in the shadows,
Ready to turn me crimson, or break my heart.



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