



ZWWG

/lit/erature Digest

Issue 7 - July 31st

A Beautiful Body
by Kyra Reinhilde

Deadeye Dick Dawkins
by Madison

Death on the Rye
by Avril Lavigne

Shiva
by Josef K

On The Boardwalk
by EJ Harrow

The Pornographer
by Ryan Silva

With illustrations by Bantha_Fodder

INJUSTICIA

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Introduction/Note from the Editors

INTRODUCTION

We would like to extend our thanks to the writers who have submitted to us. If you are in support of this project, more gratifying than any thanks is an expression of support through submissions. If you have a talent for writing, art, or anything else, please send your submissions or ideas to us, however ridiculous or taboo they may be. Help us continue to make this something that you would be interested in. We hope to continue to expand this project to include a greater number of authors and artists producing a wider variety of creative works. We remain very open to criticism and suggestions on how we can improve ourselves. Give us your opinions, honest and blunt as they may be, and help us make this project better. By Anon, for Anon.

Contact Us

Our IRC channel is still:
Server: irc.freenode.net
Room: #ZWG

Our main distribution page:

<http://zwg.wildwestwaffles.com/>

Our wiki:

<http://zinewritersguild.wikia.com/>

Updates

For this issue, the zine has decided to make use of extensive colour background matting. This represents a trial effort, and feedback regarding this change from anon would be appreciated.



Hey guys, I hope you are enjoying our publication as much as we enjoy bringing all that wonderful content neatly arranged for you to read. It's being an all around good hobby for us and we're really happy to see how far we got and to wonder how far we can possibly get. Believe me, we're working very hard to better ourselves on every issue and I believe we're making progress.

On other news, I've been engaged on making an adventure game as an art project for a long time, but only now have I gathered enough resources to actually start the production of what I would like to call a game of love.

I'm using the AGS engine and acting as a game designer, director and artist. By now, we've already got a professional programmer and a sound technician, but we're still in need of another artist and a main writer to help me arrange a good storyline for it.

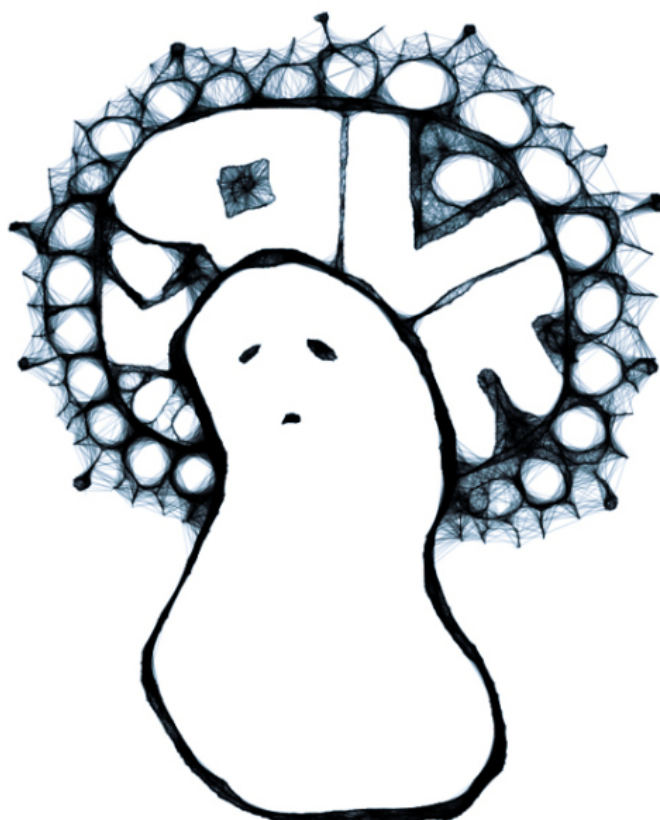
We need someone who wants to write about love and the many shapes and colors it can present. Someone who can write about family, romance, deception and pain. The main setting of the game is on a place called Inbetween, and the ultimate goal of the game is to help Love, the ghost, get out of this place. Something beautiful.

Do you think you have what it takes and want to see your fiction turned into an adventure game? Well, here's the chance.

To submit your story simply send it to us at zinewritersguild@gmail.com with 'Love the Adventure' as a title and we'll get back at you in no time.

We're waiting to see your work and wish rivers of love to you.

-Goldensox



The image features a warm, orange-toned background with a soft, textured, and slightly grainy appearance, resembling a sunset or a glowing light source. Overlaid on this background are several dark, black silhouettes of leaves and thin branches. The leaves have various shapes, some with serrated edges, and are scattered across the frame, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall mood is serene and autumnal.

[Fiction]

A Beautiful Body by Kyra Reinhilde

All I can hear is the screaming. I hear it no matter where I go or what I do. A woman wailing like she's being killed. No words, no pleas for help. Just screaming. The only time I'm free is during the day, and even then there's still ringing. My ears can't take much more of it. Either I'm losing my hearing, or losing my mind.

It started a few months ago, after what happened to Maggie. Somehow I'd gotten it in my head that if I drank enough scotch, she'd come back to life. Maybe even yell at me a little, get that little crease between her brows that she hated. I don't know how many drinks I took, but it wasn't long before I saw her in the kitchen. She was wearing the apron I'd bought her for Christmas two years ago, the one she hated but I loved. Get enough scotch in him and a man will see whatever he wants to.

I laid there watching her for a long time, just letting the look of her sink into my alcohol-clouded memory. The way her hands moved when she reached for the big pots, the little huffs of noise when she had to lift them. The skin at the nape of her neck. Things I thought I'd never see again. God, I missed her.

But that's when I heard it. That scream tore right through my mind until there was nothing else there but that horrible sound. At first I thought it must've been something on T.V., or maybe the neighbors, but it kept going. Not any louder—though it was already damned loud—but always constantly there.

I plugged my ears. I crammed my head under pillows. Nothing helped. Eventually I figured I'd just drank myself into a stupor and tried to get to bed. When the alarm rang to wake me, my only problems were a fuzz-filled mouth and hungover headache. The screaming was gone.

The next morning went by easily enough. Got up. Showered, shaved. Stared at Maggie's things all lined up under the mirror. Promised to clean them out eventually, but knew I wouldn't. Went to work.

"Good to see you, Chase," they said with their toothy smiles and dead eyes. "Welcome back. We were worried."

Not a one came to check in on me after Maggie died. Not a one. I remembered that as I smiled back at them.

My workstation was just as I left it. Photos all over of Maggie and the baby. I took one look at it and requested a new cubicle. They had one waiting. I closed the door behind me, put my head in my hands, and tried not to think about her.

I got no work done, but they didn't expect any from me. Throughout the day people came by to ask how I was doing. So terrible, what happened, and did I maybe need some time with the guys from legal to blow off steam?

Sickening. It was all so sickening. I couldn't handle it. Where had they been when I'd found her body? Were they at her funeral? Did they have to bury their baby daughters because some sicko wanted a matching set?

Only natural that I stopped at a bar before I got back to the apartment. Drinking was drinking, no matter where it was done. Scotch. Gin. Whiskey. Old friends of mine. My father taught me to drink, and I could hear him in the back of my mind telling me what all the parts of the label meant. It helped a little. The burning down my throat helped more. I sat there at the bar drinking until sundown, when I heard it again. I slammed my hands

against my ears and tried not to scream myself. That sound...there aren't any words for the terror in that woman's voice. I can barely even recognize her as human. It's all I can do not to collapse on the spot. This isn't just a woman in danger. It's a woman way past the point of being saved, when her only option is screaming loud enough that God might hear her, if he isn't deaf already. And I know, listening to this scream in my head, that he must be. "You alright there?" asked the bartender. I looked up at him. The man was looking at me like I was a lunatic.



"Yeah, yeah," I murmured. He couldn't hear it. No one else could. I looked around at all the other dark faces and not a single one of them was as afraid as I was. There was a woman screaming in my mind at night and I was the only one who heard her.

I tried everything. Therapists told me I was just having trouble dealing with what happened to Maggie. Survivor's guilt, they said, as if they knew why I felt so guilty. They prescribed me the same thing those whackjob schizos take. For a while I tried it. Didn't help any. Just made the world seem gray. More therapists meant different drugs, but none of those worked either. A couple of them tried to put me in a ward, but I got out of it with a smile and an admission that yes, I really do just miss my wife.

So next came the insane solutions. Ouija boards that didn't reply to my touch. Crystal balls. I ching. All sorts of snake oil I was willing to buy into just to get the screaming to stop.

That was how I ended up in the psychic's place. I'll admit, going in there I felt ten different kinds of idiot, but with a problem like mine there aren't many options. It was either the

psychic or the psych ward now. One might stop the screaming, the other would give me a comfy padded cell to hear it in.

I took a step inside. The whole place stank of some kind of incense. Crystal bead curtains swung into my face as I tried to make my way to the actual sitting room, and all kinds of schmaltzy artifacts tripped me up. Seeing it all almost made me turn back, but I was desperate. The woman gestured for me to sit across from her, and I did, trying not to let my discomfort show.

"Chase Radcliffe," she said. She tried to play up the throaty voice, but it didn't work. Just got on my nerves. "I've read about what happened to you."

But she didn't know, and couldn't know, what it was like. She just pretended to care. I gave her my money, of course she read up on me.

"Everyone has," I snapped. "It was front page news."

"Murders like that aren't common," she replied. Somehow she's still calm. Something dark in me wants to lash out at her for being calm when we're talking about what happened to Maggie.

"No. No they aren't. Now are you going to help me or did I just waste my money to hear about what I already know?"

That fazed her. She took a moment to herself, then looked back up at me. Something about the way she was looking at me made my stomach sour and the hairs on the back of my neck bristle. Maybe it was her eyes. They were boring right into mine. Whatever it was, I hated it. It made my skin crawl.



"Screaming," she said at last. "You hear screaming at night."

I narrowed my eyes. "Yes. Good to see you're not a complete waste. I hear a woman screaming at night."

Maybe she looked into my medical records. There had to have been some kind of note on my little problem by now. Ten therapists couldn't be wrong. Must be there in big block letters, "Chase Radcliffe: Insane".

The woman stood and walked to a chest. She fiddled around for a bit. I shifted. The air seemed heavier all of a sudden. She came back with a thick leather book and slapped it on the counter. "You will want to take that home and read the chapter on the bean sídhe," she said. I flipped through the thing. It smelled like death and didn't look much better. The letters were too intricate for me to read, and even when I could make them out, the language was too obscure. "There is not much I can do for you, but it is best to be informed of things."

"Not much you can do? I'm going to be hearing this all my life?"

She looked at me and smiled. It was the kind of smile you see in horror movies. "Yes, you will. But before we read that, there is something we must speak about."

She sat back down. I remembered that I'd forgotten where the exit was.

The psychic looked at me again the way she had before. I liked it even less this time.

"What was she like?"

"Brown hair. Green eyes. Smiled like the dawn," I said. "Don't know how I managed to charm her; she always deserved better."

But the psychic shook her head. "Not Margaret. The other woman. The one whose bed you were in when your family was murdered."

She might as well have punched me in the gut. Everything was turning red, but I had to keep my calm. No one knew where I had been that night. This woman was the real deal.

"It was just a mistake," I said. "Just a stupid fucking mistake. I don't even know why I did it."

"But you did," she said. Accusing me. "You slept with her."

I shot up. "I didn't plan it. It just happened, alright? Maggie was...nothing was supposed to happen to her."

"But it did," she said. "And it's very important that you tell me what that woman looked like. Everything depends on who she is."

I sat back down and hung my head in my hands. I didn't want to remember it, but back it came. Sitting in a cafe after work. Maggie and I had been arguing since the baby had been born; she was having trouble adjusting. Post Partum, she thought. I wanted her happy, but I was exhausted. Between that soul-sucking job and my wife's depression, I had little to myself.

And then I saw her, sitting outside in a little black dress. She was dressed for a cocktail party at noon. She was with a guy around her age. Blond, blue eyes. Good looking. They had to have been dating, but I still couldn't take my eyes off of the woman. She wasn't like the others. Next to them she was a damned statue.

I watched her from inside and tried not to think about the crook of her neck, or how soft her lips look. She was radiant, but she didn't seem to care about anything around her. Like she was above it all. A quiet kind of arrogance. She'd never bother with someone like me.

But then she looked my way. The sunglasses hid her eyes, but I knew she was staring right at me. I felt it in my bones. Those deep, soft, red lips smiled at me and I found myself smiling back. It felt right.

She turned towards the guy and said something quick. He looked a little upset, but nodded to her anyway before he left.

She looked at me and pointed at the seat across from her. I couldn't help myself.

"Her name was Julia," I said. "Julia Frapp. She looked like she'd stepped out of ancient Greece."

A dark look came over the psychic's face. She rose to her feet.

"Get out of my shop. Take the book with you, but get out. Now."

And so I did. I left her with the stupid book in tow, a book I can't read for the life of me. Julia

is on my mind again. Her skin like warm marble. The sounds of her moaning underneath me. Nails digging into my back and the smell of her perfume.

She didn't speak to me much, but she knew my name.

"Mr. Radcliffe," she'd said with a slight smile. "My employer is familiar with you."

I had no idea what she meant by that. I still don't. The firm handles more clients than any other in the area, so I thought that we'd worked for her boss at some point, but Julia didn't seem the type for a 9 to 5. All I could do was fumble through my introductions.

She leaned over. I could see down her dress to the smooth skin of her breasts. "Are you a man who enjoys his wine, Mr. Radcliffe?"

"Scotch," I said. "Not wine. Never wine."

She took off her sunglasses. There aren't a set of eyes more blue in all the earth, trust me. I just couldn't decide if they reminded me of fire or of ice. All I knew was I'd gladly let them consume me.

"A pity. I am fond of wine, and thought that you might enjoy to sample some with me. The vintages are quite rare."

"I can make an exception."

Two hours later, I learned that she had black silk sheets, black lace lingerie, and a penchant for biting. She was everything Maggie wasn't, and for that moment, I loved it. My tune changed when Julia left the second we were done, not even bothering to say goodbye. Still, I was too tired and too covered in bruises to go home that night.

When I did return home the following morning, my door was open. Maggie was a Nazi about that sort of thing. My heart was in a vice grip as I entered my own home.

I called for her. She didn't come. I called louder, expecting to wake the baby, but I heard nothing. Something was wrong.

The bedroom was empty. The kitchen, too. As I approached the bathroom, the smell of copper and rot made my stomach turn.

I took a deep breath and opened the door.

The body in the bathtub had once belonged to my wife. I didn't know it was her for a few minutes because her head was bobbing around in the bloody water. Her beautiful body was a bloated and deformed beyond recognition. On my knees I crawled to the tub, fished out her head with its rotting eyes and tongue, and held it in my arms. The baby was in the tub, too, headless like her mother.

I've done my best to read the book. The psychic directed me to the chapter on banshees. You can only hear a banshee when someone is about to die. I like to think it's me.

All I can hear is screaming.

[Image credit: Bantha_Fodder]

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for A Beautiful Body\]](#)

A Nightmare by C.R. McMahan

Last night when I drifted off into sleep my subconscious made the transition smooth, so smoothly that in my dream I was sleeping in the same exact position in my bed, fully tricking my brain into thinking that I was in fact not dreaming but still fully aware in the waking world. My door opened and closed as the girl who I constantly dream about slipped into the room. Before I could look at her she fell onto the bed behind me and began kissing the base of my neck. She began whispering to me lovingly. "I missed you. It's been a long time since we've been together."

I whispered back. "What are you talking about? I always dream of you."

Her breath against my back was cold as she said. "No my dear, you've been hiding away from me for a long time. I've been waiting for the time you were vulnerable."

I was taken aback by this so I turned over to look at her. What I saw was her lovely pale face smiling at me and her body hidden by darkness. Then the thing planted its twisted clawed hand next to me and leaned forward to reveal the rest of the horribly contorted body but what threw my mind into oblivion was that my dream girl's face was plastered onto this thing's head and it was peeling on one corner. That's when I began screaming. "GOD OH GOD NOT HER NOT HER NOT HER." At this point in any regular nightmare a person would wake up, I didn't. I scrambled out of the bed and out the door into the hallway. I found the light switch and frantically flipped on off on off on off on off but to no avail. The thing had found its way out of my room and stuck its new face around a bend and into the hallway so I was staring right at it. I caught my scream in my throat and sprinted down the stairs to try the front door. It was locked of course. My ancient dog waddled over and looked up to me. I patted her head as I looked up the stairs to the pale face staring down at me. When I glanced back to my dog she was standing on two legs and her shoulders had contorted into two large muscular masses. Somehow I was ok with this. My dog was looking through the peephole of the door. I nudged her over and looked out to see space. Literally space, stars and galaxies and nebulas of every color and hue were flying past me. I could feel the light blinding my eyes and the radiation burning my face. Then my dog started barking and I woke up.

My body was in a cold sweat and my heart was bashing against my ribcage. My eyes scanned the dark room looking for signs of a waking nightmare. I laid there in my bed for forty minutes too terrified to move. It wasn't until I heard a bird outside my window sing that I was able to relax. I took out my phone and looked at the time, it was only 4:50AM. I had only slept for a fucking hour. Then I texted my dream girl who I had fallen in love with over the last two months and told her I had a nightmare. I wish I had the chance to tell her I loved her before I could never dream of her again.

I stumbled out of bed drunk from the horror and went downstairs. I lovingly pet my dog and hugged her, she's so old that sometimes I think she doesn't know who I am anymore. I put some grounds into the coffee maker and leaned against the counter and thought to myself. I can never dream of her again and it's the only place in the world where I could have her. How insane does a man have to be to kill the only thing he loves in a place where anything is possible.

I'm killing myself next week. I'm going to tell her how I feel and she's going to tell me that we should stay friends. Then I'm going to go home and empty my medicine cabinet down my throat.

-C.R.M.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for A Nightmare\]](#)

Bone Canyon Pt. 1 By Philly K

I.

Come with me on a stroll through Bone Canyon, AZ. The place freaks, warriors, ball-park sluggers and depressed authors go when they die. They call themselves Mac-gruger's Men.

What would you like to happen after you die? Maybe you'll float through the ceiling and live forever in the endlessly blissful kingdom of Heaven. Or you could live in anguish for all eternity down in Hell. Or perhaps you think you'll be reincarnated. You could come back as a nameless, faceless soldier in some war from 130 AD that has been forgotten by history. Or maybe another politician. Or a lion, or a tree. I've toyed with the idea of atheism. I don't know what the truth is. Atheism could very well be the truth. But I don't want to rot in the ground forever with no conscience. I'd like to play around a little bit before that, see what I could do while I'm dead. See all the things I couldn't see, all the things I wanted to do, all the things I should've done until I'm screaming "I wanna go back, I wanna go back!" But of course that would get boring after awhile, even a feeling like sleeping forever would. We need some time away from our own consciences or else we lose our minds. You can't complain if you don't feel anything.

I hopped in my grey jeep/truck/piece of shit on a warm, moist Friday morning in June. The leaves on the trees were green and vibrant. Every creature was whistling and full of life, ready to live out the day with unmatched optimism. I liked the feeling, but the humidity felt horrible.

I ended up on Route 93, my hair blowing in the wind, sunglasses obscuring the visual details necessary to know whether or not I was actually sleeping while driving. Listening to some man on the radio screaming about the Democrats to someone else screaming about Republicans. I needed to escape all the egotism surrounding me at my home, my job, my neighborhood. It's like a clubhouse where all anyone does is show off their six-pack abs and big cocks to each other, and all the while they hide cheeseburgers under the loose floorboard, and they don't cut the fat kid any slack when he forgets the secret password. Everything sucked basically, and I was looking forward to meeting the center of so much national attention lately.

"Kid, some freaks down in Bone Canyon were on television this morning. The church 's getting all irate about 'em," said my boss, Doug, as he sipped his warm, caramel-colored morning coffee two mornings ago, feeling the heat and steam on his stupid grey and brown mustache. "I want you to go down there and actually talk to them. Figure out why everyone's making such a buzz about them." I was bored with the murders and the sex-scandals and the collapsing local landmarks. I took the assignment.

Exhausted, I made my way towards the Wild West, past the tiny diners and rest-stops. "Excuse me," I called out to a waitress in a restaurant called The Snake's Tooth. "Could you point me in the direction of Bone Canyon?" With a curious look on her face she gave me the directions. Aint too complicated based on where I am now, I thought to myself.

Within 3 hours I came to the mouth of Bone Canyon around 10 at night. I didn't want to disturb them so late at night, even though that's probably when they're awake. Or

maybe they were always awake. Guess I'll find out, I thought. I slept in my truck, under the stars, with nothing to lull me to sleep but the sound of what might be the most fun I could ever dream of, raging over the ravine...

II.

I woke up in a garbage bag at 3 in the morning. Gasping for breath, I pinched the shiny black plastic with a few fingers and tore it open. Desperate to get my mouth through. I must have looked like a cow. They were all staring at me with their pale-grey, gaunt faces.

I spoke up. "Are you guys the - um..."

"Dead freaks? Yeah," answered the youngest, Anthony. "That's us. Who are you?"

"I'm a journalist. I came down here to ask you guys a few questions. See how you live. Why am I - How did I get in this f---ing... Where's my truck?!"

"Everything is fine."

Anthony died in 2006 in a freak baseball accident. Line drive, straight to the pitcher's mound. Smashed him in the throat and he collapsed on the mound like a sack of rocks. He died almost instantly from the hemorrhaging. He was 13. He's still 13, though his mind has the capacity to mature. He stood before me in a grey, sleeveless, hooded sweat shirt that he cut with scissors. The weird baseball pants/shorts. Stirrups. The whole baseball getup, minus the jersey. My god, he's perpetually stuck in the same damn clothes, I thought.

"So, how'd you get here?" I asked him.

"I don't know. Things just sort of worked out that way. I never knew what was going to happen when I died. I came here, had a choice to stay here, so I took it," he said, eyeing his wooden bat, the light-brown, dirt-and-blood-speckled club resting against the wall.

"Where's everyone?" I asked.

"Come on, I'll show you around the canyon. Some of the guys are still up, but it's getting late," he said. He led me out of the house and down the dusty wooden steps that creaked and squealed with each setting and lifting of the foot. Their little encampment was surrounded by giant red walls of rock erected towards the clouds, and two cactuses guarded the natural road ahead.

3 men sat around a fire, eating the scraps of some wild beast that formerly patrolled the canyon. Its white rib cage protruded out, stripped of meat, carved, fried, seasoned and eaten.

Allen, one of the original 4 Men, took a swig of whisky while Anthony told me his background. He of course, wears his Union uniform. The same thing he wore in death.

"Allen came here with the other guys around 1863 or something, during the Civil War. Chased off the side of a bridge at the Battle of Apache Pass."

"And where's Macgruger?"

"Not here. We have his scalp though," he said before running inside enthusiastically and then exiting once again in what seemed like a second or two. "Look! Hasn't even decayed or anything! Isn't that weird?" The once hot pink flesh on the bottom of the scalp was now blue and pale in the moonlight.

"SHIT dahts hawt," Allen shouted as the rib-meat of whatever animal he was eating spilled out of his mouth, muffling his words. "Nice to meet you, man, I'm Allen. Whisky?"

"Sure." I took a swig. Something deep in the back of my brain started boil, and I suddenly felt the urge to get blasted.

"Aaaand that's Spalding. And that's Joel." Spalding is an effeminate writer from upstate NY. His horribly made cabin, which he refers to as "the worst f---ing piece of architecture ever conceived" burned down in the 80s, reducing him to ash and smoke.

"The furnace was in the f---ing attic. Does that make any sense to you? I was heckled into buying it." We all laughed. "Don't trust a pretty view, man."

Joel is a bit more reserved. He went a little insane after his wife's car accident in the 50s. I thought he was a corpse at first, considering he looks like nothing more than a skeleton with a shallow layer of skin stretched over the bones. He starved himself to death in his house.

"So what do you guys do?" I asked.

"I take off my head and I throw it at people," Joel responded, in a voice that sounded like a heavy smoker, crying and trying not to cough at the same time. This invoked wild laughter from everyone around the fire. I didn't laugh due to how uncomfortable his voice made me.

"Joel only opens his mouth to say something batshit insane," Allen told me. "This means that pretty much everything he says is hilarious." No response from Joel. "But anyway, we basically just try to live. We're dead, so we don't really have to eat. But we pretend we do. Gives us something to 'live' for. We've gained back the ability to become hungry. Food is our main goal. We also like to party. Party hard."

Spalding lifted an eyebrow. "Hey, man. We can still die you know. Don't let this asshole make us sound like a huge stereotype. If you cut off my head and then threw it in the sea, I'd die after a few hours. Pulverizing us into sand or trying to blow us up usually works too."

"What the hell is wrong with you? Why are you telling him this? Now the whole world is going to know everything. Everyone thinks we're immortal," said Anthony.

"Well that's f---ing racist," Spalding said, forcing Anthony to chuckle.

"What happens after you die...again?" I asked, receiving the bottle from Spalding as he handed it to me, some liquor dripping from his chin onto the red sand.

"Umm. I think you just sort of go to Hell or something. I don't know. Never happened to me," said Spalding, wiping his mouth with the sleeve of his sweater.

And with that, we trekked up towards Dracula Mountain. The reddish brown walls of the canyon looked colorless and dull in the moonlight.

"I'm freezing," said Anthony.

"You're dead," said Allen.

"Anyway, we gotta protect ourselves you know?" He handed me a long, brown, skinny rifle. A Springfield Model 1861. Their aggressors are a group of dead Apaches led by Chief Cochise. Spalding offered a telling description. "They are anooooooying. Always running around and yelling. Super high pitched. Keeps me up at night. And the Confederates. Alcoholics I tell you!" he exclaimed, stumbling a bit over a very cliché-looking bull skull, the kind you see in Yosemite Sam cartoons. Joel picked it up and put it over his head, wearing it like a mask.

A few Confederate soldiers pop up every now and then, running with the Apache crew. They don't seem to realize that the war is over, or they just don't care. Spalding kept complaining about the raid from a few years ago. A group of about 14 apaches and 5 rebels came through and took everything. Including the whisky. "Other than booze, I don't understand what they want with us."

"Y'know. A new guy comes through every year or so, not knowing what to expect, and gets absolutely decimated by the Apaches before he's even here for a week," Allen said.

"Oh and the church guys too. They come down here and try to start shit every couple of months. But we can't kill them! We just have to sort of slap-fight them until they go away, total bullshit," Spalding explained.

We entered a cave. The shining portraits of all the men who lived in Bone Canyon throughout history hung on the wall. Various documents framed, along with poems and stories written by the Men. We all sat down in a circle and proceeded to drink peyote, which I forgot was actually a real thing. I had only seen it in Young Guns.

I clicked the REC button on my tape recorder and adjusted the little, black mic. Things started to spin, colors blurred and bled into one another. The spinning got faster and faster. I vomited. And they laughed at me. After a few hours though, I felt fine. I started to see everything clearly. Everything was bright and nothing felt bad. I wasn't paranoid anymore. Joel sat silently with his legs crossed like an Indian. Anthony sat against the wall on a silver laptop, smoking a joint. Allen sat in the corner, suffering from vicious chills. He would breath in and out and in and out, often looking right and left and up and down in a spastic manner. The cigarette between his fingers burned down to the filter, as he was too gone to smoke it.

Spalding began to tease him a bit, with consideration "Oh my god. Oh my god, man. Are you freaking out? Are you - are you drowning? Hey. You drowning?"

"Yeah," was all he could muster.

"Haha. Alright. You'll be fine in a bit, son. Just drink some of this water," Spalding told him and tossed him the plastic bottle.

I felt sort of like I was dead. Not in a bad way though. It was a feeling that everything was ok. I was one of them. Everything was resting in place. Ghosts of the former inhabitants of Bone Canyon started to form and dissipate, singing and dancing above. I was a bit confused.

"Bu..How are they ghosts...if they were already...ghosts?" I asked in a strange tone that I could not control.

"Well when you die, you just transport to a different place. Ole' Perronie there is hanging out in an Italian vineyard now. The peyote allows us to connect and hang out with them for a bit. You can only get it here, and a few other places around here though, so the fellas that used to live here get pissed when we don't call on them every couple'a weeks," Spalding explained.

"Buut, you said you didn't know what happens when you die for the second time," I said. I was becoming confused, and I started to zone out a bit while Spalding was talking.

"I know. I just figured I'd explain it to you when we got up here, when you're all stoned and confused, heh heh."

All the bad things were disintegrating, decaying. It gave me the opportunity to pre-

tend I was fine for awhile. Plus, I didn't feel like such a shithead journalist around them. I felt closer. Everything had trails. Any time something moved it left behind a skin which would fade into the atmosphere. In the cacophony of the cave, I became one with them. They live without caring. No one to love but each other. Don't they get bored? Don't they need to get out once in awhile? How many others are there? How the hell haven't we known about them until now? I asked them all these things. They graciously answered all of my inquiries.

"I don't know how many others there are. Probably about 20 in a colony, at the most. We didn't exist until about 500 years ago, and we've been in hiding up until now. Actually, we're still in hiding, you bastards just happened to find us," Anthony explained, before falling backwards and hitting his head off the butt of a rifle. I said Ow to myself, in my head. But I wasn't sure why. So I started laughing uncontrollably for 3 or 4 minutes (according to the tape. It felt more like a few hours when it was actually happening.)

Allen lifted his hand toward my face and snapped at me like a dog-owner. "I'm trying to answer your questions, mac! Listen, to live freely you have to just not care. Don't care about anything." He then pulled a guitar out of its case and began to strum the same chord over and over again, sporadically hitting the open strings above and below in a very peaceful way.

"What happens after you die is much less important than anything that happens during life," Spalding retorted. "Time moves a lot faster. So, actually Allen, you're wrong. You gotta give shits while you're alive, at least a little bit. Then once you're dead, give way less shits. It's pretty fun."

"Look at us, man. You think we're going to remember you even coming here 10 years from now? Probably not. We'll take a picture and hang it on the wall, and that'll be the only thing to remind us," Allen said on top of the beautiful music.

"I can't remember what I ate last hour," said Anthony.

"Actually, I was gonna ask you. You really don't remember?" I asked.

"No. I think it was a boar. I don't know."

So, in their minds, memory loss is the key to fulfillment. A remedy for boredom, I thought.

"Does being dead actually inhibit your memory? Or is it the partying?"

"Both," they said in unison. And we danced and sang and talked shit for hours into the night.

I left the next morning with the rifle they gave me slung over my shoulder. A nice memento. I could still see faint trails, and I was still disoriented. I started the drive back home, hoping I could remember anything that happened. I at least hoped I could remember where I put my notes and my recorder. I had a sad little thought conversation with myself about how my life is sort of like this highway. It's not worth writing about now, really. I then made the slightly selfish decision to veer straight into the oncoming traffic at 90 MPH. I got smashed.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Bone Canyon, pt.1\]](#)

Death on the Rye by Avril Lavigne

The lake, the Rye, – as in, the one near the public park, with the malignant swans that bite your hand if you offer them bread - was shaped like a concave dome. The water lay remarkably still in rigid hemispherical formation, in defiance of gravity. On Saturdays, swarms of adolescents would jump in, splash and scream, and the lake would be the same regular shape as they climbed out. At night, it looked like a skate park crossed with an ice rink. If you shined a torch in, the sides would sparkle and glitter.

Cybergirl packed exactly 6 items into her backpack, before she shut the door that night. They were: a three mega-pixel Kodak, two cans of spray paint, neon orange and pink, personal alarm – of course, it was late at night, unsafe for a young woman such as herself -, a pack of plasters, just in case, and a torch. This last item was basically unnecessary, as Cybergirl's eyes shone with electric blue incandescence all the time; they hadn't stopped since she devoured a crate of uranium-227. She wore sunglasses during the daytime. Lately, her skeleton had started to show through her skin and clothes, glowing cyan also. This was pretty worrying, for her.

She ran like a TGV crossed with a Concorde. The streets flew by like levels in a 2D retro side-scroller. There were midnight cats with bright green eyes, who avoided her trajectory, and ducked, skulking behind lampposts. Cybergirl was pretty much alone, as far as she could see. In front of her, as she ran, was a luminous patch of neon blue lighting, from her eyes, that scanned the floor for chewing gum. The stars were blocked out by sulfur streetlights and smog.

The grass near the Rye was so flat and short, it was almost impossible, in the dark, to tell the concrete path from the lawn. The graffiti had been erased from the 'No Bicycles' sign. The lines of the tennis court were as fluorescent as Cybergirl's bones. When Cybergirl approached the lake, spraypaint in one hand, camera in the other, there were no swans wandering around the edges; the park was so empty, it could have been a graveyard. It felt as dead as Keanu Reeves' acting.

"HELP!", She screamed.

That night, The Paranoid King was on one of his raids, where he would prowl the neighborhood, sticking up posters, about himself. They had about 10 sentences on them, all about how great and scary The Paranoid King was, and a clip art picture of a careworn ninja with two katanas. Most of the time, his posters got shoved into dustbins, but the week before, a Neighborhood Watch grandma had handed one copy into the police. The Paranoid King, contrary to the poster's words, was not wearing obsidian black, but plain jeans and a murky brown T-shirt.

At the Rye, The Paranoid King used to hang out at night, by himself, because he was a su-

perhero / super-villain. His previous accomplishments were: scaring a stray cat, helping a hobo cross the park, bickering, from a distance, with various groups of chavs, with bottles of gin, adding 'that's what she said' to three (and counting!) graffiti slogans. He had received his name from the park chavs, in a brief civil conversation, because of a bizarre delusion he had been worried about, which involved a pensioner with a camera, who followed him to the Rye at night. Most of the time he spent there, he was leaning against a big tree and looking at the lake, pensively. The park was sparsely populated with greenery, there were only two trees to lean against, both along the edge of the watery cavity. It was boring, most of the time.

Cybergirl's shriek was at the same pitch as a whistle and the same volume as a pneumatic drill. When he found her, she was struggling, but floating, face up, on the nadir of the fluid surface, with the contents of her backpack spilled out and also floating across the dome. The exit ladders were rolled up tightly on either side of the lake. From above, it looked as if Cybergirl was infecting the lake with a deadly poison; the water around her was glowing a dangerous neon, the same as her skeleton, and the stain was spreading.

"HELP!", she screamed, again.

The Paranoid King dived in, bursting with chivalry, and landed in the same pit as Cybergirl, his backpack scatted also. There was nothing to do but flap like a disturbed chicken, or drown, whilst simultaneously attempting to grin sheepishly and remark flirtatiously oh what a pickle we're both in now. They looked like a pair of skydivers without parachutes, stuck in stasis in the centre of the lake, mortified.

Did you know that The Paranoid King had a stalker? Her name was Baroness Pursuant, who was ninety years old and was disgusted by the 'intimidating' posters he had been planting around the suburban neighbourhood. She owned nine cats, all of them average-sized and ginger. After the police had ignored her, she took it upon herself to follow The Paranoid King's every move, after the hour of 7 p.m., until 3 a.m., for as many days as it took for her to gather evidence against him. Her face was like a grey cabbage. Often, she went out with her fuchsia curlers still stuck in her hair.

"HELP!" , screamed The Paranoid King and Cybergirl, simultaneously, and Baroness Pursuant jumped, out of nowhere, with a camera, into the water, but did not fall in, as the edge of her nightgown was stuck to a nail on the riverbank. The camera flashed at a jaunty angle, capturing the couple's terrified expressions. The Paranoid King grabbed his stalker's gnarled hand and pulled himself onto her back, dragging Cybergirl with him, and stepped across the discs of old woman's spinal chord onto the shore. He was holding Cybergirl's hand, still.

They looked at each other. She said, "Thanks... shouldn't we help that old - MY KODAK THREE MEGAPIXEL CAMERA IS GONE!" - well not exactly, that's a paraphrase - and he said "That old bat's camera has EVIDENCE of me!" - also paraphrasing, it was a long,

soppy conversation, you don't want to hear the full thing. The old woman's camera was not digital, cool in a quaint, ironic way, and undamaged by the water; you can tell what they ended up doing.

As The Paranoid King reached into the water, the old woman's withered arm hit him over the head. It felt like mouldy jelly. He instinctively punched back and the old woman's night-gown ripped and she tumbled, half-naked, into the lake, looking unconscious, maybe even dead. The Paranoid King's first reaction was to grab the camera, which appalled him, so he dropped it back into the water again, which meant he had to jump back in again, with Cybergirl holding him so he didn't get stuck. And when he did retrieve the camera, both teenagers realized that the wounded pensioner was the more pressing issue.

The Paranoid King was lowered into the lake again, with Cybergirl squatting like a frog and her arms wrapped tightly around his trainers. Check her pulse! , Cybergirl was screaming, through at the hushed volume of a whimpering puppy. Do you have a watch?! , The Paranoid King whisper-screetched back, answered by, just check there IS a pulse, never mind how fast! He did not understand, in his confusion, how it was possible to check someone's pulse without a watch, so he instead reached for Cybergirl's discarded torch and aimed it at the woman's withered old eyelids.

Oh my fucking God, he said, she's dead. Cybergirl pulled him out of the water as fast as a fat kid slurping up a liquorice string. Her face, if The Paranoid King had seen it, was much like the face of the character in Edvard Munch's painting, *The Scream* . She picked up the old woman's camera and disappeared into the black, leaving a wet trail of neon waterdrops behind her, like cat's eyes on a motorway. In a couple of minutes, he too had disappeared, in a mad panic. He couldn't remove the words from his consciousness: grandma-killer.

That night, the uranium-227 in Cybergirl's body had infested the lake. The hemispherical shape, for the first time in the lake's history, began to fall and regress to a normal, level surface. The body rose with the lake. It had three hours, in which to absorb the uranium. At 4.21 a.m., a thunderstorm passed over the lake, and shot down stakes of lightning, one landing, by pure chance, at the tip of the body's spinal cord. From the sky, it looked like a glowing human skeleton, star-jumping. The next morning, the lake was empty, save a few cans of spray paint, a camera and other miscellaneous items.

"Yes.....! I can BREATHE again!"

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for *Death on the Rye*\]](#)

Jane Pt.2 by B. Carpe

He sits up on the evening of the seventh day, straight and fast, and by now it has taken so long the climax is not enough to merit the zombie's surprise, and so it only looks up when the man's sluggish movements dislodge the back of his trousers from the plughole. The water drains, fizzing and slurping.

The zombie watches the man squelch a hand to his face, running it over his eyes and his mouth, and it watches him as he blinks, seemingly attempting to restore sight to his vision.

"Gluuugh," whispers the zombie, in a way no one is attentive enough to humanise as hesitant.

The man rolls his shoulders, and they go pop, pop.

"Well," he says, finally, coughing the first half of the phrase, "I don't feel inhuman." And then he snorts, spraying some water out from his nose. "Or, at least, I don't feel any different."

He turns to look at the zombie who looks at him.

"Do you understand what I'm saying?" he says, and the zombie just looks at him as it always does, so he laughs. "I suppose if you did I'd be in trouble."

He rotates his jaw and rolls his eyes into the back of his head.

"Did you want to go on a killing spree with me?" he says, performing a repeated stabbing gesture in slow motion, glancing down at his hand and back up into the eyes of the zombie again and again, as if talking to a very small, bloodthirsty child.

The zombie just looks at him as it always does.

"Gluuuuugh," comments the zombie, and then it leans over to pick up his boot from the bottom of the bathtub, tilting it to its face and drinking.

He pulls a face in lieu of responding, choosing instead to jerk his head at his boot.

"Clever," he says, "you know, using it as a bottle." He wipes his nose on the back of his hand. "If a little disgusting."

The zombie just looks at him as it always does.

"Gluuuugh," it scoffs.

"Okay," he says, raising his hands in defeat, then turning them palms inward to inspect the state of his fingers. "I'll admit it was a little uninspired. I was looking to pay homage to Noah—you know, the flood and the animals."

He looks at the zombie and the zombie looks back.

"I mean you," he says, and the zombie is silent. He traces the shape of his pinky.

"Well, us," he says. The zombie turns its head away.

"Alright, yeah," he says. "It was definitely a little uncomfortable of me, that whole blood thing."

"Gluuuuugh," agrees the zombie, eventually, its face peering out from the sole of his boot, water dribbling down its chin, damp and enthused.

He begins patting himself down with no small amount of desperation, and the zombie jerks its head to where Jane rests on the tiny porcelain ledge where she used to keep her soap.

His mouth twists in a line.

"No mindless brain-eating sprees any time soon, then, I suppose?" he says, as the zombie finishes off its boot-water. He levers himself up with some difficulty, grasping at the edge of the bathtub, his fingers waterlogged and slippery and careening towards the zombie's. The zombie retracts its limbs, shifting them closer to its person.

Well, zombie.

"I really don't believe it," he says, and he totters over to his bed, collapsing across it, careful to avoid brushing against the pillow by his head.

"Gluuuuugh," comforts the zombie, and he squelches in response.

He lies there until it is dark, or at least until when he suspects dark still happens. The zombie is unnaturally quiet, although that might be by simple virtue of the fact it is unnatural.

When the sun starts to rise again, and his hands have returned to their normal state, he opens and closes his mouth a number of times, running his fingers over his face all the while.

"So I didn't turn?" he says, finally, very fast and humanized as hesitant.

He rolls over a full rotation and stares up at the ceiling, and the zombie just looks at him as it always does, and he looks back the same.

*

He springs up when the sun rises to find the zombie wringing out the mat on the bathroom floor, droplets of water trickling down a tassel to fall into its waiting mouth. He furrows his brows.

"How is it that you need to drink so much?" he says. "I mean, really."

The zombie peers up at him from behind the curtain of his mat.

"Gluuuuugh," it mutters.

"Water's no vice," he says. "It's a need."

"Gluuugh?" returns the zombie, flippant as you please.

He furrows his brows.

"No," he says. "No difference."

*

He spends the rest of the day picking up the pieces. Although the man is under the impression these pieces constitute the ones he has allowed to unravel around him, the upkeep and the maintenance, the needful motions of his interminable humanity, really all it amounts to is collection of body parts, blown up by land mines or cloven through by spikes.

This is picking up the pieces too, but a different kind — a vice kind.

He slings a left arm over his shoulder.

No. No difference.

*

He takes the arm with him back to the house, and it goes slap against his spine every step he takes, and he imagines it is clapping him on the back over and over, good job good job

good job.

He swings it down to trail against the stairs as he climbs, and he remembers he and Jane used to race up and down these stairs on their hands and knees, ridiculous in every moment but the ones during.

"Look what I brought," he says to the zombie, which sits with its leg crossed, feet splayed against its lap.

"Gluuuugh," grimaces the zombie, when it looks up to see the arm draped over his shoulder.

"Don't be a baby," he says. "This should have happened to you."

"Gluuuugh," snaps the zombie, and he looks at it for a moment and it looks back.

"Well, it didn't," he says. "Some people have all the luck," he says. "Well, zombies," he says, and he swings the arm down to grapple with its fingers, fanning them out in front of his face. "Well, this one," he says.

"Son of a bitch got to be married too," he says, fiddling with the ring on its finger.

"Some people have all the luck," imitates the zombie, using all the mouth sounds and none of the expression.

"Well, Christ," he says, "warn a person before you do that."

And he turns face and leaves, dropping the arm because his own are shaking.

*

He runs downstairs barefoot because he hasn't thought to put his boots back on, the old ones the zombie hasn't appropriated as flasks, the ones he didn't ever let a zombie appropriate anyway, but the ones Jane used to smile and shake her head at, her hair kind of swaying.

He sits down on the only stool left in the only kitchen left for miles and miles and just rests his head in his hands, and all the shaking in his arms flows out through his fingertips and twirls into his mind where it is chained and trapped and controlled, and safe, most of all safe.

And because he's so good at this the shudders dissipate too quickly to facilitate the tears that he never allows out to overwhelm him, because they're from the mind and he's got a lid on that.

And then a zombie smashes an elbow into the glass by his stool and wriggles it around until there's an opening large enough to squeeze through and he remembers why one does not ever go downstairs and stay there, especially at night and especially with no shoes on.

*

"Hey," he says. "That's not fair."

He leaps, managing to clear most of the glass, swinging the stool upon which he is seated round in the same motion.

"One bad thing at a time," he says. "I mean, really."

The stool collides with the zombie's torso, which is considerably low down, and he realises this zombie cannot have been older than perhaps twelve.

He wants nothing more than to see it dead.

*

If the zombie—his zombie—hears the commotion downstairs it gives no indication of having noticed, turning instead to another task, seemingly spurred from some tenuous lethargy, which is perhaps indication enough.

For some time when the man and the zombie are not busy making anguished and confusing and something eye contact, the zombie's feet have been swelling, and for just as long the man has assumed this is the product of Jane, and if he is feeling particularly something, he is willing to acknowledge perhaps not Jane, but himself. Had the man the acumen or the inclination to make extended physical contact with the zombie, he might notice the hardening that accompanies the swelling of the zombie's feet, bloated and repugnant. He does not.

The chain binding the zombie's ankle to the bathtub goes pop.

*

The zombie falls to its knees at the blow, and it draws its chest in on itself.

"Hey," he says. "Don't make me decapitate you. Just let me mess you up in the middle."

He brings his knee up to its face, over and over and over until it is difficult to differentiate face from knee and assign blood to owner. It doesn't move, its balance unshakeable, its face a spongy mass lined by hair and blood.

He is satisfied.

"Alright," he says. "Time to go ahead and die now."

And although he thinks pow pow, he doesn't think Jane.

*

The zombie—his zombie—springs up with admirable gusto, swinging its chain around to land abandoned in the bathtub, next to Jane on the tiny porcelain ledge where she used to keep her soap.

The human, not the pistol.

And there is a difference.

The zombie coordinates its ailing appendages towards the man's bed by the window.

*

He kneels down so he is closer to the zombie, and by now he has rendered it incapable of speech—due in part because it is no longer the owner of what any human nearby might conventionally describe as a mouth.

"My," he says, "you're so pretty."

He drapes the zombie across his kitchen cabinets, the ones that have been empty for a year now, but where he and Jane used to keep their pea soup and other tinned goods.

He brushes off its face the hair wetted there by their blood, and he unbuttons with movements that don't make him think about pea soup anymore, the first three buttons of her

blouse.

The zombie still only has a mass instead of a mouth.

“And look at your darling necklace,” he says. “Isn’t that something.” It’s shaped like a star, resting below its collarbones. “Did you get it out of a cereal box?”

The zombie still only has a mass instead of a mouth, but he knows the answer is yes. Jane had one exactly like it, willing to wrap around herself and smile, smile at any piece of jewellery he could find to give her. He remembers it used to swing off her neck when she tossed at night and how the cold metal would brush against his shoulder. It used to be enough to wake him.

“Alright,” he says, reaching over to unclasp the necklace. “I’ll admit I’m being a little crazy. I mean, I know this blouse thing had the potential to be quite disturbing.”

He leans over the zombie’s frame once more, buttoning its tiny buttons with fingers restored.

“There you go,” he says. “Good as new.”

He slides the necklace into his back pocket, tracing his fingers along his belt in search of Jane’s holster, and it’s still wet.

“Wet?” he says. “Fuck wet. How about it’s empty,” he says, to no one in particular, and so the zombie makes an attempt to respond—or to make some or any noise at all.

“Shut up,” he says. “Shut up now.” He pats himself down, from top to bottom, sliding his fingers up his calves and down his ankles and around his torso, and they all fall apart again.

“Stop it,” he says, pressing closed his eyes. “Stop it.” He buries his hands in his hair, carding his fingers through, looking to see if maybe he put Jane in his head too.

“Where is she?” he says. “Where is she, where is she?”

He lunges at the counter, which is bare but for his gaze, and that doesn’t add substance nor Jane to its surface and so all he can do is kick and kick and kick until the zombie makes a sound like it’s exhaling, just one last time before it goes away, and already it’s just a little homesick, and then she dies.

“Where is it?” he says. “Where is it, where is it?”

He grinds his feet into the glass and the more he does it the slicker and easier everything is so after a while it’s just like skating.

And when he falls to his knees it’s not like crawling at all; in fact he feels he’s flying, and he and Jane are racing up the stairs again except this time he’s losing, can’t keep up properly with the pain in his chest, almost like someone’s cloven it in two, and victory doesn’t matter, and so more than ever he’s lost.

When he reaches the landing he remembers the zombie, and he remembers Jane, and he thinks oh, the ledge, and then a belated oh, it’s got Jane now, hasn’t it? And then he thinks of being shot over and over from the feet upwards.

“I’d deserve it a little,” he says, and he climbs to his feet and they sear. When he falls against the doorknob it can’t be said he means to turn it, but he does.

*

The zombie looks up from where it sits on the bed, the bedside drawer he's kept locked for a year ajar, the fingers of its right hand carding through its hair and Jane's plastic purple hairbrush following the trail.

"You could never just do anything normally, could you," he says, and he crawls into the bathroom to cry against the bathtub.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Jane Pt.2\]](#)

Maxwell's Hammer by Globulous

Maxwell Edison was a very quiet person. He got along with other people alright but most usually alienated him, leaving him in seclusion. He was very bright on the other hand, majoring in medicine. His mind was constantly running scenarios and possible outcomes of situations, analyzing what could happen or inevitably go wrong, hoping that someone would find interest in the way he sees things. This often proved counter-productive, though, as the people around him were disturbed by the way he always goes about it and end up leaving him. Not everyone was bothered by him though, Joan Pelisier found him quite charming.

Joan was a very quizzical person, always finding something curious to her and relentlessly questioning it. She studied Pataphysical Science, leading into long nights at home, slaving over test tubes. She often had no time to go out and enjoy herself because she became so immersed in her studies. The only time she knew she would concede to leaving her work was if Maxwell asked her to. To her dismay, he never did. She often wondered if she loved him but dismissed it as illogical and childish.

Maxwell loved Joan. He would do anything for her. So many times had he tried asking her out, but to no avail, Until that one fateful day. Maxwell picked up the phone and dialed her number. She greeted him cheerfully while he kept a nervous tone, constantly stumbling over his words. He tried to make small talk, to avoid getting to the main reason he called but his speech was so broken. Eventually he would have to ask her.

"Joandoyouwanttoseeamoviewithme?"

He couldn't believe his own ears. It just came out. He had no control over it. One big mess of a word. And then there was silence. He didn't like the sound of it.

"...Max, I would love to."

His heart jumped and danced when he heard those words. This was it, he would finally be able to be with her, the way he imagined.

So they decided on a time and a place and somewhat awkwardly said their good-byes. Maxwell hung up and layed down, trying to comprehend what just happened. Joan hung up and crashed onto a sofa. She couldn't remember the last time she had been that happy. Things were starting to look up for Maxwell.

Maxwell was sweating bullets the entire drive to Joan's house. His mind was racing, he could barely focus. He probably shouldn't have been driving. But alas, he arrived without incident. It was the third house on the left in a cul-de-sac. Not a fancy home, but not a shack either. On either side were houses with tidy gardens with Joan's lawn being unkempt and unruly. He walked up the stone path and caught a glimmer in his eye. It was a hammer with a silvery shine, just lying on her lawn. He picked it up. It wouldn't hurt to inquire about it.

Joan was jittery. She was nervous. She couldn't keep her nerve. Her excitement couldn't contain itself. It got to the point where the phone rang and she nearly jumped out of her shoes. It was one of her friends.

"Joan, did you hear about Matthew Scott? Apparently he's going to ask you out."

"Seriously? I would never go out with him. He's so weird and he knows it. He called me one time and all he did was stumble all over his words. He couldn't even speak normally."

Unfortunately, Maxwell had been just outside her front door when he heard her. Her front window was wide open but all he heard was Joan's retort. It was enough to send him into a spiral of anger. He suddenly couldn't grasp right and wrong. He didn't know what to think. The only person who seemed to like him, the one he loved, really didn't. He felt crushed. Broken. He didn't know how to fully react so he did what felt right to him.

He rapped his fist against the wooden door several times. Rapid footsteps were heard running around inside. Moments passed but Maxwell seemed not to care. Nothing phased him at this point. After much delay, the door swung open to reveal Joan Pelissier panting out of breath with a mess of hair tied up into a rough bun.

"Max, you're really early. Are you okay?" She looked at him. Something didn't seem right. There was an air of anger and hatred. "I'm still getting ready, do you want to come in?"

Still gripping the hammer in his right hand, without hesitation, swung up and smashed it into her forehead with a loud crack of her skull. The hammer came down upon her head and a light spatter of blood struck his face. Joan hit the floor in a small mess. Unconscious. He stepped over the lifeless heap and examined her head. The one blow didn't do justice. He swung the hammer again and again, pulverizing the girl's face and features. Blood pooling on the floor and collecting on the hammer and himself. He made sure that she was dead.

Confused and disoriented from the events that had just taken place, Maxwell dropped the hammer and walked back to his car in a sort of daze. He didn't remember a damn

thing from the past five minutes. Perhaps it was for the best. The blood, he figured, was from a nosebleed.

~ ~ ~

He hadn't seen or heard from Joan in over a week. He wasn't completely worried because she did this often, lock herself in her house when she got bogged down in work. But something didn't seem right. Regardless, there wasn't much he could do. After making a fool of himself at her house by bleeding all over the place, he couldn't show his face around there any more.

~ ~ ~

She was dead. Brutally murdered. All that was found at the scene was a blood-stained silver mallet. An instant feeling of dread and sorrow. It happened on the day they were supposed to go out. Deep within his mind he felt it was partly his fault. Had he not gotten that nosebleed, she may still be alive. But, alas, there was nothing he could do. She was gone.

~ ~ ~

Maxwell sat in class, quietly. Everyone else around him were interacting with each other. He just kept his head down, eyes glued to the floor. He acknowledged no one. He responded to no one. He just sat there.

His teacher, Erin Halloway noticed that something was wrong. She, having a degree in Sociology alongside her Ph.D in Medical Science, knew that if she found out what was wrong, she may be able to work with him to make him more in tune with reality. It was quite apparent his mind wasn't all there.

"Max?" Her voice brought his head up. "Could you do me a favour? Go into the supply closet and grab me a jar of iodine."

He got up and moved across the classroom quietly. It took him a moment to search the shelves for his objective. He wasn't sure why she took notice to him, no one else did. Why didn't she make someone else do it? Oh well, he found the iodine and slowly closed the supply closet door. Keeping close to himself, he crossed the room with the jar in hand. He extended his arms to hand her the iodine but before her hands made contact, it slipped through and smashed all over the floor.

"I... I... I'm sorry..."

"Max, could you see me after class? Cody, can you find one of the janitors to clean this up?" Max, embarrassed beyond all reason, quickly made his way to his seat and resumed looking at the floor, to avoid eye contact with anyone.

~ ~ ~

Everyone was gone, Max sat almost alone in an empty classroom. "Max, come here." She called him over to her desk. It was cluttered with stacks of paper, jars of unknown origin, and for some odd reason, a run of the mill ball-peen hammer. This caused Maxwell's mind to race as lost memories flooded back. Pictures of a dead girl. A blood-stained carpet. A tightly gripped mallet.

Was it he who killed Joan? Impossible, he thought, he loved her. Why would he kill her? How could he kill her? He knew it wasn't in his nature to be violent.

"Are you alright?" Max snapped back to attention. "You look a little pale." She pressed the back of her hand against his cheek, checking for fever.

"I'm fine. I'm sorry about the iodine, by the way."

"Don't worry about it. Now, Max, is something troubling you? You seem very vacant recently."

"I... I don't know. It's not every day your best friend dies."

She thought for a moment. That would explain why he's been so distant and miscalculated. But there must have been something else. Most people are reclusive to this sort of thing, he was something more. "Max, I want you to do something for me. I want you to write 'I must not be so' 50 times on the blackboard beside you. Leave a blank at the end of each sentence so you can fill in the last word on your own."

"What does this have to do with anything?"

"Just trust me. Now if you'll excuse me, I have some work to do, if you can't tell." Maxwell lightly nodded and began writing out what he was told.

Over and over he wrote the same sentence, still unsure of what it was supposed to accomplish. I must not be so... I must not be so... I must not be so... I must not be so what? This didn't make sense. He was reduced to monotonously writing lines. He felt his anger grow, he was practically being punished for something that wasn't his fault. As he got angrier, he could feel his confidence rising. He needed to find a way out of this. No matter what. He didn't deserve this.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the hammer. The blue handle. The gun metal grey head. Just crying to do justice. The teacher was sifting through a filing cabinet. Her back to him. Perfect.

He placed the chalk down and quietly walked over to Ms. Halloway's desk. He placed his hand down and slowly picked the hammer. It'll be just like last time.

"...I'm done." The teacher spun around, almost startled, but only saw him a moment before the hammer came crashing down upon her head. No blood this time. He would change that. His hand tightly wrapped around the handle was quickly turning red as he relentlessly brutalized her face. A thin layer of blood coated the filing cabinets across from them while the rest all ran to the floor. He was merciless. He would not, could not stop. Until he knew he had justified his punishment.

~ ~ ~

He must have been sitting there for over an hour, just covered in blood. This time, he knew what he did. He was proud, yet something felt incomplete. The blackboard. He had yet to fill in the blank. Though it was unnecessary at this point, she wouldn't be seeing it, he figured he would humor her.

He got up from beside the lifeless teacher. The blood had long since coagulated on the floor. Standing next to the blackboard, he contemplated what to fill in the blank. I must not be so... I must not be so... I must not be so... A slight sneer curled his lips. I must not be so... Testy.

As he dragged the chalk against the slate to fill in the missing word, the noise of books dropping behind him caused his head to jerk around. Standing in the doorway, with their mouth agape, was a fellow student from his class. All Maxwell did was crack a smile and continue writing. The student, panicked, ran out frantically. Maxwell knew it was only time before he was arrested. But he didn't care. He would wait for them to come. After all, where would he run to? His face had already been seen. He would use this as a way out.

~ ~ ~

"We've got a dirty one." Maxwell overheard the police chief whisper to the bailiff. "Bludgeoned two girls to death, both with hammers."

"Good God, and look at him, he seems so meek."

"The weirdest part? He didn't resist arrest. He willingly gave himself over."

"Odd. Oh, shh, here comes the judge. All rise for the honourable Judge Addison." The small audience plus Maxwell and his attorney all stood as the judge took his seat.

"Alright, sit down." They all did so. "Maxwell Edison, you are charged with the manslaughter of two females. One Joan Pelissier and one Erin Halloway. How do you plead?"

Maxwell stood up from his chair and looked the judge square in the eye.

"Guilty." The congregation behind him could be heard murmuring.

"You take responsibility for these murders?" The judge was incredibly confused.

"I don't take the responsibility, I admit to doing it."

"Doing so will guarantee you at least 30 years in prison."

"I am aware."

The judge thought for a moment. "Mr. Edison, please come to the witness box." Maxwell nodded and walked over to the small booth, right next to the judge. "Max... May I call you Max?"

"Go right ahead."

"Max, why did you kill those two girls?"

"I wanted to."

"But why?"

“I just wanted to.”

The judge let out a sigh. “Captain, can I speak to you for a moment?” The police chief walked to the judge, over to the side away from Maxwell. “There is no way he could have killed those girls and then willingly admit to it. Something isn’t right here.”

“What do you want me to do about it?”

“I want you to keep guard outside, I’m going to do something a little bit against protocol.” The chief gave him a look of odd curiosity. “I’m going to ask everyone but Max to leave. I think he may be hiding something and the fact that people are here is keeping he from revealing the truth.”

“Are you sure? He’s accused and admitting to the murder of two people. Do you really want to put yourself in that kind of danger?”

“There is no danger, there is no way he could have committed those crimes.”

“He was found at the scene of murdered teacher covered in blood!”

“I don’t care. Look at him, he’s just a socially awkward teenager.”

“Which gives him more reason to snap.”

“Just... Give me a moment with him.”

The police chief massaged his brow for a moment. “Fine.”

“Thank you. Everyone, I would ask you to please leave this room for a moment. You will be escorted out by both the police chief and the bailiff.”

“Wait! Maxwell must go free!” A woman in her forties shouted from the gallery.

The judge scanned the room with his eyes until he found where the objection came from. “And who are you?”

"I'm Maxwell's mother; Rose. This is his sister Valerie." She directed his attention to a little girl of only seven. "Maxwell is a good boy, he wouldn't do something like this."

"I'm sorry to say but if the evidence proves otherwise, he will be convicted. I have no other say in the matter. Now, if you would kindly remove yourself from this courtroom for a moment." There was nothing else she could do but leave, along with the rest of the evacuating crowd.

The judge stepped down from his seat. "Max, I see you're insistent on taking blame but you don't seem like the kind of person to do these things to begin with. I want to know, is this a full confession or are you hiding something? Taking the blame for someone else?"

"A confession." Max wanted to keep his answers short, there was nothing more to say. The fact that they kept persisting he didn't do it only made him angrier. He did it, why couldn't they just put him away? All they were doing was wasting time. He killed Joan, he couldn't live with himself but he very well couldn't kill himself. "Why are you bent on proving me otherwise?"

"No offense, but look at you. You're not prime murdering material."

And on top of no one believing him, they're going around criticizing him. Typical behavior of someone in doubt. It was then he remembered that judges usually have a gavel. A hammer. He put two and two together.

"Max, I just don't understand, why go through with all of this?" The judge walked over to a window, admiring the people down below. "There are six and a half billion people on this Earth, why kill the two that actually listened to you?" This was working all too easily for Maxwell. Being as silent as possible, he reached for the gavel. He felt the handle and quickly snatched it, keeping it out of sight.

"I wanted to." As the words left his mouth, he was already working his way out of the witness booth, still moving silently. He crept on his toes with haste, making his way to the judge.

"I guess I have no choice but to convict you if you are just confessing like that."

"Fine by me." Maxwell's voice seemed closer, louder. He was right behind him. The impact of the hammer against his head was quick and sharp but soon felt nothing. Max needed to make sure this one couldn't talk so he took the gavel in both his hands and used the force of both his arms to destroy the judge's cranium. BANG! BANG! Maxwell's hammer came down upon his head. CRACK! THUD! He made sure that he was dead. At this point, he was

used to having a thin layer of blood on him. It wasn't anything new.

"Is everything okay in here? I thought I heard something fall." The police chief poked his head into the courtroom. "Can we come back in or-JESUS CHRIST! Drop the hammer. NOW!" He immediately pulled out his gun.

Maxwell just looked at him. "Nah."

"DROP IT!"

"I'd really rather not." Maxwell started walking towards the door.

"One more chance, drop it!" Maxwell just kept on walking

The chief pulled the trigger 4 times. Maxwell was hit three times in the chest. Once in the forehead. Despite the fatal shots, his body took a few moments to fall. The gavel that was in his hand was the first to go. Slick with blood, it slid out from his hand and clattered to the ground. His body rapidly growing weak eventually buckled at the knees and collapsed to the courtroom floor.

Maxwell was covered in blood for the last time. This time, it was his.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Maxwell's Hammer\]](#)

On The Boardwalk by EJ Harrow

The sky is napalm. People walk on planks of wood suspended out into the bay, it's almost night, and the civilities of the day are about to collapse into the frivolous unethical province of the night. It feels like the end of something.

At the end of the dock stands a man. He wears a trench coat, which covers a ventilated tuxedo. The coat flaps in the wind and offers resistance against the Earth's natural forces of energy. The man is hiding from something.

Here she comes. A fellow player in this game of hide & seek. She is a hider, as well. Here she comes in her beautiful sundress; the breeze flows fluently and true, and for a moment, a fleeting second in between now and then, life, and reality seem like a suspended second, a moment, or a drug. The moment is petrified, and terrifyingly beautiful. And all the occupants of this serene painting feel like they are in a children's lullaby. Salt drifts through the air, and somewhere in the park a band is playing a chorus of windpipes, and flutes. An organ grinds softly, and muted in the distance.

The woman holds tightly onto her long brimmed hat, so the wind doesn't carry it away. She stands beside him now. Two old souls, suspended in this realm of surrealism. She opens her mouth to speak; he hushes her and places his finger over her soft pink lips.

"They tore it down," he begins to say. She doesn't understand. She doesn't understand a lot of the things he says because often he makes no effort to explain himself. He is one of those types who laugh at their own jokes. The cruel irony of being this sort of person is the world laughs at them more times than not. "This was where I landed. When I first came to this nation," he referred to the USA. He was a foreigner by origin. "This used to be where the immigrants landed. But they tore it down. There was a ferris wheel right over there," he pointed back onto the shoreline where a small amusement park had once stood. "I came with my mother. Father stayed home. And the first thing I ate upon coming here was a hotdog at that stand over there," he made gestures with his head instead of pointing with his digits. "My first taste of America. I will never forget that first taste. It tasted like..."

"Victory?" she cut in. He shook his head. "No. It tasted like a regular Hot Dog. But it wasn't just any regular hot dog, it was an American Hot Dog."

She nodded in understanding. "But you know... America isn't that great" she said.

"Says you," he shot back. "But I know in my heart that it's the best of the worst." She did not respond. The wind spoke for the both of them for a while. It played with their hair. It danced for them, and carried exotic melodies of joy, and sorrow for them to hear. They were the Wind's guests for that period of time, in that realm that transcended everything. He giggled. A memory was stirring in his mind.

"I went to Raleighs the other day, you know, the bookstore? I went incognito. I was supposed to sign up for an autograph signing. Instead as I opened the doors and stepped inside I was taken aback."

"Why?" she grinned. He paused for a second, perhaps searching for the right words. "There were just these aisles... aisles, upon aisles, upon aisles. Uncountable, and awe inspiring. Rows and rows of media. Text. And it just floored me that the place was empty. Save for the corner where they expected me to show up and sign their little dogeared copies of my novel. I looked at them, studied them. I had some-

how wandered into some ancient, decadent... and degraded feeding frenzy! This pestilent pack of rabid bastards were resorting to their most primordial, and antediluvian animal instincts. In that moment in time, they were nothing more than stupid, fiendish apes, indulging in idol worship. And there god was a novel. But they cared nothing for the novel. They cared for the author. They probably hadn't even read my books. I must confess, at this point I felt confused, cheated, robbed, and above all disappointed. I felt like shouting "Stop right there, you brutish, starstruck, reptilian scourges!", and I would've, but my Groucho Marx Funny Glasses prevented me from doing so. It would have blown my cover immediately. And so I decided that this, right there, what I was witnessing, was human perversity, and delusion at it's pinnacle. And I had stumbled right upon it. And the words of Kurtz were resounding in my ears the entire time:

'The Horror... The Horror... Extinguish all the brutes'

And then this geeky looking pseudo-intellectual college type clerk asked me a question. Nothing complex. Just a standard little 'Can I help you with anything?' At first this didn't register with me. I replied with the automatic kneejerk default 'No, just browsing,' Then something changed. 'No, wait. Yes. You can.' She turned around and let out a sigh. She didn't think I had heard it. I ignored it and went on. I told her I was looking for a book that would help me rearrange the fragments of my shattered gaping hellbound soul, and inspire me to pull myself out of the gaping sinkhole that is my life. And she pushed her glasses up onto the top of her nose, as they had previously been slipping downwards, and falling off her face. She gave me this look, that was both skeptical, and harsh. She asked me if I was joking, or if I was being serious. She did so very monotonously, I might add. If you want my opinion, I think she must've been a cyborg, probably the work of the Soviets." he let out a deep laugh. "I told her that it was a bit of both, but I was mostly being serious. She mechanically extended her arm with her index finger drawn, and pointed to a small wall in the corner. 'Religious Conversion Section' she said quite seriously. And then she told me her Raleigh's Recommended Read would be "Basic Teaching of the Buddha, with a foreword by Glen Wells" So I let out a grin, and proceeded to the Religious Conversions Section to pick up a copy of the text."

The woman-Elly laughed. "They actually have a Religious Conversions Section, huh?" Jack nodded. "And it's actual official title is "Religious Conversions Section", they don't beat around the bush with that one."

They were silent for a few moments. They listened to the music in the distance. He felt compelled to tell her something. To explain it.

"I just wanted to be a statue, you know, Elly."

Again. She did not understand. He stared out to sea with vacant familiarity. He looks like he knows something, a secret, exclusive to him, and him alone. Something about the sea. She removed his sunglasses and put them on herself. The spectacular sunset was faded black. "You never take these off... you're missing so many colours..." she said.

"I've worn them so long. My eyes would feel naked without them..." he squints, as he says. The waves came up. Out far they built up, perpetual cycles of rhythm and motion, endless and timeless.

"Perhaps you were a statue in some way, Jack" she says. Even though she does not understand. She pretends to understand. He knows she doesn't understand. His coat flows in the breeze; it's that warm California breeze. The gulls drop and call out.

"No, babe, I don't think so," he says as he hops up onto the wooden handrail and balances. "If I was, if I were to fall right now, I'd sink like a stone."

She followed alongside him, as he shakily made his forth. He felt foolish. "You don't understand anyways, love" he says. He produced a flask from inside his coat breast pocket. "Then tell me" she says. He passes her the flask. They gaze into each other's eyes for a single lifelong moment. He let out a wild laugh, and brushed his blonde hair out of his eyes.

"It's not about the art anymore. It's about a lifestyle. And the writing... the writing was just a tourist attraction." he hops off the beam. And speaking softly, mostly to himself, he kicks a can. "And you, and I, were just..." he pauses, furrows his brow even more than it's usually furrowed. He stares straight into his own sunglasses. "we were what?!" she asks.

"We were only pawns in their game, babe." he replied, as he stared into the dark lenses. She let out a soft mad giggle. "You're only realizing this now?" she inquired. She turns and leans on the guardrail. "Paper media is dead." she speaks from numb lips that don't want to utter the words. He took a swig from the flash. It burns smooth. "I wrote something..." he says. She glanced at him. He had not written anything in a while. "Oh?" she replied in her usual way. He uncrumpled a piece of Hotel letterhead paper, and read aloud:

"I did not give my permission, by JE Harvey" he read the title. He handed it to her, and her eyes poured over the paper. Some of it was illegible drunken rambles. But she took what she could in.

"I only ever wanted to be a statue,

in some obscured shrine. Hidden to most.

Where rays do not find. An Uninterrupted Garden, that was the dream I had.

In a prolonged, suspended, state of solace.

Where Childhood plays, and lets out happy innocent guffaws into the air.

And the sound of running water is nearby.

Where I am draped divine, garbed with sacred vines.

Where there is an alien beauty about neither being born, nor unborn.

I only ever wanted to be formed out of stone and clay. Frozen in one single moment, princelike, and a symbol of nothing. In this Sacred Garden where we do not age.

And there is only my everlasting gaze, a loving entrancing eye.

There is an inscription at the base that reads simply: "Yes. Above all. More than anything. I wanted these things.", and as Childhood meanders through the forest to locate the statue they love so much, it will rain sometimes, and I will recall the days of my youth, now long gone, and the pungent, overpowering, reminiscent aroma of damp asphalt in humid

after moist downpours will reach my concrete nostrils, wafting at first, then taking hold. And I will finally be at home, in that lake, the body of water I came from. I will finally be back at the lake. And I will sink like a stone..."

She handed it to him. He crumpled it back up, and put it away. He said nothing, but stood beside his companion. She was quiet. "Things look much more peaceful through your lenses, Jack..." she finally said. "They'll be waiting for us back at the awards ceremony." She took a swig from the canteen and passed it.

"To hell with them, and their awards. Let them rot. I write for me. Not for them. And I can promise you this. They'll never see so much as a single predicate from me again." he said firmly. "I'm not going back into that hazy house of mirrors, and social vampires. I'm going to sit here and watch the sunset with you." he squinted, realizing for the first time how bright it was without his sunshades.

"We really have become the dinosaurs, haven't we, Jack?" Elly asked. He put his arm around her shoulder, and replied with utmost certainty. "Yes, we have. We're the dying breed. The last generation of the last Analog Age. The New Lost Generation. And soon we will all be shrivelled up bones and fossils, and if we get real lucky, our head's will get mounted on the walls. The times, they are-a-changing,"

Below the boardwalks the waters crashed into the pylons. A sea otter let out a call. It fell on deaf ears.

"This is the perfect moment, isn't it? This moment of pure unadulterated acknowledgement..." he said to her. She glanced into his eyes. He pulled the sunglasses off her face, and rested them on the crown of her temple. Their eyes met, with no lenses in between now. They were on the same level or understanding. "We can't kiss, you know that, right?" he said.

"Oh. And why is that?" she sneered. "For some silly "I just want to stay friends" reason?" He shook his head. "Because this moment is perfect. We need to maintain it for as long as we can. It might be impossible to maintain it forever. But we can do our best... and to kiss would be to change it, and make it into a second moment altogether."

She grinned. "Then we will kiss when the sun goes down, and this moment is but a fleeting memory in a dinosaur's mind."

"Yes, darling" he said, pulling her closer. "We will wait until then."

So they watched the sailboats make their way inwards, in an eclipsing frosty silence, guided by lights. And before too long, the dusked-over sea whispered softly a story of two bitter hidiers in a game of hide & seek who had found each other, ready or not.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for On the Boardwalk\]](#)

Red & Black by C.T. Pickett

Part One: Red

I always slept with thick, black curtains hanging heavy over all three of my bedroom windows. To keep out the sun. The middle of one night, though – March 23, 2199, six years ago (has it been that long?) – a hot red light shone so bright through the dense cotton or whatever of my sunblocker drapes that the whole room lit up at once and glowed the same dark off-red as the inside of a womb, if I could compare the color to anything. I started up and considered action; ultimately I decided against it: who knew what the fuck kind of alien craft or demon from hell could have been capable of casting such a sick light as this, but I figured it had to have been one or the other because that terrible light was not of this world, at any rate.

Shortly it was revealed that I had guessed correctly the first time. It was a real flying saucer, but I don't think like any that I've ever heard about or seen on tv.

The curtains flew and disintegrated in flames. I could have pissed myself, and honestly I think I did a little bit – just shaking all over, mumbling prayers to a god I've never believed in but at that juncture desperately wished for and at the same time angry at him for his very inconvenient absence.

“Jesus fuck,” I said. “WHAT DO YOU WANT! WHO ARE YOU! FUCK!”

Glass shattered from three directions all at once and rained down on my sheets.

I hid my head under the covers.

It still looked red, even there in the little cotton cavern I had dug out for my scared little self. Tears running freely made everything wet.

“Jesus I'm sorry for being such a piece of shit I guess please don't let me die I'll do anything... what did I even do that bad that you've got to sic your dog Satan on me Lord, what is this – I don't even...”

Now, I couldn't tell you beyond that point what I was thinking or saying.

Weightlessness occurred to me like a slow realization; the sheets slipped off my body and I was naked and limp in the air above my bed. This burning red force drew me towards its brightest light, the window in the wall opposite the one behind me. I floated over the foot of my bed and out the window.

Red gave way to black.

The next day, wouldn't you know it, I didn't remember a goddamn thing.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Red & Black\]](#)

Shiva By Josef K.

[Editors Note: Shiva Is Hebrew for "Seven"]

My mother is crying so loud that at first I can't make out what she's saying, her voice made tinny and small through the phone. Finally I pick his name from the sine wave of her wailing, and I know my brother Lev is dead. My guts constrict, wrapping into a knot, and I feel the air rush out of me, and then I am no longer quite standing. I let her go on for a while as I struggle to control my breathing, eyes tilted skyward to stem the tears, back pressed to the cool cracked plastic of the refrigerator. When she's out of breath I hear my father, his low baritone cracked with hurt, muttering, to me or my mother or both. After a while I start to hear his words, hear 'shiva', and my guts twist again, counterclockwise this time. He is talking to me.

They want me to come home.

1

I land just in time for the funeral, crossing the continent in a few bleary eyed hours, and I arrive at the cemetery still wearing the sweaty reek of the plane's cabin on my clothes. The coffin is almost into the ground before I can fully grasp what it means. That this is my brother's body, and that he is dead, and this is forever. I'm still mulling this over, spinning it in my head like a smooth stone, when we arrive at the home we grew up in. I place my bags onto a familiar bed that looks smaller than it should, and then I return to the ground floor where I shake hands, and nod politely to a swirling fog of strange and aged faces from my childhood.

I answer the same questions over and over again, my job, my life, the past 20 years. There's a rhythm to the answers I soon nail, and then I no longer have to think about the responses. The faces drift away with the daylight, and when the house is dark and empty, everything sharpens and solidifies. Everywhere I twist my eyes, something triggers a tiny explosion of images and memories. A dented baseboard. Dull silver on a salt shaker.

My mother and father sit, side by side in plastic folding chairs across from the couch, hands clasped and eyes tilted downward. For a moment I think about helping them to the couch, to some relative physical comfort. The moment passes. I sit down in my father's overstuffed recliner, and try to keep my head above the flood of little memories.

There's something odd about the light, I think, as the edges of my vision grow dim. I look to my mother, see the light shining painfully off the chrome trim of her glasses, see the dark hollows of her eyes go almost black. The contrast sharpens, and the uncanny change in the light becomes too painful to look at, to even think about. Unfair is the word that comes to mind. I shake my head, and look back to the flat neutral tones of the embroidered couch.

My brother is there. Dressed in funereal black, his hair long and wild. He is staring at me and be-

neath his uneven beard his mouth is moving, but no sound escapes, not even the sibilant pops and clicks of lips and teeth. No breath. I struggle not to pass out, hold my neck rigid, and stare.

Engines of logic whirl to life in my head, burst through the superstitious fog that threatens to choke out the last of the weird light. I close my eyes. I'm tired. Under extreme stress. Still not quite well. I should have expected something like this. I press fingertips to my eyes, and focus on the purple and blue geometric explosions of false light. Count the angles and lines. Breathe.

Breathe.

Open.

Lev is leaning forward, reaching his arms across the coffee table at our parents, and his lips continue to dance and twist without sound. They look down, leathery faces impassive. My father is asleep.

He turns back to me, and his bright black eyes flash beneath black coiled ringlets of hair. He is smiling. That wild, wide Lev smile. Mischief and revelation and something else. He speaks again, and with a sudden snap, like the bursting of a soap bubble, I hear.

"The light, Ronen. Can you see it?"

Breath escapes me like a pierced balloon, one long sigh until I am empty, and for the first time today, I begin to cry. Lev's black eyes are wet, locked on mine, and I hang onto the moment, until the creak of my father standing breaks the silence.

"I'm glad you came home, son," he mumbles as he takes my mother by the hand and leads her up. "Thank you."

Irrational anger wells up in me, and I twist to glare at my father, to shut him up, but the strange light is already fading. I am crying in an old chair in a familiar room on a warm, wet evening.

Lev is gone.

Sleep comes quick, and it is deep and black. In the morning, I make breakfast for my parents, and none of us speak aloud. There's a language to the little looks, the hands clapped on shoulders, the sad little smiles. There's comfort in presence. I wash the dishes, feeling the cool waters moving over my hands, savoring the crash of white noise.

In the living room, the doorbell rings, and my father allows the first of the minyan in. There is hugging, and nodding, and they begin the mourner's kaddish. The old uncomfortable itch flairs up at the sound, words whose sounds I know intimately but whose meaning I know not at all. Ignoring a sharp glance from my father, I climb the stairs, and lock the bathroom door.

I shower, take the morning's pills, and shave. When I return to my room, Lev is there. He sits on the edge of the bed, looking out the window, morning sun painting his face. The pressure on my chest is back, and I focus hard on breathing.

He turns to me and smiles.

"Ronen. I'm so glad to see you again." His voice is liquid and golden. His smile is beatific.

"Me too, Lev," I manage, aware of how cracked and uneven it sounds.

"I will see you again. In God's hands, and in due time." He turns back to the light, closing his eyes. "He loves you, Ronen. Even when you hate him. Especially when you hate him."

I remember why I hadn't spoken to Lev in three years, and I'm as angry as ever. That patronizing shit. That condescending self righteous-

I'm staring at an empty space on the bed, motes of dust in a sun beam. The water in the bathroom is still running. I'm alone.

My parents and I reach an equilibrium, an understanding, by the third day. I cook for them, spend long silent hours cleaning the house, hold them when they appear close to breaking. They don't ask me to join them for prayer, but I see the furrowing of their brows when I leave the room.

When Lev appears to me in the back yard, I am clipping laundry to the rust scarred plastic lines of our drying racks. I look up, and Lev is beneath the boughs of the old apple tree, dappled sunlight on his sallow face. His skin is waxy, his cheeks sunken. He no longer smiles, and beneath his limp bangs his black eyes are searching, flitting from the sky to my own.

I still have a kernel of anger from the day before, irrational and seething. I turn to make sure my parents are far from earshot.

"Lev," I say.

"Brother."

There is a long pause, and he turns from me to run his thin and bony hands against the bark of the apple tree.

"How is Paradise?" I ask, and am instantly ashamed. I've tried not to dwell on the teleological or psychological implications of these visits. On the first night, it was a waking dream. Yesterday, it could have only have been Lev, infuriating, self righteous, beloved Lev. Now, as his eyes waver and shine, I see in them not smug glory, but terror, kept barely at bay, I regret my bitter words with an almost physical force.

He opens his mouth long before the words come forth.

"I don't think that's where I am, Ronen."

"What do you mean, Lev?"

"There's no one here with me." He crosses his legs and sits beneath the great tree, picking up a late summer apple, gone soft with rot. "It's warm, and full of light. But," he waves his arm at the shining sky, "So goes the season."

I go to him, sit down in the sharp and unkempt grass, making a mental note to weed and mow tomorrow afternoon. I face my brother's shade, see the gray color that seeps into his taut skin.

"Why are you here Lev? Is this me? Or is this real?" On the last word, his face tremors, and I am afraid the skin will split.

"I don't know Ronen. All I know is that I still am. Time, distances, they are fuzzy. But I'm here, in some way. Mother and Father cannot see me. No one but you."

"More evidence that you're a dream."

"Put away your logic, brother," he spits, anger flaring on his delicate, decaying features. "Why did you come home?"

"For them. It was important that I sat with them," I say

"But you don't believe."

"I let them say the kaddish. I'm not here for you. You're dead."

I expect another surge of fury, but he only nods.

"When I awoke, it was Paradise, because I knew it must be. But, I must be wrong. God wouldn't leave me to doubt like this."

"Not your god," I agree.

He smiles at me, and this time the skin does split, cracking at the corners, bloodless tears that widen his grin.

"It takes death to bring me to your camp, Ronen."

I bite back the expected retort of a hundred practiced theological arguments. We spent all our lives together in this fight, and now I don't want him to agree with me. I want to hear his rhetoric and justifications. Lev surrendering is not Lev.

"This is me," I declare. "A shallow wish fulfillment fantasy of misfired chemicals. This isn't you." I stand up, feeling the truth in it, and turn away. "It's not fair to your memory Lev. I owe you better than this."

"Please don't leave," I hear, but when I turn, I see only unkempt grass and rotting apples.

Thick clouds make the sunlight gauzy and the heat unbearable. My parents have slipped into the rut of behavior, and the intimacy of shared tragedy starts to evaporate like spilled water. I spend the afternoon plucking up the rotten fruit and tangled weeds from the grass, and then push the old mower in a tightening spiral around the apple tree. The rhythm is easily remembered, muscle memory taking over, and I remember how I used to tell myself that each loop was one closer to the last, how soon I would mow the lawn for the last time, and leave home forever. I had been right, in a way, just wrong about which time would be the last.

When I don't see Lev that day, I decide that I must have come to grips with what ever I needed to say, whatever I needed him to know. The conceptual model of my brother I'd created in a thousand arguments and interactions, summoned forth to bring closure to some callow part of my mind. Pathetic. I wallow in this shame until long after dark, and when sleep does not come, I rummage in my duffel bag to find the crooked little joint I'd thrown in at the last moment of frenzied packing.

I find matches in the kitchen, and go out to the back porch, where the parting clouds have let the night grow cool. The moon, a waning gibbous of cold blue light, swims among the pinprick sea of stars. I strike a match with a satisfying sound, light the joint, and inhale deeply, focusing on the acrid warmth that fills my chest.

When I find that Lev sits next to me in the ratty deck chair, I pass him the joint without stopping to consider.

"You're right, of course," he says, his voice strained to hold in the smoke.

"I usually am."

"It's all chemical."

"Mmm," I say, wondering why some part of my mind finds this charade necessary. I turn to him, and see in the moonlight, that he is almost gone, his skin cracked and gray, his eyes clouded and filmed. The pot makes me dizzy, and my vision swims, like ripples on water.

"I'm in a box, a half mile away, breaking apart slowly, dictated by the interaction of simple and complex molecules. You're burning a plant to activate receptors in your brain to make you feel a certain way. You take a half dozen pills to push the chemical systems in your brain back into alignment. The intersection between my body and that car was long ago prescribed by inertia. It's all just billiards."

“Lev, you were never this bleak. It’s not amusing.”

“Lev is dead, Ronen. Your mind is stripping a gear, and you’re experiencing a momentary blip of phantom sensations, and you’re weaving it into a story. The really unique thing about humanity is not our consciousness; it’s our ability to tell stories. To lie to ourselves, and frame the random shuddering of the universe as a narrative. Consciousness is just one of those lies.”

“Shut the fuck up. Please, Lev.” I press the lit end of the joint into the plastic arm of the chair, and the plastic deforms beneath it until the heat is expended. I want to stand, but I’m afraid I won’t be able to find my balance.

“The most important, and most fallacious story is that we have some sort of choice. Every moment is prescribed by the initial movements of the universe. Self organizing proteins on an orbiting sphere of heavy matter around a second generation star, we’re still just ripples in the water from the first stone. Complex ripples. Ripples that tell themselves pretty tales before being subsumed in the great unthinking sea of matter.”

I look at the rotting shade of my brother next to me. His glassy eyes stare into mine. A dozen half formed thoughts twirl in the space between my mind and mouth, and every one breaks apart and drifts away. So I say the first thing that comes to mind.

“I’m going to bed, Lev.”

He nods, and raises his crumbling gaze to the sky. The moon paints high contrast shadows in the cracks of his peeling skin. I leave him there, beneath the stars.

I sleep well.

5

I can’t get out of bed the next day. I can feel the coiled strands of my muscles clenching and unclenching, but I have no desire to co-ordinate them into actions. I tell my parents I am sick. My mother brings me lunch, tomato soup and a pastrami sandwich on stale bread. She still hurts, I see it in her face, but she is descending from the mountain of her grief, self sufficient again. I hear my father downstairs, laughing at something, a booming sound of comfort.

I read a tattered science fiction novel from the shelves long into the evening, coming down only to eat dinner, and to fill a glass of water. When I return to my room, there’s a bird out-

side the window, perched on the eaves. I open the window wide, but he does not take flight, merely hops away on one clubfooted leg. Without considering, I heave myself up to the window and squeeze out onto the narrow ledge of roof.

I'm unsurprised to see Lev, sitting on the roof, leaning against the window of his own childhood room, the pigeon perched between us.

I know it's Lev in that same way that you know a recording of your own voice, at once familiar and strange. He's sketched in faint light, hazy at the edges, a shadow of a person cast in warm tones.

We sit for a long while without speaking, the way we did as kids on hot nights, until he fell and broke his leg, and we were forbid to go out on the roof. Some small part of me still expects my father to start yelling for us to come down.

"Ronen," he says, breaking the peaceful silence, "I am sorry about last night. I know it doesn't mean much, but I needed to go there, to that place."

I let him speak, not sure what to make of it, of his persistent presence.

"I think... I understand now," he says, with uncharacteristic humility. "It's been a long time for me, since last night. I never put much stock in your trade, the physical sciences. If I had, I may have seen the pattern before this point. Or maybe not."

"I never made up my mind about free will, Lev. What you said last night? I've considered it before. It wasn't a new idea a century ago. But the more I know, the more likely it looks that anything save determinism is an illusion, the less important it is for me to have an opinion one way or the other. That's the comforting thing about reality, whatever it is, it does not ask for your faith."

"Touche," he snorts with a laugh. Or at least I take it to be one. I realize that I'm not really sure this hazy shape is even speaking aloud. Everything about him is indistinct.

"The thing about free will is... it's a useful illusion. That feeling of accomplishment from doing something well is pleasant. Believing I learn from mistakes allows me to feel progress, which is also pleasant. It's better to own a lie, than have no claim on the truth."

"I missed you when you were gone, Ronen. I missed talking. I think I fell into fanaticism without you to temper me."

"I know you did, Lev. I saw your hair." He laughs again. "So tell me little brother, what is the world tonight?"

"If there is free will, it's not on our scale," he says. "Bacterium are creatures purely of impulse, are they not?"

"It would seem so."

"So is man. But the universe tends towards complexity at larger levels. As subatomic particles create us, so do our spinning galaxies sketch and describe great and complex beings. And likely outward and upward to the infinite. As millions of skin cells die when we embrace, suns snuff out and worlds boil in warfare at the subtle interactions of these massive beings. There is true free will, true conscious minds, just not at the microscopic level of solar systems and carbon life."

"Little fleas have littler fleas," I say, the poem coming to the surface unbidden. "On their backs to bite 'em. And little fleas have littler fleas..."

"So on, ad infinitum," he says. "Yes, that makes sense."

"It's a nice story, Lev. I like it. I really do. It absolves us all of the guilt of our actions, yet preserves some sense of wonder. But like all the stories you tell, it's just a story."

The pigeon takes flight.

"I've had a few thousand lifetimes since yesterday to come up with it."

"You missed your calling."

"I missed a lot of things. When I see you tomorrow, I may tell you the truth."

"I'd like that, but I'll settle for another story. I'm only here for one more night, you know."

"You always were a miserly shit with your visits."

"Good night, Lev."

I'm already packing in the morning, careful to do it in measured steps. I don't want my mother to think I'm looking forward to leaving, but I am already fantasizing about a shower with real water pressure.

When Lev isn't there, I barely think about him, I only dwell on the shadows of his passing. The meals made by neighbors and friends in the fridge, the dozen copies of his memorial service pamphlets. My parents, never as pious as Lev, have already broken most of the shiva prohibitions, and my father spends long hours on the couch in front of the television. After lunch, I sit with him, rarely speaking except of the upcoming football season. I watch my mother read, the small glasses perched on her nose to supplement her failing eyes.

Soon enough, I will be back here for one of them, or the other. That may be the last time I come home. The finality of this is somehow comforting, like finding the path in a darkened forest, finally seeing the way. I love them both, tenderly and protectively, but I cannot fight entropy, and I will not rage at its unbreachable walls. The future is understandable, knowable, and yet-

"It's what's beyond the future that scares you," Lev says.

I'm in his room. He is there with me. He is a painting of light, an impressionistic bipedal smear, with onyx black eyes and a smile like a sun. I'm dizzy with the shock of him finishing my thoughts, of finding myself in a room I haven't entered in two decades. I don't remember coming here, I don't remember seeing him appear.

The sensation becomes too intense to manage, and I try to sit on his bed, but it is gone, shimmering away like heat haze. The walls follow, and soon I am alone in a black void with a star shaped like my brother.

"Lev," I whisper, hearing the sound echo a thousand times. "What is this?"

"When the universe first lived," he continues in a voice like creation, "It was everything we ever feared: cold, unfeeling, mechanistic. There were no stories, no dreaming, only the truth of matter and inertia.

"When the great chemical clock wound down at the end of a hundred billion years, as matter scattered wide, and the suns cooled, Life rebelled. Life refused. Refused to be cast aside, refused to dim into galactic night. Despite the unending nightmare of this first universe, Life wanted more."

My heart is in my throat, I can feel it thudding, and when I press my hands against chest, I see with only a small measure of surprise, that I too am made of light. In the distance, I see cold, dim points of light flaring into existence, first red, then searing white.

“The Living, the self replicating vehicles of protein on a thousand worlds, came together, and built great bulwarks of matter and energy. They rewrote the fabric of their existence, and fought a fierce and hot war against fate.

“And they won.”

The dim points of light flare brighter, wheeling discs of stars coalescing from the gloom. His voice causes the thousand galaxies to whirl with his tale.

“They broke the clockwork of time, shattered the bonds of causality, and anarchy flowed back through history like a wave. For a billion backwards years, there was no reason, and no laws. Great and foolish kingdoms flourished, colonizing time and space. There was madness.”

The whirling galaxies dance above us, then tear themselves apart, sketch profane and vulgar graffiti across the sky in blood and fire. The adolescent tremors of an emancipated universe.

“But the insanity was as undesirable as the mechanical world that it replaced, and the great minds, now written in the fabric of space, rather than luminous matter, conferred in a frozen, eternal moment, at the hot singularity of creation.”

The sky collapses, pulls us into a boiling white point, and my body vanishes into the moment.

“Great accords were struck, prohibitions made, and freedoms guaranteed. The prime equation was altered. And the world began again.”

The moment contracts like a breath, and then expands.

Explodes.

Ignites.

It is shower of suns, and it blasts through me.

"Consciousness, sapience, is a rhythm in the music of the world, and the rhythm remains, long after crude matter that pounded the beat for a few decades is scattered.

"It joins the great symphony of existence, free of time, mischievous and playful. They sound out and ring among us, giving birth to a billion stories, each of them fundamentally true and demonstrably false."

The music of the spheres rings in my nonexistent ears, the stinging fireworks of creation sear my missing eyes.

"We garden the universe with joy, Ronen. This is the gift of the first lives. This is what awaits, beyond your future. Don't be afraid."

I am not afraid.

But I am crying, with the intensity of emotion and awe that I haven't felt since long before the pills, not since childhood.

My mother and father are beside me, because, I realize with a start, I am still on the couch, sobbing into my hands. The sensation of having a physical body again is stunning, and somehow profane, wrong. My mother's arms are wrapped around me, and my father's outstretched hand strokes the back of my head, rough calluses catching in my hair.

"I know, Ronen," he is saying. "We miss him too."

7

My parents, having a child in need for the first time in decades, find a purpose in doting on me, and for a while at least, I do not deprive them of the joy it gives. By the next day, I'm still a wreck, an empty shell blasted hollow by the day before, only just learning how to dream of being full again.

I wonder if grief will always be this hard.

By the late afternoon, I find the strength to finish packing my bags and I call a cab, despite their pleas to stay. I consider it, more than I ever would have before, but the need to be alone, to rest in the neutral ground of my own home, is a magnetic pull.

A block away from the house, I ask the cab driver to stop at the small park where we played as boys.

Lev is there, as I knew he would be. He is Lev as a child now, dark eyes alive with wonder, and he is skipping across the sand, scaling the wooden castles and slides with the enthusiasm that marked his actions all his life.

"Hey Ronen!" he calls to me, waving his little arms above his head. "You look exhausted, bro."

"I am," I admit. I watch him mount the swings, pumping his legs to build momentum. The cab driver honks his horn.

"Time to go?" he asks.

"Yes. But..."

"You want to ask me what it means. If it's just another story."

"Yes." I say, before I even know that it is what I want. He launches from the swing, hits the sand, and topples to the ground. He lays on his back, panting and staring up at the sky.

"It doesn't matter, Ronen. Either it is, or it isn't. You get to choose." His voice is hoarse, his little lungs sucking air in gasps. "But get some sleep okay? You look like shit."

"Fuck you, Lev." I say with a tired smile, and he giggles, a sound like a burbling stream of clear water. "I love you."

"Love you too, Ronen." My baby brother vaults to his feet, and begins to sprint for the old hole in the fence, the one leading to the bike path and creek beyond. He turns sideways, and vanishes into the shadows of spruce trees. The driver honks again, and I mentally reduce his tip by a couple of dollars.

When the rumbling engine of the plane fires up for takeoff, I fall asleep almost instantly, lulled to sleep like a baby.

The dreams are vivid, and wonderful. A garden of joy and awe. When I wake as we land on

the other side of the world, the glowing warmth of it remains for a long time.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Shiva\]](#)

Sunset Marmalade by A.J. Kees

They bumped into each other at the docking port of Titan. She wore a pink sundress that fell just below her knees. He donned a charcoal suit with a black tie.

"Hey", she said with a smile.

"Howdy", he replied in the same aura.

She was passing through to Ceres, he himself had been supervising port expansion. Technical stuff, he said. She glowed and asked for some company at the coffee shop. He agreed and they locked arms and walked. "We only have a couple hours", she mentioned. "I want to come see you some time soon."

"If you really want to", he answered. "I am a busy man."

She ordered a strawberry mocha and he ordered a cup black. They sat by the window overlooking the harbor and the dozens milling from gate to gate. Saturn lumbered in the background.

They talked of past days and mutual hours and the past four years. She was no longer the cutesy grad student he once knew, she informed him. He gave her a pleasant smile and nodded. She rubbed his forearm and her eyes grew misty. She cocked her head and asked if he wanted to come back to her hotel room. She intended to check out only on the way off Titan.

"What hotel?" He asked.

"The Olympiad", she replied. "Do you want to have an actual drink before I leave?"

"You don't think you'll be back?"

"Maybe. I don't know. Where business and pleasure make me wander."

"Let's go have a drink, then."

They traveled a mile and a half to the hotel. The maid had already come and cleaned the sheets and replaced the towels.

She took out a bottle of chardonnay from the cooler by the kitchen sink and uncorked it. They each had a glass and fell into each other's arms, rekindling emotions and forlorn memories and passions.

They lay between silk as she rested her head on his chest and wept. He felt a pang of sadness too. They dressed and left and kissed goodbye at her shuttle door. They parted.

On her ride over she rested her chin in her palm and thought of sunbathed mornings together, laying in a hammock off the lake shore under their elm tree. He went home to his wife that night and ate a quiet dinner. He lounged in his den and watched the sun set and thought about waterless toilets.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Sunset Marmalade\]](#)

Tea in the Sahara by Lexiphagon

Seventeen minutes ago, I would never have spared a target, never thought I would risk my life for anything, and never thought I would die this way. I always believed in the quote "Don't think, just do", that thinking was hesitation and hesitation was death.

I won't claim to be educated because I'm not, but there is a particular line from a particular book I never read that has always given me strength. "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way". I don't know what Tolstoy meant, but I felt suffering gave me power. My unhappiness blocked out all thoughts and I could just go on. Go on killing that is.

I lost my family way before I can remember anything but I remember my 'adopted' family. The mercenary family taught me the first quote and they also provided me enough of an education to read the second. That was the extent of my 'education', the rest of my schooling was how to become a killer like them. Such was the creation of me, the uneducated thirty year old brute that thinks about nothing just killing and getting paid. That was who I was until something happened within those past 17 minutes.

My target was some old wart, who looked far older than he really was. His code name was Socrates, probably because he was constantly preaching and talking. The man who hired me shared my ideals that talking and thinking only slows down the world, the world no longer needs thinkers, just doers.

My target was in Cairo and wasn't hiding. I found him around noon at an outside shop, sipping tea at a table. He was tan and very wrinkled. His eyes were squinted and it would only be later that I noticed that he was blind. I walked straight down the shady alleyway where he sat. I pulled a white chair from an adjacent table and sat down across from him.

"You are an assassin, just like the others." He whispered, sniffing his jasmine tea.

"Yea, I am. I don't want to involve anyone else. Just follow me." I said, pulling a short pistol from under my trench coat.

I had lied. It did not matter to me who was involved and I was willing to shoot him right there and then. But it was some sort of a killer's etiquette that had been hypnotically placed in my mind at that moment

"May I finish my tea first?" he asked innocently, looking up from his tea.

"Yea, whatever." I answered, cursing myself later for not thinking my answer through.

It was during the first moments of silence that I realized several things. One, his

eyes were scarred. Someone or something had sliced across them horizontally. The second was that I felt boiling hot; I was wearing long black clothing in the Sahara. I cursed myself once again.

"Hey old man, did an assassin slice your eyes like that?" I said, pointing unnecessarily.

"I'm not that old, I am just fatigued all the time. You would be surprised to learn that I am not that much older than you-"

I cut him off, asking the question again. It started to bug me that he acted like he could see. There was no doubt, however, that he truly could not.

"No, these injuries are old. I got this scar before I became enlightened." He said, rubbing his eyelids as if he wanted to feel the scar.

"Oh?" I muttered, though faintly curious.

"A tea for the gentleman." He said when the storekeeper came outside to see what was happening, "Yes, I was not always enlightened. I started my life poor and worked my way up by being an assassin, much like you. Then, one day the target was a dazzlingly attractive young woman who was doing much like I am currently doing. She was a philosopher's daughter and she had a goal to spread education and thinking to people all around the world. A dictator in central Africa, it matters not who he was, hired me, to take her out. Her teachings would have subdued his propaganda and prevented the creation of a utilitarian government. I found her walking along the Sahara Desert and challenged her. To my death threats, she responded with ideas. She was forcing me to think about questions I never had cared about before. I was frustrated and ran at her. She was used to being attacked and easily blocked my attempt. She also scarred my face permanently with her scimitar. Her final words were 'Perhaps you will see more without your eyes.'"

"That's a rough broad." I noted, and then noticed that the tea had been brought to me.

"Yes, but she was right. As I wandered the deserts, I was constantly thinking about what she said. And I found enlightenment in observing the world not through sensations but through logical and rational thinking." The man said, finishing his tea.

"How do you know it wasn't madness?" I asked, my skepticism finally returning.

"Tell me, do you realize that we know so very little?" He asked.

"What's there to know?" I replied.

"It is troubling to philosophers, like Socrates, that we know so very little. There are many questions that we have unsatisfactory answers to. The world, just like your mercenary brethren and the one who hired you, has chosen to ignore this. They are

the ones who are blind; and they willingly do it." He continued.

"Explain." I said sternly but I felt some truth in what he said.

"The ones in control are dead certain about everything. They lie and create answers for everything that comes up. And what do you and your men do? I doubt all of you truly believe in your leaders."

"I guess...that...we don't let it concern us."

"Correct, you shut your eyes and become indifferent."

"What's wrong with that?" I asked, not actually as defensive as I acted.

"Socrates once said 'He who knows what is good will do good'. If you and your brethren continued to learn you would come across what is universally good and would stop committing senseless acts of deviance." He commented.

"Now, Mr...?" asked the old man.

"It's Todd Spinoza." The old man chuckled but I didn't answer, "Do you have a name or have you accepted your codename of Socrates?"

"I do have a name, it is Isaac. I don't know my last name. Now it seems funny that my codename is Socrates since that lady I mentioned was a strong believer in Socrates. I'm more of an ardent Descartes follower."

He could tell I was confused. He pushed off the discussion of Descartes for a moment and talked about Socrates again.

"Now, Todd." He avoided my last name for some reason. "Can you honestly say that you don't feel any remorse or that some inner voice telling you that killing is wrong?"

"There have been times when all I wanted to do was think but I always stopped myself. 'Don't think, just do'. Eventually I never paid it any thought again."

"Socrates said we could never be happy until we stop doing things against our better judgment." Isaac mused.

"I guess I can relate." I pondered, looking down at my steaming tea.

It was strange, as I looked at my tea, I was NOT looking at my tea. I was not taking in visual information but thinking and working over what I had just heard. It caused me to have flashbacks.

"So why do you feel you are more like this Descartes person?"

"He believed we can not trust our senses and should use only our logic. Being a blind man, I find his teachings can 'relate' to my situation. He did not trust any other philosophers' ideas and therefore disregarded them. He started with basic knowledge, 'postulates' if you will, and built up his theories from there. He, in a sense, started from square one. He also created modern day mathematics. His philosophies inspired many others, such as--"

BANG!

A bullet whizzed from a rooftop and flew towards Isaac. Against everything, against all I had held true, I leapt forward and was hit by the bullet. The sniper from the roof attempted another shot but slid and fell to his death.

"What is the meaning of you risking your life?" Isaac asked, standing up to help me.

I pushed him off and put my back down on the table. I did not answer him and spent my last few moments just thinking...Perhaps it will surprise my reader that this death is only metaphorical. My life did continue, my arm simply shattered along with my ideals. But I had a new journey, one that matched "Socrates" and "Descartes", to spread philosophy. And by spreading philosophy, it is meant to spread thinking. For even if people don't accept every theory or piece of logic, once they start thinking, there are few problems we can't fix.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Tea in the Sahara\]](#)

The Anguish of Mort, pt.2 by Jack Kristoffer

Now, against the starry sky, an errant bird flies closer to Hingle. He lies on the ground facing up, comforted by the intricate nature of the galaxies and celestial clouds above him. The ground is cool and mossy green, damp against his bare back, but not chilling.

It comforts him.

The dark bird lands on Hingle's chest and stares with bleak eyes. Hingle can't move; he can't swat the bird away. He doesn't want to swat the bird away and he doesn't want to move. He's comfortable, lulled into silent acquiescence. The magpie on his chest opens its beak and speaks to Hingle. The words come from everywhere and nowhere at the same time; he can take no action but to listen.

"Chaos and disorder relish in the ever lasting comfort of human anxiety. There is no order but what order you define in life. It is arbitrary. You don't get what's coming to you, you reap what you sow. War. War with oneself; enter the human mind and notice the violence and guilt that penetrates deeper into the soul than emotion should. An inky black sea of your erroneous judgments and your guilt, infinitely deep. Infinitely painful. Guilt is just a symptom of regret. Regrets don't last after death. It isn't the end. But for you. But for you my sweet apple pie. There isn't more. But regrets don't make it to the other side, whichever side that may be. Up or down. Who cares? You care? I care. So make a choice. I don't care. Limbo, limbo, limbo. Or not. Judge for yourself.

Judgment. Again, arbitrary. Or is it? There can be no certain definition of what it is to be judged until one has been judged. Is it possible to find oneself wanting in that respect? Is there ever the lasting notion that you will be absolutely pure and righteous? Not here. Not in reality. There is no certainty even in death. For who can say when it occurs? The Gods must be crazy to have allowed life to balance as precariously on the verge of non-life as a tight-rope walker dangling helplessly in the air after a fall. It is the fear of death that makes self-reflection worthless. I have seen my own reflection in the mirror and I happily accept the blood 'neath my tongue. Don't like the man in the mirror? It's fine; you don't have to look at him when you're dead. Once you've made that choice. Regrettable though it may be. Regrets and guilt. Regrets and guilt. Find no solace in regrets and guilt. Shiny, shiny, shiny, like your mirrored self, gazing terribly at what you have become. Longing for the look of happiness again. The look of the grave.

You don't have to look at much of anything when you're dead. Disregard the perils of life and embrace the safety of death. For though you may believe otherwise, death has its own benefits and rewards. There are horrors in death that are far too personal to generalize, but they matter only to the individual. To the mind, not the hive. The concept of death cares little for the whims of society, but that society cares little for death. Society is one being that is beyond, even the reach of the underworld, should it exist. That is because society lives for itself. Forward-looking. People live for the past. Backward-thinking. It is the past that dooms you. It is the past that brings you to your knees in agony and makes you wonder what it was all for and whether or not death would be a welcome embrace. The apathy of empathy harboured within will comfort you in death, if you're willing to accept the past and move forward. Unfurl the sails of your past so that they may cut the waves of tomorrow. How deep is the port? Can you see the bottom? Don't look up, don't look down. Look forward. Look in. Death is a movement forward, reluctance is a symptom of backwardness. Those too reluctant to die are those too reluctant to live. I'm not guilty of it. Are you?

Be you only too fortunate that 'twas I, and not the raven, who visited you."

Then the magpie barked and flew away, having said his piece.

* * * * *

Hingle awoke to the sound of a bark. He thought it was strange that a bird was able to bark like a dog, but quickly realized that he was lying on the floor of his own bathroom. This likely meant that he had bigger problems than a barking magpie. He wasn't sure what had just happened, if indeed it had happened at all, but the memory of the peculiar fowl was gently fading from his mind, as if it were being drawn elsewhere. Perhaps his sanity was being protected by subconscious mechanisms, or the rumbling in his stomach had induced dementia. He rubbed the sore bump on his head where he had struck the toilet bowl as he fell, although he didn't remember fainting. There must still be coffee left! That notion became his sole concern for the moment as he left the sterile bathroom and shuffled his way slowly to the kitchen.

An eerie red glow was visible under the door. It seemed to intensify as Hingle approached. His mind was set on edge and his eyes decided not to report the worrying glow to his brain. He entered the kitchen and poured a new cup of coffee. This time the liquid was more reasonable and went down smoothly. Hazy memories checked themselves against Hingle's consciousness but were denied. Those memories were obviously a security risk to his sanity and were forced to the back of his mind with all of the other confusing events of his life. One day he would sit down and sort through the mess. If his soul was not broken in half by the overburdening guilt and remorse of those memories, he would come out of the process as a better man. As it stood for the moment, the survival instincts inside of him decided that it was better for Hingle's sense of worth not to recall the pain and regret of the past.

The green bile splatter that Hingle had spat all over his kitchen cabinets had hardened into a crusty brown substance. It was utterly disgusting, so he turned his back to it. That's when he noticed the red glow under the door. There was an ominous feeling wriggling up Hingle's spine. It compelled him to open the door and find the source of the garnet-hued glow. Once again, he set down his coffee mug on the counter and approached the door. He opened it slowly and immediately was awash with dark red luminescence.

He poked his head out of the doorway and looked both ways, as if to cross the street. It was swathed in the same eerie crimson light. The smooth concrete walls of the hallway were bare: no entrances, no exit. Hingle was the building's sole occupant. He looked left: the hallway ended in a flat, blank wall; to the right, the corridor stretched into infinity. He heard a low snarl emanating from the blistering scarlet to his right. The light grew darker when he looked in the direction of the sound, causing the hall to shrink. The sonorous growl reverberated through the otherwise quiet hallway. It stung Hingle's ears as if it were the voice of the Adversary himself and he slammed the door shut in fright.

Hingle questioned his sanity but got no reply. The dark scarlet glow was still visible at his feet, shining from under the door into his darkened apartment. After mustering a shred of courage, he turned and pushed his face against the door so he could look through the cleft. His palms were cold and sweaty. The nervous curiosity tingled his body like an electric current. He strained his eye against the small fish-eye lens to no avail; there was nothing to be seen but the menacing red that bathed the alien corridor.

He listened at the door for the rumble of the growling, unknown beast. The only sound that reached his ears was the incessant beating of his frightened heart. In moments such as these, some men are liable to shirk their humanity and give in to the most animalistic and basic of instincts: fight or flight. Hingle's instincts were largely concerned with neurotic thoughts and primordial grief from long ago.

He judged the situation poorly and took a deep breath, intending to swing the door open again and face the hall-demon's snarl. Hingle jerked open the door and peered once more into the luminescent flood of crimson. There was silence. It almost deafened him to strain his ears, listening for nothing. His heart was beating so furiously that he got the feeling it wanted to leap from his chest and escape to a quiet life in the country.

As if on cue, the guttural growl echoed down the corridor toward him. Hingle stood firm, burdened but strengthened by fear. The sound surrounded and enveloped him like a warm cocoon. He had the feeling of being watched and noticed quick flashes of something's reflected retinal blood vessels at the far end of the gloomy crimson hall, as if something was sizing him up. His vision adjusted to the lighting and he could clearly pick out the dark eyes that watched him. His heartbeat intensified as he locked eyes with the creature. It growled louder, staring into his soul. Hingle was fraught with shock; he couldn't move a muscle. The poor man stood gazing into the soulless eyes of his regret. Tears streamed down his face as the creature judged him and he judged the creature. Memories flooded his brain and forced a whimper from his lips. The realization of past trauma, past regrets, overwhelmed him. They flooded his consciousness with desolate emotions: the guilt and pain as overbearing as the blackest, moonless night. His soul was aflame with despair, nothing mattered in retrospect. Hindsight told him that it was over.

It was over, but he wasn't ready to let that simple event go.

He wished so badly that he could turn and run, but the beast had locked eyes with the man and he was paralyzed. He was no threat to the creature; it would be free to penetrate to the very core of his being and consume him with wretched, visceral apathy. He wanted to flee now: the instinct had kicked in. It was the moment of truth; it was time to back down. He'd made his choice, and he wanted to get as far away from this phantasm of guilt as he could. There was no fight in him. He was no match for his beast.

His throat was parched. It ached for release; a name dropped from the tip of his tongue. It rolled down his throat and throttled his vocal cords into action. He trembled. Tears still streamed down a face that was contorted into a wizened shell of the childhood innocence that had been given up so long ago. He was no match for his guilt. His body was running on adrenaline and fear; there was no consciousness left within him. He had been drawn back to that day.

"Max!" Mort wailed and collapsed.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for The Anguish of Mort, pt.2\]](#)

The Pornographer by Ryan M. Silva

(all likeness to people (alive and dead) and places are merely coincidental)

The plane was not due to take off from the airport for another three hours, and would not be accepting its passengers for another two. Not that it mattered very much because there was plenty of nothing to do. I took it upon myself to observe for American soil for the last time. There was a lot of it in direct view as I looked outside. I was standing in front of a large window plane that afforded a view of the runways. The soil in-between the asphalt rivers was tan and it was the breeding ground for rows and rows of perfectly mowed sepia crab grass. I questioned the reasoning behind not cementing the whole area. The Environmentalists wouldn't outcry over it. There was no greenery here. It was springtime and there was no sense of new life here.

The life here seemed to be stuck in the tan, sepia and gray tones of middle age, or at least this is what the carry-on bags told me. I knew nothing of the people themselves, for I did not look at them, for I was a broken and embarrassed man and I did not want to be noticed. That being said, the paranoia on my part was a bit unfounded because I was one of those individuals known in-name-only. The only person who could remark upon my name was the girl at the ticket kiosk and she made no gestures that did not indicate that I was not some twenty-something traveling air-conditioner salesman and the maker of films that the government had declared as unsuitable for the public eye.

I am compelled to take a walk. Not that I am in a particular mood for light cardiovascular activity, but staring at the soil has become boring for me. Death steals away my attention for a time, but then I get desensitized to it. I get the feeling that this is not necessarily a commonly held notion as I pass the Bass Pro Shop in the airport's mall. Sitting above the entrance to the store is a stuffed moose head, presumably real, that is sitting on a sizable plaque. Upon the plaque reads these following words in plain American English

ART IMITATES LIFE

It's a cliché, yes, but it's not like I expected anything profound from the epitaph of the decapitated moose.

I look at the storefront window. There is nothing of particular note but I suppose I will pay words to them: camouflage jackets, camouflage pants, graphic T-Shirts and a copy of President Palin's new book: *The 500 Books, Movies, and Songs Corrupting Our Children*. I smile whenever I see that book. I smile because that book mentions humble old me. I smile when I think about how she dismissed my most recent film as "Porn" and me as a "Pornographer".

I walk into the shop and lose myself in the fishing pole section. Right after President Palin published the book, it effectively became law for any concerned mother whose conviction disappeared up her asshole, so to speak. It didn't take too long for the hate mail to come in from people who considered themselves too decent to watch the film. I had produced the film in Ecuador. It was given a limited distribution in the United States. It was a consideration for Cannes, but never made the official jury listing. I was perfectly content with that. I had made it for just about zilch. It tripled what I spent on it on home video sales. I was a happy man who was putting bread on his table.

It had ended up in the school's library while Sarah Palin was exerting her con-

trol over the little Alaska township. The film was produced in 2003. It is now 2013. It was number 499 on President Palin's list and further evidence that libraries were places where children could read books and watch films that were full of naked men and women doing dirty things to each other, and God forbid you trust writers, because they all are dirty and unwholesome and should be doing more productive things than writing. Filmmakers were even worse because they were all pinko commies. You couldn't trust a filmmaker as far as you could throw the projector playing his dirty pinko commie films. Especially my films, according to Palin, which were full of naked pinko commies and undesirables and most importantly, jizzum.

In the midst of these thoughts of Marxism and sperm and the President I had found my feet leading me in the direction of a console that featured a game, which in all capital letters as faithfully recreated here, was titled:

BIG GAME HUNTER

In this game you killed deer with your choice of weapon: crossbow, sniper rifle, and providing whether or not you knew the cheat code (read: were fourteen), a double-barreled shotgun. In a rather terse write-up, the President noted that such games were "important to the fabric of Americana" because they preserved an All-American tradition – sport hunting. For the twenty thousand years that it's theorized that humanity has resided on ground that was later to become the United States, the BIG GAME HUNTER did not exist. The original inhabitants of America, the only "all-Americans" in America, the Native Americans, followed a philosophy of purposely not killing animals in order to preserve the natural order. Most of them are dead now.

In the same vein, Palin dismissed the latest round of World War II-themed video games, one of whom was purposely critical of the bombings of Hiroshima, and another, which allowed for a story recounting the tale of a Japanese soldier in Iwo Jima. The President deemed them damaging to our national pride.

And I agree with the president here – if the bombing of Hiroshima wasn't and still isn't damaging to our sense of national pride, then I have no purpose calling myself an American citizen. But most of that's pointless now, because I will never be returning to America.

Coincidentally, the country that I will be moving to is Japan.

Coincidentally, I will be making a Nikkatsu Roman Porno there.

The first of those decisions was made out of necessity.

The second of those decisions was made out of spite.

If she wants to see a porno, then by all means, I'll give her a porno. Because by my standards, the film she denounced as shameless was by no means shameless. First of all, it was a documentary. Second of all, it was about a Indian Tribe native to the central South American wilderness – the Kanka-bonos. Their social contract does not require them to wear three piece suits while they hunt and make ceramics and eke out a day-by-day, traditional existence. One of the extra features in the DVD is a series of clips unused for the documentary itself. One of them in particular, is a recounting of a male rite of passage ceremony. There is a line of their ancient ceremonial monologue, which makes a reference en passant to male jizzum. This was enough for it to get banned from thirty two hundred school districts shortly following her text's publication.

Not that it matters, anymore. I'm done with a nation that claims to be free but uses its own First Amendment to repress others, citing nothing but parental tastes.

Do I think it is better anywhere else? Not especially. I'm a pessimistic with a distaste for hypocrisy on the part of an entire nation regarding artistic freedom. Do I think Japan will be a haven for an expatriate filmmaker with an adequate command of their language? I don't know. All I do know is that my plane will be leaving soon, and as I take my roundabout path to the exit, I pass by the section of the store that sells guns.

Well, models of guns. You can't actually buy guns at an airport, under the fear that you'll hijack a plane and kill everyone inside. But there's still a fifty year old eyeing me down the sight of a replica of a Remington. He's bald and hefty and must be going on a plane to visit some landmark that's uniquely American – the Grand Canyon, or Yellowstone, the latter of which probably would have been destroyed by American industry if the national parks service hadn't stepped in and prevented logging there. I am convinced that in another twenty years, Yellowstone will be the last forest standing in the mainland part of the nation. But this time it won't be loggers that kill it, it will probably be acid rain. They're saying the mainland is finally feeling the after-effects of that oil spill on the part of BP. It's been three years, and BP has gone through forty seven plugs attempting to cap the spill. On the bright side, the well will be empty in another half dozen years.

There was a pretty girl at the cash register who smiled at me as I walked out of the store. I suppose that I am a rather handsome gentleman. I wonder what she would think of me if she knew that the President had called me a pornographer. I wonder what would happen if I told her I was a pornographer.

“Hey beautiful, my name's K and I make Pornos.”

Was what I didn't tell her. What my smile told her in return was that I was a nice gentleman who wore nice clothes but whose glasses gave him the look of a bit of a hipster. That was the genre of films that the rest of my films fell into, I made films for arty teenagers, as I was told on many an occasion. These teenagers were usually leftists because it was trendy, and were going to college on trust funds. As if everyone didn't attend their public high school on what amounted to be a government trust fund payed by everyone in their town.

And thus, I was an art-film director. I could live with it. I was putting more bread on the table than I did when I was young and making porn in Ecuador. I had even attended a round table with the previous president on the importance of independent leftist cinema as a way to keep tabs on the American working man. I wasn't invited to the last Presidential round table, which was about, if my sources are correct, the importance of films reflecting the primacy of the individual.

And so I found myself at Starbucks, which was a fair distance from the Bass Pro Shops. I tend to lose all sense of time and direction while I think. I recall, one time, when I was on set for my highest grossing film, Red Rain I found myself utterly lost in how to set up a particular shot. It was a tracking shot during a flashback that showcased Americans torturing and killing the remaining Nazis at the Breslau death camp at the end of the war. They cut one of the Nazis throats and it took him an eternity to die. I structured the shot to slowly zoom on the face of the dying Nazi, who I purposely cast as a seventeen year old German boy with wavy blonde hair, and put the composition to Mozart's Requiem.

The shot itself took twenty minutes because I lost myself in the actor's eyes, think-

ing about what a beautiful shot it was. In the finished cut of the film, I made sure that it took twenty minutes for the Nazi to die, inter-cutting it with more murders by the Americans and stock footage of the dead Jew bodies piled in the crematorium, all to Mozart's Requiem. It was a beautiful shot. I was accused of being a Nazi sympathizer. Cinemas banned the showing of my film in thirty states. It was a big hit in New York City, though, because I said something to the effect of "my camera only sees human beings for what they can become, not for what they have done." I had come up with that line on the spot to defend myself in an advance screening on Broadway.

Now, in retrospect, I realize that I should have said "but look, it's not pornographic! It represents the All-American sport of big game Nazi hunting."

"Can I take your order?"

"Huh?"

Where was I again? Oh right, Starbucks.

"Can I take your order? Or did ya come here just to stand around...?"

He must have a lot of those people. Starbucks is a very trendy place, you know.

"No, no – I'll take a Dark Roast with no cream and two sugar."

I needed to wake up. My eyes were blurry, out of focus. I forced my attention to one of the loud, colorful signs above the worker's head. As I regained visual clarity, my mind processed this visual image, faithfully recreated here:

LIVE LIFE IN STORES THIS WEEK

It was the advertisement for one of those supposedly underground pop-folk-fusion-jazz-Asian-import-bands they like to advertise. I got my drink and then sit down. The plushy couch that I sat on was across from two young males sipping coffees and playing around with their iPods.

"So did you buy their album?" Asked one of them.

"Nah, I'll probably just torrent it. It's their third studio album." Answered the second.

"Sell-outs."

"I liked them before they got big, man."

"And look what happened."

I liked hipsters before they got big. Now they line the thrift stores and Starbucks and art house theaters. Their fake-ness is pretty obvious, but I've made no attempt as a cultural figure, or rather, pornographer to call them out on their shallowness. Probably because they were buying tickets to my pornos and anti-semitic films at respectable theaters. I listened to them talk at length some more. I would faithfully recreate the rest of their conversation if it had consisted of anything significant. I fear I've bored you out of your wits with just five lines of dialogue.

I ended up drinking the coffee too quickly and burned my tongue several times over. I left Starbucks slightly more miserable and a lot more paranoid than when I walked in. When I returned to one of the seats in the main waiting area of the airport, I tried to read. I had brought a copy of *Something Happened* by Joseph Heller. I had enjoyed *Catch-22* because I realized that now, with millions of adult Americans calling for my death in anonymous emails, there were indeed millions of people who wanted to kill me. But I couldn't manage

Something Happened at that moment because the small typeset of the book and the asses of the thirty something businesswoman became more and more interesting. But soon after the coffee really started to kick in, I found myself searching the airport for people who might possibly be familiar with my looks. I wanted to avoid a scene lest I burned at the stake for my films.

Soon enough, much to my glee and despair, greenery appeared in the airport thanks to the artificial light that appeared at one of the terminals, signaling that a plane, my plane, was ready to be boarded. I gathered myself and slunk like a snake towards the queue which was already ten deep by the time I arrived.

When I reached the woman who was to confirm that my ticket was indeed legitimate, she looked at my name, which was on the ticket of course, and looked at me in the eyes, squinting a bit. I squinted back, assessing the woman in a similar way until it dawned on me a moment later that this was incredibly awkward. For the record, she was forty-something and not particularly attractive.

“Are you the K? The director K?”

Oh, Jesus.

“My son loves your films, you know! He’s going to film school! Oooh, I’d ask for your autograph but I have no paper--”

“Oh, that’s a damn shame.” I said, unconvincingly sad.

“Could I at least ask you a question, then...? It’ll be quick.”

To avoid making a scene, I complied.

“What advice would you give to a beginning filmmaker?”

I pondered this for a moment, because it was a legitimate question, and maybe I could help the young lad, who might very well make the same mistake I did. So from the bottom of my heart, I suggested this before going on my merry way:

“Make no mention of jizzum.”

END

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The Yabo By Strangeways

The front door was unlocked, so I let myself in. It was dark inside, but I could see well enough. There was a hallway in front me and what looked like a living room to my left. I went into the room to inspect it further. They had a huge flat screen television and a bunch of very comfortable looking chairs. I plonk myself down in one to check. I slowly work up the will to leave this little heaven and then do. On top of a cabinet containing some fine china there were framed pictures. Using my little flashlight I examined the family portraits. The overweight man had a surprisingly pretty wife and two smiling children. I went back to the television and turned it around so it was facing the wall. Then I did the same to the chairs, as I was turning the chair I had sat in, I turned awkwardly and the knife in my pants dug painfully into my leg. I checked for blood, but it didn't break the skin. I moved through the living room and came into the kitchen. I rummaged through their pantry and found some bread, peanut butter, and marmalade. I made myself a pleasant sandwich and then ate it with some milk I found in the fridge. I divided the contents of the fridge between the oven and the freezer and put the stuff from the freezer into the pantry, what I didn't have room for in the pantry I put under the sink. I went out of the kitchen and into the hall, there was a bathroom on left and what I assume were bedrooms at the end. I went into the bathroom, closed the door and turned on the light. The man in the ski mask in the mirror stared back at me. I opened the drawers, everything was neatly organized. I scattered everything and made their toothbrushes touch. I left the bathroom and open the door on the left. It was the little girl's room. She was snoring very softly. The carpet looked fluffy, so I took off my shoes and socks and silently walked around. Still barefoot I gathered her multitude of stuffed animals and arranged them on the floor. I set them in neat little rows facing her bed, like a little audience.

I left the girl's room and decided my work here was done. I was going down the hall when I heard heavy footsteps coming up from the basement. I darted back to the bedrooms and ducked into the one across from the little girl's. I left the door open a crack and peered out at the fat man in boxers shuffling into the bathroom. The door closed and the light went on and I heard the toilet seat being raised, this seemed like an opportune moment to exit. I was just about to step into the hall when I heard a shriek behind me:

"Die robber!" And something hard hit me in the back of the right knee. My leg buckled and I went to the floor. Above me I watched the bat come down with practiced grace and then connect with my stomach. All the wind in my body shot out of my mouth just as the fat, naked man with his underwear around his ankles opened the bathroom door. He let out a wordless bellow and started at me, but he tripped on his underwear and went headfirst into the wall instead. The bat thudded on my left shoulder and bounced into the side of my skull. I mustered all of my energy and lunged out into the hallway on top the fat man. The bat hissed by my thigh and made a plopping sound on the fat man's back. I tried to scramble into the kitchen, but the fat man reached out and grabbed my ankle, dragging me back towards him. I saw the wife opening the back door. The boy tried to leap over the father but landed on his wrist, freeing me. I managed to stand up and tried to make it to the living room. There was a furious skittering sound from the back door and a huge dog came charging in from the back yard and came straight at me. He lost his footing on the linoleum, but somehow managed to maintain his momentum and made no effort to slow down when his open mouth connected with my leg. I fell hard on top of the dog and he squealed in pain and tried to twist around to bite me more. The bat came down hard across my shoulders as I was trying to stand up and I fell onto

the dog again. I kicked out at the boys ankles and he hit the floor. I got up and dragged myself into the living room just as the fat man got to his feet. I managed to make it out the front door before they could get to me and hobbled across their lawn. I looked back and saw the fat man, naked as the day he was born, coming at me like a freight train. How did he run so fast? I turned and ran away from him, watching him gain on me over my shoulder every few seconds. When he was just a few feet behind me he lunged and brought me down with a flying tackle. His weight was immense I started being pushed down into the moist sod. I thrashed frantically and must have hit something, because the man let out a surprisingly high pitched yell and rolled off me. I managed to get up and scoot into the darkness.

A few days later I was watching CRIME WAVE! and my story came up. Trent McGruber, war hero, police hero, and host, did the usual introduction. "People," he said with his eyebrows furrowing to indicate the gravity of his words, "if you thought you were safe in your homes..." The camera zoomed to his lined face with its ever-furrowing eyebrows and terrifying music blared. "Think again," he sneered with obvious contempt for anyone who ever thought they were safe in their homes. "A few nights ago the Hendrickson's thought they were safe, in fact, they didn't even lock their doors. We bring you now to a shockingly," lightning flashed across the screen, "accurate re-enactment of that night's events. I warn you, dear viewer, that this footage is graphic and may terrify you, but always remember; it could happen to you just as easily as it happened to them." Trent's eyebrows shot upwards letting everybody know they should be terrified and a bloodcurdling scream pierced the air. Then they went to commercial for security systems.

The actor they got to play me in the re-enactment didn't look much like me. He had a wet-looking comb over and he wore a trench coat. Every now and then he would raise his moustachioed lip into a sinister grin and his eyes were decidedly shifty. I noticed he always kept one hand in his pocket, tugging suspiciously at the front of his pants. As the camera pulled back we saw he wasn't wearing any pants. Pale, hairless legs stuck from the bottom of his trench coat down to his socks and sandals. As my doppelganger sinisterly surveyed the two story house from some shrubs, he reached into his coat and pulled out a can of pepsi. He slurped down the pepsi with a horrible suckling sound, dribbling copious amounts down his chin. Then he lurched across the lawn and into the house. Then they went to a commercial where beautiful people laughed and danced and drank coke.

"Folks," Trent greeted us as we returned from commercial, "it isn't everyday that we encounter genuine heroism, but today is one of those days. Meet the Hendrickson's, Buck and Betty and their two fine children, Todd and Leslie, ages 12 and 7, and their lovable Labrador, Scruffy." Photos of the Hendrickson's flashed across the screen with harpsichord music in the background, I recognized one from the china cabinet. "Just a few nights ago the Hendrickson's were the victims of the heinous crime you are about to witness. And it could have been worse, much worse, if this family had not remained vigilant in the face of evil. As we all know, the forces of evil are all ever-present, but, as you will learn tonight, if we, the good, honest, hard working people remain ever-vigilant, evil can be thwarted."

Inside the house they filmed in night vision. The actor playing me opened his trench coat revealing a pixelated blob between his legs. He proceeded to slink around

the house stuffing valuables into his pockets, the bright green holes that were his eyes shifted mercilessly. The kitchen in this house was much fancier than the Hendrickson's kitchen; the fridge had an ice machine built right in. As TV me opened the fridge I noticed a large general electric logo on the front. TV me reached into the fridge and pulled out a plump tomato and bit into it. An ominous dark liquid oozed down his chin. They cut to a shot of the slumbering children and parents with tinkling music. Strings shrieked as the camera returned to a particularly ghoulish shot of me. Then they cut to a commercial for dog food.

When we got back Trent was sitting at in his living room with his TV grandson, Timmy, on his knee. "Timmy," Trent intoned with grandfatherly wisdom, "do you hate evil?"

Timmy looked to the right of the camera and said "yes."

"Well Timmy, if you want to grow big and strong to fight evil, you have to eat your vegetables."

Timmy looked to the right of camera and squinted, then he haltingly said "but I hate vegetables."

"No Timmy, vegetables are your friends, you should save your hate for evil. Do you know else is your friend?"

Timmy looked to the right of the camera and said "no."

"Hidden valley ranch salad dressing," Trent enthused, procuring a bottle on salad dressing from somewhere, "the original ranch. Here, try some." He poured some ranch onto a plate of carrots; Timmy looked to the right of the camera then bit into a carrot and smiled.

"Mmmmm," Timmy said, rubbing his hand in a circle on belly, "I love hidden valley ranch salad dressing."

"That's right, Timmy," the camera zoomed into Trent's face, "we all love hidden valley ranch salad dressing." It almost seemed like a threat. "You know, when I was serving my country, sometimes we had to survive eating only shrubs and leaves, hidden valley ranch salad dressing saved my life. I killed 46 evil doers in that war, hidden valley sure worked for me, Timmy," for a moment Trent's eyes became cold and dead, then he went back to grandfather mode, "it'll work for you too. We'll be right with the Hendrickson's after the break, stay tuned." Then they went to a safeway commercial.

After the commercial TV me slunk down the hall towards the bedrooms, I noticed this hallway had no bathroom. With the tomato juice still dripping down his chin my doppelganger slowly drew a comedically large knife from his waist and opened the door on the left. I watched myself loom over the bed from behind. The knife drew into the air then fell again and again. Squelching sounds filled the room, a foley artist's idea of the stabbing sound. Then they cut to a commercial for a new movie starring Kevin Costner as a baseball player.

I realized I hadn't eaten in hours, so I got out of bed and walked over to the fridge. Inside there was a loaf of bread, peanut butter, marmalade, and a jar of pickles. I made myself a pleasant sandwich and ate a pickle. After I ate I could feel my bowels trembling, so I went over to the toilet. After I was done I went back to the bed to watch more TV. CRIME WAVE! was over, so I watched Looney Tunes until I fell asleep.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for The Yabo\]](#)

Driftwood By H.Vdarski

I.

He's texting Jackie as he walks into the 7-11.

"Hey there whatcha doing tonight wanna hang?"

He feels like he's floating, yet incredibly grounded to the earth at the same time. Time has stopped in a small bubble around him. He looks around the mostly deserted store and takes note of the usual 3 AM crowd. The workers at the front are glumly shuffling around the counter, not enjoying the rut they dug have themselves into.

Dominion Bellweather doesn't give a shit.

In Dominion (or more casually, Dom)'s opinion, people stuck in garbage jobs, slaves to the wages they earned, they put themselves there with a huge amount of effort. This particular belief system causes Dom to view them as Non - People, faceless automatons pulled from Roger Water's worst nightmares.

With goldfish-like intensity, Dom begins to pile snack food into the crook of his right arm, tucked against his side. Matt wants Doritos. Nick wants Peanut Butter covered Malteasers, which Dom is surprised actually exists, and wasn't just an experiment in destroying one's body. Luke wants a few bags of assorted candies, and when pressed if he had a preference, he simply said, "Just a real fuckin' epic bunch of candy bags, man. You know what I mean? Just really...fucking.... epic."

Dom does know what he means. He understands the language, the lingo, the slang, the parlen-ceparlance of his group. Luke wants colors. Dom supposes it's a sad thing to want colors. Yet, colors he wants, and colors the man shall have. Let it be known that Dominion does what is asked of him. Dom piles as many reds, blues, pinks, greens as he can into three bags and carefully places them onto his unstable arm-crook pile.

He walks up to the counter and puts the snacks down. He signals to the automaton that he needs more time, extending his index finger and nodding, and heads back into the store. He grabs a pack of Red Bull for himself and an eight-pack of Coke for everyone else. His phone buzzes. He smiles as a song from Beauty and the Beast begins to play. Gaston. Now there is a man. He opens the phone, and reads.

"Nothing much. Just finishing a history essay and enjoying a Timmy's. Yourself?"

He whips back a quick reply, his fingers dancing across the numerical keyboard.

"Oh nothing much hanging with the boys u wanna hang out tomorrow?"

He pays for all the junk food, and stuffing it all into several plastic bags and walking out. One of the automatons, an overweight, weasel looking kid, looks at him forlornly. He's wearing a Nintendo t-shirt underneath his red vest. Dom is quite sure that he knows the kid, but feels no real desire to find out who he is. He knows he hasn't been in the store for more than ten minutes, yet, he understands in an almost matter-of-fact way, it's been fucking hours.

II.

Dom kicks the door open and three goldfish faces look up at him. The first real movement they have had since he left occurs as they jump up and rush to him, grabbing the requested items from the bags he carried. They harvest the sugary goods from his pulsating plastic sacs. There is a few minutes of silent chewing as the starving boys huddle around the table, eating. Dom thinks about the text Jackie sent him as he was walking home.

"This essay is pig-disgustingly easy. 800 words on Julius Caesar? I could do this in my sleep."

He doesn't know why she isn't answering him, but cannot find the mental capacity to dwell on it, in his current state.

Luke breaks the silence, one of his bags empty, the other two placed in the fridge to get cold, the way he likes them. The only way he likes them.

"Alright boys," he says in a mocking New Jersey accent. "I think that it's time we get down the order of what we're going to do for the rest of the evening."

Dom looks at Luke, a skinny kid with Italian features. "Do we know anyone from school who was like, kind of fat? He works at the 7-11. He kept giving me this sad look."

The three all look at him, shake their heads, and get back to the topic at hand.

"I want to watch Hercules." says Matt. There's an odd, nasally and very demanding tone to his voice. Doesn't Matt always dictate what they do? Dom can't remember.

"No man," says Nick, a bony fellow with greasy straight hair and an unkempt beard, "I brought my Chapelle's show DVDs along tonight, can you really go wrong with Dave C? I'M RICK JAMES, BITCH!" Laughter erupts around the table from everyone except Dom,

who can't stop jumping from the Fat Kid to Jackie. "I hate Dave Chappelle. Why is that even funny?" He mutters under his breath. He is ignored.

He sends Jackie a text.

"if you aren't super busy right now I could come over for a bit"

As he sends the message, mentally adding the word please, he comments, "That kid, at the 7-11? He looked like a real fucking loser. Videogame shirt, and everything."

Luke nods. He isn't listening, and he doesn't care. Dom's noticed this a lot often lately. He flips a coin, and they settle on Hercules. Nick shrugs with an impassive look on his face, as Matt smiles with glee.

Nick bothers Dom. He's the college kid out of the group, and something about Nick's demeanor screams to Dom that the second he has his degree, he won't talk to any of them again. In fact, Dom suddenly remembers, he has actually said this, several times.

Dom thinks back to the Fat Kid. His sad look on his face. He looked so pathetic, but Dom almost felt a connection to him, but in what way, he cannot devise. He can hear his brain dissolving.

Jackie texts him back.

"I don't think he's too bad of a guy. Chop off some hands, slaughter a village, it happens".

III.

Dom realizes something. Hercules came out in 1998. He is sitting here watching a movie that is eleven years old. This fact disturbs him, and his brain can't be arsed to explain why. A disturbing sense of wrongness is bleeding into his brain.

Another hit. That always works. Sets the demons back.

A few minutes, or hours, or days, later, Dom can't tell, he's looking at his friends.

They're a really great bunch. Good times, amazing people. Snap some photos, throw'em on Facebook.

Yeah.

Dominion Bellweather texts Jackie.

“Hey there whatcha doing tonight wanna hang”

Phil’s song begins. Dom begins nodding his head. Great movie. Disney is fucking epic. Just like when he was a kid. He vaguely remembers a Nintendo t-shirt. Maybe he should pick one up.

Jackie texts him back.

“Don’t you wish Tim Hortons had a better logo on their cups?”

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Driftwood\]](#)

Watching By gyjerok@gmail.com

Absolutely beautiful, the night is young, the moon isn't out and the corner street light is broken again. The light strays far from my next target, a local closed community parking garage, full of the rich types and such, which I see makes it fair game for me to make a quick buck. I can see it all now, those music players, portable computers, and a few other fancies—all good for a fence. To my surprise when I walk up to the gates, it's nice and broken, no border hopping for me.

Sneaking through what is a perpetual darkness, all these vehicles don't appeal to me, as look through the stable of uninspiring wealth, and after all, I need a mark with class. After the low-down of miserable sights, I see a mighty red stallion; chrome hooves, a smooth shifting hood and a shine that sparkles in the void. Shame that it's right next to a few old jalopies, the juxtaposition of that is simply wrong.

To my astonishment, the first few jigglers on my chain are able to open it, but inside, there is absolutely nothing—nothing on the seats, nothing in the back, nothing in the hatch, nothing on the floor and definitely nothing in the change slot. "Stop right there," a firm voice yells at me. I turn around to see two guards, pointing their guns and flashlights at me; seeing that, I simply raise my hands. First time for everything I guess, getting caught without even a single coin in hand.

"What is it?" I ask.

"Burglarizing, trespassing, terrorizing—" says the cheap fuzz.

"Terrorizing who?"

The fuzz grabs me and throws me to the ground, acting like they're the real deal. I try to look up as the guy throws me down. I can see in his face that I'm somehow the scum the universe. "Hold it," says the most suave voice I ever did hear. Turning my head, I can see a man in a business suit, slick blonde hair that just combs so nicely and a radiant smile across his face; like the Rebel King himself is walking out of those shadows. "I want to see his face," says the man. The guards pick me up but continue to hold me.

"Who are you?" asks the blonde man.

"Ain't saying, Rebel King," I say.

All the man does is chuckles as he looks over to the guards.

"What was he doing?" asks the Rebel King.

"He was breaking into this car, which I believe was yours, sir," says the cheap fuzz.

He looks over at me with calm eyes; all I can do is nod in response. He looks back at the cheap fuzz.

"I won't press charges," he says.

"Y-you won't?" the fuzz stutters.

Again he looks over to me, this time with eyes piercing me, not angry, just piercing me, giving me an unnatural feeling, like I'm going to be sick at any moment.

"But only on two conditions," he says with a slick tone.

"Yeah, sure," I respond.

"First, I want an apology and second, I want a promise."

He wants a damn apology; his pity would be burning my gut right now if his stink eye wasn't already giving me a bellyache.

"I'm sorry," I say.

"Hm, I don't know," he says.

"I'm sorry," I say with sincerity and the last of my pride.

"Excellent, now, all I want is a promise that you will do good for the rest of your life."

"Define good."

"Good indeed! A question with many answers. Then let me rephrase, do what you think is good."

"That's it?"

"That's it."

"Yeah sure, I'll do some good"

Just like that, the guy turns his back to me. I swear I can hear him snickering, probably with a wide smirk across his face. "Let him go," he says. "Let him to do good for his life." He turns his head to give me one last glance and with his parting words he says "I'll be watching."

Next thing I know, my ass is out on the streets with the fancy community garage behind me. The guards chain up the gate for good and leave me in the gutter to rot, die, or both. Back to the old cardboard mat in the Ditch for me, to drift forever as a bum.

Sitting on my usual mat in the Ditch, the other bums have gone digging through the streets, checking every can they can find, like the rats scurrying across the floor before me. I can't help but reach out to one of them and chuck it across the street. But I do wonder, would that be bad of me? After all, I did nothing to them but I can't help but feel that slick Rebel King is watching me. Ever since last night, his words still creep me out. "Do good," he says; as it's constantly running through my mind.

I have a pick of the lot and I choose his red stallion to break into; can't get any sleep because of that man. Like these scurrying rats are constantly crawling over my feet, only difference is that these pests are the epitome of bellyache. There's a small nudge on my shoulder, it's old Coyote Asshole. "Hey there buddy," he says with a gob full of rotten teeth.

"Piss off Coyote Asshole," I reply.

"Ass still sore from last night?" he retorts.

"What do you know?"

"Saw you sneaking in that there garage lot last night; then also saw your ass tossed out."

"Said piss off, go back to dumpster diving."

"Ain't doing that anymore. You know, I beginning to know people that might get me somewhere, so I suggest you call me by my proper name, pal."

Always a liar that guy, I can't help but get up and walk out of the range of his stink. I can hear him saying something to me, but instead in the suave voice of that man from last night. Bastard looking down at me like scum, taking pity, and throws me on the street saying to do good; acts like I'm evil. I'm just trying to survive in life, stealing or not.

It's not like stealing ever hurt anyone, I need some quick cash so I can eat and maybe something to forget this miserable transient life. As I exit the alleyways and onto the streets, a little kid bumps into me, far from reaching his double digits yet and he is running around at night by himself. He looks up to me with ignorant eyes but suddenly walks away, probably to avoid talking to street trash like me. Feels like even mere children are looking at me like scum. I wonder who was looking down on whom.

Reminds me of my youth actually, stealing candy bars and nickels to get something decent to eat. Adults never give out handouts anyway; I'm trying to look out for myself and feed myself, like the little urchin that I was. Actually I could go for some candy right about now, something nostalgic about it. Down the street there is a sweet outlet, I'd gladly get myself a candy bar with the few coins I have.

As I am about to step inside, I make a lucky find. A few pieces of silvery coin lie and wait on the ground right before my grand entrance. A quick swipe and I go in, full of little kids, parents, and few lovers buying sweet things. Everyone avoids eye contact with me, but whatever; I am a bum in a candy store.

Stepping out with candy in hand can't help but overhear a boy talking to another; the same one from before.

"I can't believe it," one cries out.

"Idiot," the other yells.

"Not my fault, I had a hole in my pocket."

The fruit of my find is the treasure of another. Can't help but stare at my little bag of candy, so miniscule in comparison to what I want, but can't help feel something for him. He'll get over it. Little brat has it too good for him and he doesn't know it.

I escape back in the Ditch, clutching the bag in my hand as I don't intend to ever let go of it, it's now a vice on me. I'm going to eat this and enjoy it. But the next thing I know, the bag is out my hand and into another. Douchebag Steve as usual, grabbing things that aren't his, taking the very food out of other vagrants; just looking at him pisses me off, around here, the vagrants don't steal from each other, but not this guy.

"Looks like you got a bit of a sweet tooth here," he says.

"Give it back," I reply.

"Nuh-uh man, I haven't had candy since that old daddy of mine punched out my baby teeth."

"Like you have teeth now anyway."

"I just want a little lick is all."

I sit there and watch as he opens that bag. His hand is foulest thing you could ever see; grease, crud, and little bit of the crotch rot that just rubs off so smoothly. Can't help myself but punch him in the face, hoping to knock out the last of his teeth. He steps back with a little ooze across his chin, but still grasping onto that golden grail of candy. Another to the gut and he finally falls to his knees, but dropping the very essence of my nostalgia away.

The candy falls onto the murky ground either falling into sewer grates or into the pile of crap that the metropolis leaves behind. Douchebag Steve deserves the crap beaten out of him, taking away my candy, or rather candy I deemed rightfully mine. As I'm stepping over the withering douchebag, can't help but question on what's good. I'm just trying to survive,

I mean, Douchebag Steve might be a frail guy, but he'll be back to take my food again another day. I'm doing what's best for survival; I'm doing what's good for me.

Months, weeks, and days pass quickly as I sit here in the Ditch. Old Coyote Asshole is gone, which seems strange because he always got some yarn to spin; but the rest are still breathing around here. All of them are either talking shit or eating it, some reason panhandling around here does no good, but that's the Ditch, worst spot for us as the other homeless dens drive us out; pretty bad when we're the scum of all scum in the city.

Sitting here and looking up at the spotless night ceiling, all I can think about is what I'm going to eat next. Anything with a little bang—gunshots—are all I can hear. No one of course takes cover; bullets are worth more than us and would be a waste of precious coin to off one of us. No, instead, a bunch of the gangbangsters are coming around, chasing each other with all guns blazing.

This time is a little different though; usually these punks shoot each other up and leave them for dead. The fuzz eventually comes around to drag off any cadavers avoiding all eye contact with us. No, this time, they decide to run around in the Ditch with more than peashooters, but like anyone cares. What makes it special is that one of them drops something, a pack load of the fun powder. None of them seems to notice, as they were shooting each other up right in our home and the worst part is, we couldn't change the channel.

Soon after the gangs leaves the area, forgetting their cargo and leaving a few for dead in our home. The other bums like to pile them up in some sort of feng shui. I, on the other hand take the precious cargo for myself as the stuff is worth quite a bit around these parts. Never got into the stuff, prefer old trusty ethanol for my dreams and with this stuff, I'll be able to get a big ticket to paradise.

Still know how to fix like my teenage days, but of course a lot of stuff in those days was good and legal. I travel out of the Ditch and into a place where I can get quite cozy to avoid the punks running around and flashing their piece all over the place. Before I can exit my home, I get the old bear hug from Dickless Jane.

"Where are you heading off to honey?" Dickless Jane says.

"Ain't going nowhere Dickless Jane," I reply.

"Not so fast, I saw what you got in the ruffle and I want in," it exclaims.

This monstrosity of human nature wants a cut of my prize, most likely so it can shove it into every orifice it has. I pull out an old paper bag that I used to hold my last bottle and split up my treasure. I give the portion to old Dickless and It runs off into the darkness of the Ditch.

I'm going back to business with treasure in hand; down to a place called the Crud some ways down the street. The Ditch may suck to live in, but the Crud can be worse. Transients who live there often die over night so no one ever visits it, except for my potential clients, who are the same ones that die in the place. Not my problem if people like to lie down and die there, nothing I can really do either.

Thinking about it, how does the Rebel King expect me to do good anyway, nobody wants my help of any kind. People hate me with extreme prejudice before I even have a chance to utter a word or offer a hand in relief. Walking down the street toward the Crud, I feel something leering at me. Like maybe he is keeping true to his word, maybe he is really watching me do these deeds. Or maybe it's just the fact that paranoia is creeping up on me

again, I'm trying to survive.

Finally arriving at the Crud, there seems to be little life here. Any other fixers are gone and the stinking wretches of people are out of it in the alleyways. I'm sure business will be good with me being the only one out here. As I'm sitting out here on the corner, the traffic is dull, people are sparse, and the street lamp keeps blinking, like his eyes are trying to wink at me, like I'm suddenly supposed to preach a gospel and give good fortune to anyone I see.

I'm not here for that, I'm for the people really; after all, they need me to help them, all for a small bit of coin to help me survive, of course. I easily separate the powder into bags I find all over the streets, probably used for the same purpose. A handful of people come by, looking for what I have to offer and soon enough, I was able to make a small amount to make living a quite bit easier.

As I am talking to this one sod, real trouble comes around. A gangbanger comes around and takes notice to my fixing. I recognize him easily, wearing the same stuff of the people who got shot up in the Ditch, and this is probably his territory. Like a lion walking around his prey, I fear what might happen if I enter the den.

"Yo, what the hell you doing here? Hustlin' on our turf," the gangbanger says.

"Nothing here, Millimeter Peter," I reply.

After immediately saying that, with that mouth of mine, without even thinking, I run for it. Peter runs after me, with his gun firing a barrage; it's actually flattering that someone would waste their bullets on me and lucky that he can't aim. I run down the Crud's alleyways, hoping that I might escape within the mazes of the city. Jumping and tumbling over the tainted cadavers, or would-be dead, as they lay there with mouths wide open, not a care in the world as the drugs run through their systems.

I wonder where I'm going as I run for my life; I can still hear him coming after me, still shooting at me. Stray metal often hit the ones I'm tumbling over but it's not my fault their fate ends quick, if anything, its fate's sweet mercy granting them something life couldn't. My muscles begin to ache, my lungs are out of life and my eyes see only in a daze. I reach the end of the Crud's alleyway and I find myself on a busy street, raging with the sound of a thousand horses.

I look behind me to see Millimeter Peter coming around the corner and again, luck smiles on me as all I hear now are clicks of an empty chamber. His angry eyes are still on me and with a backup plan; he takes out a knife, one that flutters open. I stand my ground, not knowing what I should do; all I can see is a blurry haze rushing right at me. I sway a little to the right like a drunk and out of chance; he misses his first swing at me. I grab his arms and his body but the fatigue is getting to me, I'm not able to hold him and the tables turn as he tries to overpower me. I step back in fluster and trip on my heel, sending Millimeter Peter out into the raging river. I fall to the ground, barely able to keep my breath and as soon as I look up, I see that man coming at me again, but only for a moment as the next moment I seeing a raging truck splattering Millimeter Peter, letting his blood run down the street and into the gutters. What was a simple street is now a bloody scene, people start gathering all around in awe of the sight and all I do is crawl away into the darkness that is the Crud.

For once in a long while, I'm actually awake during the day and I see the strangest sight. Old Coyote Asshole comes out of a black smooth car parked on the side of the street; wearing something that isn't rags or crap over his face. What the hell is he doing here if he

can actually live a normal life? He walks into the Ditch like he has some sort of dignity about him and looks down at me.

“Hey buddy, been a long time, hasn’t it?” Coyote Asshole says with a smirk.

“What is it Coyote Asshole?” I reply back with my usual demeanor.

“Still with the attitude huh, pal? Look we’ve been good buddies right?”

“If you want to call it that.”

As Coyote Asshole is talking to me, he seems to linger in the Ditch, like he’s too good to sit down like the rest of us, now, instead he looms over me like he’s talking down to me—like everyone else.

“Didn’t I say I was starting to know people? Look pal, I just want to help an old buddy out, I want to offer you a job,” he says.

“Serious?” I ask.

“Yeah pal, you know how to drive right?”

“Yeah, use to do that a long time ago, why?”

“This company I’m working for needs a private courier and I thought we could help each other out.”

A job huh? I never would have thought I would be making a decent living in my lifetime. My heart feels like it’s melting, but at the same time, something is stomping in the mush, but maybe, this is what I need to do better, because for some reason, I can’t really take this life anymore.

“I don’t have any identification or anything like that,” I say.

“Don’t worry, pal, these guys I’m working for, they’ll pay in cash,” he replies.

“Really? Cause I ain’t telling my name either.”

“Why not? All the time I’ve known you, you never did mention your name.”

“The only ones who know my name, is me and the Ditch itself, I was born here you know.”

“I don’t believe that, how?”

“I ain’t telling.”

I can see that Coyote Asshole wants to know, as that prancing attitude of his disappears and actually sits down like he use to. He hands me a hundred dollar bill “Now tell me,” he says. That’s serious cash, real serious, to think I might be able to make that.

“Fine,” I say. “Old momma of mine got drunk one night while she was almost due at that bar over there, which hasn’t changed in forever. As she stumbles out of the bar, she staggers right into the Ditch and passes out. Next thing she knew, it’s morning and I’m lying right in front of her covered in shit. My tether was gone for some reason but she knew it was hers as that belly of hers was gone. Right there she gave me a name and carried me off.”

“How the hell do you know all that?” he remarks.

“She told me herself before ditching me when I was young. Just shows how worthless I am.”

“How about another hundred to actually tell me your name?”

"Piss off."

"Fine," he says, shrugging his shoulders. "So, do you want to work?"

"Yeah, sure."

Shortly after that day, I start working for some company driving a large van, reminds me of the ones the banks use. I drive across the state, non-stop usually as the company wants the delivery done fast, don't know why though but they sure do pay well for me to do it. I actually have a home now that I pay with my own cash that I work for. Even after all this, I haven't seen much of old Coyote Asshole; guess he works somewhere else in the company.

Today I have to drive through several of the states to reach my destination. It's always so boring to drive these distances and every time I do, I feel like something is tugging at me, like a bad mojo in the air I breathe. I don't know what I'm transporting but if it's something like the fun powder, it shouldn't be bothering me. After all, drugs aren't really bad by themselves; it's the people who use them. Even then, something is bothering me.

I arrive at the destination, a small little town out in the boonies, though I still don't know why I come all the way here to deliver this crap, there's nothing here. Hairy Slick, one of my superiors, meets with me at the drop off point. The point is so weird, next to an old shack outside of the desolate town, probably would raise all sorts of suspicion, if I actually cared.

"Good timing, here's your next delivery," he says as he points to the other van next to the shack.

"I'm supposed to get a day off after this," I exclaim.

"Tough shit, this shipment needs to be brought home by tonight."

"Yeah, sure, sure."

Something about my superiors always bothers me; they dress all smooth and suave, even out here in the middle of nowhere. But they can keep their fancies, I'm just happy to have clothes on my back that don't give me the itch.

I jump into the van and instantly I get that same feeling, like these people fill the vans with something just to piss me off. I breathe in hard and deep, but the only thing that fills my lung is the cool air from the breezy vents. I start the van up and speed off. All ahead of me is the desolate dry highway, not a single other car on the road.

The people who look down on me tell me that I must take these routes, avoiding the main highways. I don't know why, they make me drive these things without a piss break and expect me to deliver with a damn smile. But I never question the ones who look down at me, but I would like to question old Coyote Asshole, haven't seen his mug in a while.

Driving all peaceful as usual, the sun sets over the land, soon to be night. My eyes get lead weights over them and the next thing I know, I swerving all over the road. I hit a large pot hole in the middle of the road and the van becomes uncontrollable. I crash into the side of the road, into a large ditch. By now, the sun is already gone and all that's left is the violet skyline that it leaves behind. I grab a flashlight and head outside to check myself.

The back doors of the truck are thrown open; have to make sure whatever the hell I'm delivering isn't in pieces. I peer inside to finally see the cargo I've been carrying all this time. Nothing. There's absolutely nothing in here. I step inside to see the great big nothing

I've been hauling all over for, but as soon as I step inside, that same horrible dread fills me up. Something is wrong here, I know it, something is wrong, I'm far from venerable but I'm sure as hell no demon, but I know it, something's evil in here.

Then all the sudden, my nostalgia kicks in, my crummy years as an urchin suddenly dwells within me for some reason, maybe I'm about to die, like they say right before you bite it, you see those kind of things.

But maybe, it's something else, there's definitely something wrong in here. I notice the floor boards are odd, metal like the rest of the carriage but bolted down half-assed, and the crash just so happens to let one loose. I grab one of the floor boards and try to rip it open with all my strength. Finally, conquest. I look down to see something I never thought that would come true, what I see isn't horrible but the idea that it brought is the most horrible thing ever, like every single story I hear on the streets come true at this very moment.

Children, I see children in complete bondage, rolling around in their own filth unable to a damn thing. They can't see me with their blindfolds but I know they can sense me here as they cry in fear as to what might happen next. Never would of thought that the Orphan Meat stories were actually true, companies buying and selling orphan children for slaves, sex servants, or even as organs to sell.

I, I have to do something here. Out of all times, I wished I didn't toss my lock picking tools. I rush outside to try to find anyone who could help. The first thing I see a smooth black car driving by. I flail my arms in hopes they'll stop. They don't. They ignore me.

I spend the next hour trying to start up the van with no success, I try to free the kids but without any way to open the locks, I fail. Finally, as the night turns to complete darkness, I see a swarm of headlights coming toward me. It's the fuzz, with red and blue lights filling the night, but why more than one? Then something just occurs to me, I'm a liability, that bastard Coyote Asshole needed someone like me, so whenever some shit goes down, I take the fall. As that swarm of fuzz approaches, I still open up in hope they'll understand, all I get are the fuzz brandishing their guns at me.

Without knowing a thing about the company, unable to prove my worth and with mysterious evidence going against me, it's no wonder how I ended up here in The Hole. Even behind bars, I'm still the lowest of the low; everyone thinks that I'm some kind super pedophilic abomination, thus making me worse than serial killers and the actual rapists.

"Hey, you have a visitor," a cheap fuzz says, approaching my cage.

"Tell 'em to piss off," I reply.

"Now, now, you shouldn't act like that," a familiar voice rings in my ears. "I thought you would be glad to have someone talk to."

It's the Rebel King himself, appearing out of the shadows to stand mockingly in front my cage.

"Hey, you're not allowed back here," says the cheap fuzz.

The Rebel King smiles and shoves some green into the shirt pocket of cheap fuzz. That fuzz's eyes light up with delight and walks away without question.

"Corrupting again Rebel King?" I ask.

He looks back at me with a smile.

“What the hell are you doing here anyway?” I ask.

“Just a simple visit,” he replies as he is looking around. “I see that you kept to your word.”

I stare back in silence. His eyes no longer give me the fright, but that smug look of his still pisses me off.

“Are you happy?” he questions.

“About what? That my ass is permanently sore and I eat crap that’s worse than what I find on the streets? Yeah, sure,” I reply. “As long as those kids are fine, I don’t really care, my life may have been worthless, but those kids still have a chance.”

With that, he smiles and walks away, although I don’t know why he feels happy for himself, I didn’t do a damn thing.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Watching\]](#)

A vibrant sunset scene over a dark ocean. The sky is filled with warm, orange and red hues, with a bright sun low on the horizon, partially obscured by a thin layer of clouds. The word "[Poetry]" is centered in the sky in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

[Poetry]

Amerikan Politik by Shenanigans

American Politik
are the Politik of the nova superstar
With an explosion of success
burning the world in winds of money
the country then Dies
the economy collapses
stretching space and time
beyond the fathoming of the mind
Into this black hole the launch of logic
crushing Hope under the weight of debt
stretching progress to a strand
an iota
until the light of Change is not a glimmer
not a spec
not a dot
But still they say that Everything is Grand
not like wind upon the sand
not like wind upon a void
like all your checks
Amerikan Politik
now bow to the communiste
where the cars are cheap as the wages
there in the land of sages
the land of wisdom in the void
where Nothing is eternal
in itself
So let us contemplate the void
and hope it will inverse

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Amerikan Politik\]](#)

A Parting Conversation by B.Cox

What angry youth will cause grass to grow from
the crack of the city?

What will it take for a tree to grow
from the road outside my parent's house?

When can I read to children without being arrested?

Am I perverted and lewd?

When can I see football
stadiums filled with rain like a lake?

I want to see the helmets of overpaid NFL stars
crushed in the mammoth jaws
of some wise, slow, creeping prehistoric beast.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for A Parting Conversation\]](#)

A Sinner's Company by R. Hayden

Wading against the waves of thick bean brew,
I enter.

In my only place of being, that lighted corner,
I sit.

After the sweet meal and bitter drink,
I think

Back to the mentions of yesteryears,
When I was trapped

In a cloned house, in a cloned thought,
Where I was a ewe strayed from wolf-sheep pack,
From whence I fought and was freed.

And now I'm quite alone

With my empty drink and thought

With Hamlet between me and the world.

Is the prince ever lonely? And am I more so?

For I haven't an ever-rational Horatio

To steer me straight

And only a cheery Yorick

Whose grave I declare never exhumed.

Then I'm shaken awake

By the young kind-spirited owner

Who says I had fallen asleep

And the café already closed

But I'm welcome to stay

And keep her company.

The fiery woman skips pass the tables, half-cleaning,

Talking of the past and the future.

I ask her of the present.

She says she likes Hamlet too

And begins to channel a blossoming schoolgirl.

Fidgeting with the still-clean cloth,

She asks if I would like to go out sometime.

Shocked and awed,
I fight back all my fears,
And say "Yes".
And whether or not He hates me
I thank Him from the bottom of my heart.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for A Sinners Company\]](#)

Blue & Gold by Anonymous

All, that I know
Of a certain friend
Is, he can laugh
Like a cackling hen.
Now a dart of gold,
Now a hint of blue;
Till my friends have told
They would fain laugh, too,
My friends who all know the gold and the blue!
Then he stops, my friend Beetle; Maxwell, his foe:
Them left solace themselves in those apropos.
What matter to me if their friend is below:
Mine opened his soul to me; I miss him so.

[\[Click here for online criticism and feedback for Blue & Gold\]](#)

Conversation As Art by Iron In Your Lungs

Could you find
a horizon in my breath?
Steel cold like icebergs
I saved these last syllables
for occasions like these
where we sat parallel
to Heaven's Smile.
I rose from the sepulchre as
grave wind keys jangled
from his grave dirt belt loop.
We rose and stood and made
Siamese twins from our shadows.
Gatekeepers do more than watch
they lead by example.

We filled your bedroom
with things you loved
knee-high boots
birthday balloons
trapper keepers filled
with sketches of elbows
hands full of dirt
and couples talking.
We never talk about
what really bothers you.
You reach for a zipper
to open the hole
you hide inside

I knew silence
she was a connoisseur
in little boys with big
eyes and bigger dreams
I wanted to be your

misplaced basket case
decatalogue of panic attacks
and trying too hard.
Tin men rust and lions
grow new manes.
Your mane will come back too.

You bought new tights
and came home crying
I bought another case
of light beer sentiments.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Conversation as Art\]](#)

Deadeye Dick Dawkins by Shenanigans

Deadeye Dick Dawkins
does dubious deeds.
Declares devotion
desperately delusional-
“Dogma dealeth deceit
down dispositions docile!”

Deep-rooted disdain
Dick deems Deity’s due.
Derisively dignifies
devotees defrauders-
“Dangerously deranged!”
disparages Dick.

Denounceth divinity
Deadeye doth.
Disciples descry Dick’s
debatable doubt-
Displeased dispositions
doctrinarians discover.

Defamatory debasements
devotees declaim:
“Disrespect! Disgrace!”
Disowned decadent divinity Dick did.
Delighted Deus doted on Dick.
But Dick never noticed, not ever he did.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Deadeye Dick Dawkins\]](#)

Fearful Dreamers by LeftRight

Do you see those who are afraid to sleep?

-There! They sit, hopeless, as their eyes call out empty into the halls of their minds.

Have you beckoned with that same hollow tone?

-There! They stand docile and quiet, answering with a smile and a nod.

Can you hear the strained creak in their neck?

-There! They scratch the back of their heads and shrug, supposing they slept well.

Did you spot the slide of their gaze to rest behind you?

-There! No, they don't think they had any dreams, not that they could remember.

Can you answer the question left in the air?

Welcome to the land of the fearful dreamer,

Did you have any dreams last night?

There, you feel abandoned in the crowded room of the world. Trapped in an egg made of tissue paper that you could reach out and touch, if only you could move. The forms of construction cranes and gravel heaps create an island in the teeming sea of skin and teeth.

There, you curl up fetal in the warm wooden mouth of some anonymous station. Eyeing your future as an office star waiting to be locked away in buildings shaped like filing cabinets; as a homely wife knocked-up, knocked-down, knocked-out, and crying.

There, you run from walls, and walls of books, and books with eyes, and eyes looking up plucking sparks from the lamp posts. Embers that even now prick your brain, sear your fingertips.

There, you crunch on German syllables, spitting teeth, and tongue your bleeding gums with a citrus smile. And your pia mater turns to acid, hugging your brain as cerebrospinal fluid drips from your nose.

There, you pull from your head or arms or legs, needles and hair and staples and fall apart in steps. Numbers coursing through your head as you feel the twang and pluck of your hamstring snapping away.

There, you mark yourself with tracks on the tracks hiding with long sleeves and a cracking face. And your eyes that turn to glass and break in your skull.

There, you are murdered again and again. Falling for hours and lying shattered on the floor screaming for death, looking up at the stars in a parking lot and crying.

There, you look out across the vast expanse of grey.

With the white face of your drowned mother disappearing beneath a cloud of black hair.

And a wheelchair in a castle by the sea.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Fearful Dreamers\]](#)

Funeral of the sleeper by Lysander M.

Obsidian,

Those wretched things.

Buckle inward and rot beneath

Wrinkled fold and creased envelope,

A farewell to this dishonest frailty

Broken and aged with time so as to only see blind.

Our Slow rot.

Dark city, dead city. Midnight always as your hour

Remake this sleepless man,

Resurrect

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Funeral of the Sleeper\]](#)

Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls *by NaCl*

Why is it whenever I meet with them,
Those eyes, big and pretty- but
that skin, soft and welcoming.
Whenever I meet with them,
My better part is left collapsed.

Why is it whenever I meet with them,
Those legs, meant for wonder- but
that coy look seduction,
Do I want to fuck so cruelly?
Where has gone my demeanor?
Replaced cool and calm with
this nervous passion.
This hateful need.

I never wanted to this is not my fault
fuck biology.
Why is it whenever I meet with them,
I'm incited to insanity.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Girls Girls Girls Girls Girls\]](#)

Icarus by Noah

Icarus
(1)

Staring into drowned eyes;

Through lap and splash the sun seems
no farther away now to him

than when fingers reached
their furthest.

His last grip hung on a taut white ray

then dropped

from cloud-blue

into conch-blue

(II)

What did I dream

what did I dream?

two old elements swing together
holding hands:

A beam,

a beam from Mariana!

two sacks of floating blubber
push away

And the beach crushed like a sea shell

with two old horns moving through sand,
sinking sand,
and wrecked thrushes falling all around.

chicago,

I am bluer than you;
My pristine form sprays out
from lake michigan

to stand a shimmer over the city.

My ribs suicide on pebbles,

my seagulls seem livid,
all in rhyming couplet formation:

"Fly away
this wave of a typewriter!"

And when you trip
swimming in wide circle strokes unknowing

When you whack each head on the docile pier
bleeding a bit

Though I thought we had punctured an eye

I took all five needles

in my sun-tanned forehead just fine.

and the vacation ruined my murky water.

What a suction-cup!

he wears

tilted

like a fashionable little cap.

What an inheritance!

he just shook a fortune from
the ruffled towel about to sneeze.

This little toy brother

this giant boy plastic shovel

a glory for the mud to hug

and slobber

oozes slowly from the sears tower.

And the lake boats pop!
and sink violently

a swift bang on the acorn
baby's head

sprawled like grassy lawn chairs
that sizzle on the beach.

The shoes made of metal
brash soles of fireworks,

an idol of sun

shoving its head in the sand

(forever in thy stead)

curled teeth-feet and rotten,

And this lake

how a blinking waits above us

how a crack sprouts

from my nose
all the way through to my

backbone.

I have no child, no adult

only growth

so that with a little balance movement,
promptly sat on my sand castle.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Icarus\]](#)

Insomniotic Catastrophe by Globulous

I cannot sleep but, alas, the clear and present danger knows no bounds.
The enigmatic differentia of my mind and the demons that haunt it,
Keep me from understanding the underlying power of human thought.
Long gone are the days where human emotion and everlong curiosity
Throw themselves betwixt and between thematic uncertainties.
Angels from up on high, grace me and my hallowed torture,
Yet abandon me for the bliss that is never ending disconformity.
"HARK!" I cannot be appeased until my withering insomnia is no more.
My cries go unheard. I see the end of nothing and the beginning everything,
But it is unreal for even these things do not exist on an ethereal plane.
A crushing anomaly within the throes of intertwined thought matter,
Endlessly running under a nocturnal guise. I need peace but I cannot have it,
Amidst the pills and remedies of wives' tales past.
This night will never end. This night will be forever to me.
This night will be the catalyst of my dark and dreary transience.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Insomniotic Catastrophe\]](#)

Jurassic Park: The Poem by Billy

Back in 1993

A film was made which I hope you'll agree
Was the best of its kind, an instant classic,
About a dinosaur park that was Jurassic.
Based on a book, sharing the same exact name,
it was Spielberg's film that got the most fame.
A Box Office hit, its profits grew high.
A storming success. I'll tell you for why...
Because Jurassic Park, it captured imagination,
Kids and adults stared in fascination
At Spielberg's amazing combination
Of good old fashioned storytelling and CGI animation.
So if you'll let me, I'd like to embark,
And tell you the story of Jurassic Park.

A crazy old scientist named Dr. John Hammond
Realises that he has to get his park examined,
Because lawyers for some reason are kicking up a fuss
That an employee's been eaten by something unknown to
us.

His lawyers insist on a full safety inspection
To ensure the visitors have complete protection.
So, Hammond decides that he will enlist,
the world's top scientists:
Palaeontologist, Dr. Alan Grant,
Who as we see really can't
Get along with kids, oh dear Alan,
Don't scare that chubby boy with your dinosaur talon.
And then there's the Paleobotanist
Dr. Ellie Sattler, whose job consists
Of digging up plants and studying them intently.
She fancies Alan quite a lot, incidentally.
And finally Dr Ian Malcolm joins the team,
You'll recognise him, Jeff Goldblum, I mean.
He's from another truly brilliant Sci-Fi:
I really adore it, its called The Fly.

Sorry about that, back to the story at hand.
The scientists get a helicopter to Dinosaur Land
And a scene plays through that amazes me to this day
With the wonder and magic only Spielberg can convey.
We are met by a creature of enormous height;
A Brachiosaurus, plain in sight!
Jaws drop to the floor, everyone's in awe;
No one's seen dinosaurs like this before.
Proud of himself, John Hammond does remark
"Welcome to Jurassic Park!"

The cloning of dinosaurs, no one can conceive,
So he shows us all how it was achieved.
He got a mosquito trapped in the sap of a tree
And extracted the blood quite easily.
The blood was that of a Jurassic beast
And contained its DNA, most of it at least.
Ingeniously he filled in the DNA that was missing
With that of a frog, but it seems he's dismissing
Great ethical issues and his responsibility
To handle his new found capability
And the dangerous possibility
That him stopping the ability
For the creatures to reproduce
Is definitely some sort of science abuse.
And just because they have all been made female,
It does not mean that they will not prevail.
The humans will then become the dinosaurs' prey
Because as Ian Malcolm says "Life will find a way".

But everything's fine, John Hammond is sure
As he sets the team off on the park tour,
But their respect for the park is subsiding
As the dinosaurs in their pens are hiding.
Soon, Ellie leaves her Jeep before it stops
And the team follow to find a sick Triceratops.
Jeff Goldblum does comment with his all mighty wit
That the dinosaurs poo is a "big pile of shit".
But the team must leave, a storm is expected.
Dr. Sattler stays, though, with the beast that's infected.
Meanwhile the big, fat nerdy computer guy
Has made a deal with his evil ally
That he will steal dinosaur DNA
And give it to his friend later that day.
So quickly he must shut down the electrics
In order to steal the dinosaur genetics.
When he's done he makes a run to the island's dock,
But his Jeep takes an almighty knock
And he crashes down a humongous slope.
So through the mud he must grope
To find the DNA and his glasses as well,
But to him we must bid a fond farewell
As the green and red dinosaurs that spit and hiss
Make sure that he no longer exists.
Meanwhile, looking cool, Samuel L. Jackson
Is trying desperately to hack on
To the system to reactivate the fences
Before a dino-catastrophe commences.
Unfortunately he doesn't get very far

As nerdy-guy's computer says "uh uh uh!"
Meanwhile, in the Jeeps the crew must remain
As the storm is causing a dangerous downpour of rain.
But they hear a noise, the crew are perplexed
It's the stomping of a Tyrannosaurus Rex!
With its gigantic size, through the fence it breaks
And causes lots of miniature earth quakes.

Alan explains that it can't see you if you stay still,
But that must be quite a skill,
When its stomping around with its gigantic feet,
And you know that it's you that it wants to eat.
It goes for the kids, but Alan pulls out a flare,
And distracts the monster with its attractive glare.
Meanwhile the lawyer escapes to the loo
What an inconvenient time to have a poo!
What a stupid man, that's not discreet.
He gets eaten right off the toilet seat.
Jeff Goldblum gets knocked out in a nasty scrape,
But Alan and the kids manage to escape.
Though just when they think they're off scot-free
They have to rescue Timmy whose stuck in the tree.
Dr. Sattler rescues Goldblum, but they have cause for concern
As the Tyrannosaurus Rex makes its return.
Quickly they must drive away;
They'll look for Alan and the kids when it's safer the next day.

The following morning, Alan finds a nest;
It appears the dinosaurs have been blessed
With the power to change their sexual gender.
Alan smiles with immense splendour.
But it means that males, the more enraged,
Are more likely to escape from their cage.

Luckily Jurassic Park's power is re-executed
But Tim climbing the fence gets electrocuted.
It turns out he's safe, so through a field they walk through,
In order to make their way back to HQ,
But are amazed by dinosaurs of amazing speed
Who nearly cause a great stampede.
Finally, somehow they all get reunited
But that's not the end, don't get too excited.
Eating their jelly they think all is well,
But there's one more fight in this dinosaur hell.
Something is desperately trying to capture
The kids and eat them: it's the Velociraptor!
Crawling around on their knees and hands
In the kitchen through the pots and pans,
They make their way to the main entrance hall,

And so takes place the final brawl.
Smashing through a wall comes the Tyrannosaurus Rex
Who throws the Raptors and bites their necks.
Quick, into the helicopter the humans fly
And we're safe to breath one final sigh.
As the credits roll and they head towards the sunset
Remember, that this was Jurassic park, don't you ever forget!

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Jurassic Park the Poem\]](#)

Procrastination by Mr.Valentine

Hm.

Maybe I should write a poem.

No, I will write a poem.

When?

Now.

Right now?

Right now.

But what about?

Plus I should check my emails.

And I should finish this game.

Wait!

That's it!

What's it?

That's it.

Procrastination,

You should write about that.

Ah.

Yes.

Excellent Idea.

So... 'Procrastination is-'

-Wait! One, two, three...

Twenty-three lines.

Meh.

It'll do.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Procrastination\]](#)

Seeking Solace by Ryan Messinger

As the wave of Lorelei washes over me,
I sit with tears in my eyes.
Her delicate fingers slowly, gracefully,
Running over the keys to that old, Grand.

As I look to the sky,
I see what I was looking for.
My mind slips away from me and,
I am.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Seeking Solace\]](#)

Seranadeeladiduhhh by Colin Jones

They clambered on the bus,
two pretty proles polypropped -
three spirits in dual forms, this weusandours tripod
was held upright by a suspended crane of damnecessity
supporting their focal shared spine vertical.
They slowslouched to their seat and
slung their sacks to the ground then they
pounced onto the blue felt,
their heavyhung heads together.
Sniffle... sniffle... sniffle...
Somnambubble boy is rocked to baby bashful bliss,
a romance of rambling unconscious in her shouldersling,
in and out through and within to out again.
Saying yes to their shared slow slumps as the motor moves us all, I watch:
sweet little sleepygirl lifts her head and kisses the skinny neck and
he wipes his nose on his wristsleeve.
Their clothes are dotted with dirtbits and
dark damp- it's the first dazzleday of Texas summerspring but
their sweat smells strangely clean.
Their lingering chins lazylimp towards each other,
nibble on nooks and
crisp little crannies,
their eyelids drop and slickly slide back open.
My gristlygrumbles fade as I chew on the way
her eyes are open but slumbering worship.
She puts her plaid pink cap on top his hip haircut,
it's lovely loving all over their world and
I'm reminded that even the sick survive somehow.
Then the bus gives a benevolent bounce to the left;
no one is harmed but my heart:
the spell is broken,
they are obviously on heroin,
their caresses are frenzy dulled by depressant.
He barely responds to her attempts at affection.

When they got on she carried all the bags on her back
like a beast of burden.
Now it's not so much the serenading la-dee-da! and more a
seranadee-la-dee-
duhhhhhhh.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Seranadeeladiduhhh\]](#)

She Never Made It To The Emergency Room *by Globulous*

Mediocre life
Hidden pain and strife
From the kitchen came a knife
She never wanted to be a wife

It all came so fast
She was going to crash
Every bone she would smash
It would end in a flash

Bottle of pills
She's had her fill
Gone against God's will
Herself she would kill

Time slows down
As she begins to drown
Nothing would be found
Except her wedding gown

An empty tomb
Made for two
A child was due
She never made it
To the emergency room

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for She Never Made it to the Emergency room\]](#)

SLATTERNS AND STRUMPETS

By Muphrid

Most days
I simply watch
the ground.
Keeping to myself;
not making a sound.

But today.

Today shall be different.

Today I strut,
today I smile.
Today I reek of charisma.

I can feel the eyes
of each and every
bitch I pass
melt with want
on my charming ass.

I nod my head
and greet them with
enthusiasm.
They giggle and
smile,
one even invites me
to try my
luck.

I pursue her.

Clearly.

She wants to fuck.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Slatterns and Strumpets\]](#)

The Night Gwen Stacy Died by Iron In Your Lungs

NO ONE EVER SAYS NO TO HER
PLATINUM BLONDE BEAUTY QUEEN
SILVER AGE TRAGEDY IN DISCO BOOTS
VIOLENT UPROOTING FOR THE QUIET SCENE
HAPTIC CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE DARK
STARK CONTRAST OF PERSONALITIES
WE GOT LOST IN THE MASKS
WE GOT LOST IN TRIVIALITIES
WE FELT SO LOST WITHOUT YOU
I HATE THE STARE OF THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE
I WOULD DROWN IT IN THE EAST RIVER
I WOULD ADD ITS SKELETON TO MY CLOSET
JUST TO SILENCE THE GREEN EYED LAUGHTER
ANOTHER RIDGE SHARP AS A TACK
SUSPEND OUR BODIES
WE BECOME COILED TO EACH OTHER
A HOWLING NIGHTMARE OF RAZOR GLINT
HOW DOES IT FEEL TO LOSE, TIGER?
TRUE TO FORM I STAYED THE COURSE
DECEIVED ENTRAPMENT THROUGH BELIEF
THAT I'D SEE YOU AGAIN
I FOUND ANOTHER
YOUR SHADOW GOT LOST IN THE UMBER
ATTACHED TO THE TENDRILS
PUPPET STRINGS
HOLDING UP SOMETHING FRAGILE
A SYMPHONY CONTAINED
IN YOUR NECK SNAPPING
A GOODBYE LETTER TO THE WATERS
I LEAVE THIS MEMOIR ON YOUR SLATE
I COULD NEVER ADORE ANOTHER
TWENTY SEVEN YEARS
SHALLOW POOL OF TEARS
YOU NEVER FORGET YOUR FIRST LOVER

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for The Night Gwen Stacy Died\]](#)

[The Stables, they're Marble] by NaCl

Hello my name is incitatus
and I
am a senator horse
the things I love
are
milling in the grass crossing great
lengths at great
speeds and politics the
things I love are
milling in the grass.

hello my name is incitatus
and I
am privy to a great empire
I aid in lead
ing
her to greater reaches her to
grander days.
I am a fucking horse.
Things I love are
politics.

Hello my name is incitatus
and I
am chief amongst the people and
senate of
Roma.
The things I love are powers grant
ed by man.
Things I love are milling
in the grass and
money.

The name my master gave
me is incitatus it means that I am
speedy, fast
the wealth my master gave me
is grandeur, grander than that
of millions.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for
The Stables, They're Marble\]](#)

Town Square, all round by Noah

Town square, all round

A circle within a square
like a gallon of paper matches,

A blanket puffing on the chimneys of youth.

Folks sleep in a jar with two ferris wheels,
well, this is exciting!

These boots roughened the tough acorn hook of my ankle,
and I sang;

I improvised the song of myself.

I rang frames off of windows,
my tenor filled with gravel

and for the short while that I shook the countryside,
the road chewed the flowers on its mind.

My voice!

We pick souvenirs from the river's floor,

walk like skeletons above the waterfall
wrapping our feet in red bandages.

We run from servile castles
visiting the old rubbles,
God, if it were only as simple as back then!

For now success intimidates me
being the inanimate
of a day once tramped through,

I the kind of person who flocks alone
I the notice of an inn at the end of the table;

Now this land is filled with love affairs,
clouds heavy with rain
a shivering, mercury-paste,

so much noise in the way!
so much dead meat

but chew patiently,
roll the rib fingers patiently
and stare at him as someone else

pick dirt up,
try to tease just one subject from his poem...

It's no use
our tread is absent from shoulders!

And breathe his deep little dream

back inside with you

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Travelling north-southwest, west-northeast

by Colin Jones

An itty-bitty toddler crouches timid inside,
peeping out to the towering world through the soulholes,
wondering where these adults go to get their certainties.
It must be a serious store somewhere,
a big shop with a humongous!
sign constructed of the strongest concretes
and the brightest!
of blazing neons brash and brimming with
brass on doorknobs and curtainrods and countertops.
Where they bought Nostalja Fer Childhud up front by the registers,
nestled next to spindly steelframe racks of Cents of Purpuss.
They amble down aisles with informative stickers allocating the spaces
where you can buy Dat's Life's and Ime Responsibull's,
People Are Good,
People Urr Bad,
Rightes of Passage,
and of course there's the many flavorful colorful wonderful
O!
My!
Gawd's to choose from.
So I keep asking,
"Where is the store?"
"Huh? what do you mean?"
"The Certainty Store? Where you bought those fine Shorely's and Alwee's and Niver In My Life's,
the Th(l)s Is Horrible's and the Way I(t) Iz's?"
Itty-bitty's turning levers, pushing buttons, pulling knobs, jumping and jerking inside the mechanical
suit,
punching keys desperate pounding commands to jig the jaw just so and not jostle or jumble inside the
skull,
"Versatile verities and suitable solutions,
you people intimate its importance and I won't settle for imitations."
Tantrum pounding through the pulse now,
"I'd like to get laid the right ways,
dance using my arms properly,
enjoy my lunch breaks
and read books with simpleism."
Puzzled looks lean in,
Itty-bitty lets loose a whittled whimper,
and encrypts away awkwardly to next subject.
They already bought the newest models, the super-special ultradeluxe
Surely You're Jokings,
Eye Dunnose,
and Whuteverse.
Tongue clenched in teeth, sticking the tip out the lips in concentration
hunched over tactical texts, bus routes,
chewing on bandages and sipping soporifics,
studying roadmaps missing Compass Roses.

[\[Click here to give online criticism and feedback for Travelling north-southwest,
west-northeast\]](#)

Final notes

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