

Crab Fat Magazine

fiction poetry art interviews



ISSN: 2374-2526

Crab Fat Literary Magazine Issue 3

Copyright February 2015

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Cover: "Escape" By: Ana Prundaru

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Bedmate Status

By: L.D. Trentman

L Word posers and Budweiser ejaculations – fantasies on a stick. “Highly sexualized and always ready for a sexy adventure.” Media clowns ignorant of the grim reaper:

Lesbian Bed Death.

Tip of the precipice, nails on a chalkboard. Red-hot to lukewarm.

Sahara pussy.

At one time, your vagina was a great attraction with red lights, lips, and jazz hands. Check this shit out!

No one likes a forgotten ghost town vagina.

Tumbleweeds.

Is she sleeping with someone else? Is she going to leave you? Are you not sexy to her anymore?

Is she straight?

Three years is the equivalent to five in hetero years. Maybe seven. But you try your best. Easily wet, but obstacles in execution. Discrepancy in the celestial wavelength when she’s soaking on Venus and you’re in space. But when the stars are aligned and it’s a Tuesday, and the moon is half full, you drink her.

You are the smoldering cigarette between her lips.

She inhales you.

Now the dog is always sleeping between you so you throw a treat and run the opposite direction,

“Why did you stop?” she says on her elbows.

“The cat is staring,” you say.

Domestic bliss.

Bras slung on the doorknob. Yoga pants from yesterday.

She puts on sweatpants.

Teakettle whistles.

Is this Lesbian Bed Death?

No grim reaper, but you have reached “Bedmate Status.”

Sex is more meaningful.

You feel her.

Love notes on the coffee maker.

The dog eats the crotch out of your underwear. You are two women, one cat, one dog, books, bones, fluffy toys, and teacups.

The vibrator is always on standby.

Just in case.

You revel in the lack of space in bed. Four breathing bodies, all touching you in some way— a head on your foot, a wet nose breathing into your ear, and her arm resting on your hip.

No one told you how hard it is to be the first one to get out of bed in the morning.

Three Stages of Her

By: David Michael Joseph

I saw her by the treadmills, on the second floor, overlooking the gym. I spied from the basketball courts, watching her sprint with a sexy, long legged gate. She was a Mulatta owning a great ass, long brown and blond curly hair draped over her slender shoulders. She had big green eyes and a large round face that had a tinge of crazy gleaming in the corners. I made my way up the stairs as she finished running. While patting her face with a small towel, I greeted her with a smile and newly discovered confidence.

“Hey my name is Dave,” I sang like a stone cold playboy.

“Lisa,” She responded cool as mountain snow.

“Where you from?”

“Near San Francisco, you?”

“New Jersey.”

Lisa was friendly: much friendlier than she appeared at the front desk earlier that evening.

“What do you do down here?”

“School. I’m studying Environmental engineering.”

I was impressed but not surprised. Her diction was neutrally perfect without regional accent and she handled hundred dollar words like a 5th year scholar from Berkley.

I had to beat Dubs to the punch. We always contested for the new Y-chromosomes. She gave me her number. I played it cool as though that happened all the time. I watched her healthy thighs exit the cardio room, and then glanced through the large windows, down to the basketball court were Dubs: my 5’10 iron jawed, bronze skinned friend and smoking buddy was playing ball.

I smiled and proudly held up the small piece of paper with the digits. He shrugged apathetically while shooting a three pointer at the far basket. I imagined her among the Northern Redwoods, engineering the environment, whatever that was. Little did I know that would be the last time I saw her normal.

A week later, I called. She wasn’t very forthcoming with information, but told me she lived close.

How great it would be go over for easy sex, able to come home, and shower in my own bathroom.

During, our first conversation Lisa was drinking wine, but I received no invitation. On second call my potential new friend was heading for the night at Key Club in Hollywood with her girlfriends. That was a red flag she might be into the **Hollywood life**, which killed the illusion of a serious Engineer.

It didn’t mix well. Hollywood was the land of the pretty, stupid people. Once her mouth opened the pretty mannequins would oust her. I called once more but got the answering machine. She never called back. Getting the hint, I returned to a couple sure things, but still felt the sting of rejection.

I dismissed her and never saw her in the gym again but a year later, while walking Pacific Avenue I saw her: pregnant and disheveled. I was caught off guard at the sight of her. Life had slapped her around pretty hard.

On that hot, August afternoon; I pretended not to see her and crossed the street. Lisa was caught in her own world. I gazed at her, blocking the afternoon rays from my eye, amazed, she had done a

savage three sixty. I felt for her: in the harbor city with child and out of her gourd. I wondered if she was still in school. I wondered who the father was. I wonder what guy sang the right words in her ear. Maybe it was the night I called, while she was drinking wine waiting for a friend.

In the harbor city it wasn't uncommon to see lonely women and their children strolling the streets, the mothers crazed: yelling in phones, threatening, crying, and begging. At that moment all the memories seemed to run through my head like a collage of feminine insanity. I turned away disappointed, feeling the struggle radiating from her bloated body. I continued up the street and forgot about her.

I didn't see her again until a year later, marching below Pacific on my way to the Sixth Street coffeehouse to work on a screenplay. I'd become a caged beast in the harbor city and the only escape was at the ends of my fingertips. It was the early evening and the rough neighborhood below Pacific Ave was oddly quiet. I was stuck in my own mental misery: dreaming of a future, cursing a horrible past that kept creeping up on me.

I heard strange mumbling behind me, as if someone was having a conversation. I turned and noticed her, looking to the left having a full-blown talk with the empty space. I recognized Lisa right away. Her eyes bugged out their sockets as if the words had reached a fever pitch.

Another victim of the harbor demons, the same ones that's made people jump off the cliffs at Point Fermin: the same ones that made the homeless scream at the beach: the same ones that ask to be fed alcohol and drugs at the local bars. I let her pass. To the Engineer I was the invisible and her friend real. She headed down the street to Harbor Avenue where all the crazies stayed in a: six floor, pink building, which served as some sort of asylum. I saw her a few more times, wandering the streets while talking out loud.

How does a once pretty girl fall into such madness? Was she already halfway there and the city pushed her the rest of the way?

The questions attacked my mind. It was a complex conundrum: to watch a fully functioning, intelligent person's mind cascade to the street as the devil took down the for sale sign.

What happened to the baby? What happened to school? What happened to her?

The stories that my brain invented were horrible and I prayed fiction.

This fucking place reeled them in and destroyed them all.

She wouldn't be the first nor last to fall victim to those streets. I'd seen a few go through the triple stage metamorphosis: The Saint, Lucky, and Dave the Sailor. First the normal stage: normal as any average person or an average person pretended to be. Paying

taxes. Watching Dodger games.
Dollars Tacos enjoyed on Taco
Tuesday. The second stage:
something odd starts to
happen. There is a slight
unfolding. Talking to
themselves: Wild stares:
Manic movement. The breaking
begins only they can't see
it. Stage three they lose
their freaking mind. The
brain snaps and they are on
another planet as king or a
god yelling orders at a race
of small orange people. The
triple stage breakdown was a
common dress rehearsal for
the final act. Which was to
be found dead in a dark cold
alley by people digging for
cans in the trash.

One evening
Dubs brought her up out of
nowhere during a 420 session.
"I saw that girl walking the
streets. Remember the one
from the Y?"

"Yeah man. She was pregnant. I
saw her last year with a
giant tummy!"

He took a hard drag of the
ceramic pipe and passed it.

"That's fucked up man. What
do you think happened to the
baby?"

Dread and grief seized my soul,
"I don't know."

Puff
inhale
ssap

Cherry Bar

By: Kyle Hemmings



PHOTOGRAPHY

Scene of the Crime II

By: Kyle Hemmings



PHOTOGRAPHY

The Life Sense

By: Tiara DeGuzman

I work as a greeter in a specialty fragrance store on Seeker Street. That's how I know his chest is covered in cologne from the Kerrigan Green line. I remember my lines, even now; especially now, as my nose is buried into his spicy-sweet neck hairs.

"If you want a smell that is refreshing and supple, with just a hint of spice; you want Kerrigan Green's new cologne, sir. Would you like to test it out on one of our recycled testing strips?"

I remember the reactions. Usually, the once interested customer would say no. I blame this on my lack-luster salesman skills and the hawkish eyes of the store owner, Mr. Thornton, who would follow me around the store shamelessly, intimidating me around every corner. Now that I look back on it, I think I was partly intimidated by Mr. Thornton because he reminded me of the priests at my old, Catholic school. He was a constant watcher, in the same way I imagine God would be. "His eye is on the sparrow..."

There were rare occasions when I would make a sale to an awkward man just getting off work around two pm on a Wednesday afternoon in a slightly disheveled suit. He would buy the cologne hoping, I was sure, that the label would prove correct; that he would indeed become "more seductive and enrapturing to the opposite sex." These customers would request brown paper bags instead of the plastic, multicolored satchels usually given to unashamed female customers.

As the figure towered over me, I wondered, did I send him home with a brown paper bag- The man who was now on top of me, the one whose chest was leaking Kerrigan Green? I wondered how it was possible, how he could smell both spicy and sweet.

How he could almost smell like memories.

I wonder if anyone can have as many memories as I have. I have memories like wildfire, the kind that sound like flying saucers thrown at brick walls, exploding like the experiment-filled bottles in my sophomore chemistry class. As Kerrigan Green pummels me below my waist, it is as if my senses are heightened, and time is quickly slowing down. I can hear a lost dog barking in the distance, his guttural sounds coming to me in the pungent breeze, entering my ears a second too late. Quickly, I can tell that something is wrong. My limbs refuse to move.

I once watched a movie on television where these aliens held a woman completely immobile in strong, elastic goo. The kind of goo that surrounds me now, permeating my flesh almost painfully.

I want to shout "It's okay. I'm basically dead. You don't have to be so rough with me." But, my throat won't work. Actually, I'm sure it no longer exists at all—like the rest of me at this moment, at most moments.

Sometimes I feel like a creature-deformed. Though people call me pretty, I say thank you and mechanically slap their shoulder, in a way that I hope is authentic. Later, I will whisper "If they only knew" in the darkness of my room, while trying to block out the steadily rising voices of my parents next door...or will I try to block out the silence of the house which gathers around me like a tornado wind, filled with nothing but wind, but deadly all the same.

I'm not sure if it is the imagined wind or if it is my will, but the feeling is beginning to crawl back into my body. Though my mind is quickly going blank, I try to scream with my fingers.

But, why do I have the urge to scream? I wanted this. I wanted Kerrigan Green all over me. That's why I dressed like this, leaving the house only after curling my hair in big wavy loops, after smearing mascara and lip gloss all over my face, after walking self-consciously down the street trying to simultaneously pull my tube top up and keep my skirt down. I wanted this. That's why I walked on this lone road so late at night, not particularly headed anywhere, just strolling in a bad neighborhood looking at the stars. I realize, he isn't to blame. Sincerely and truly, it's me. I have always felt like this.

I open my mouth to tell him so, but I choke on the air; the mixture of spice and grime close my throat making me unable to see, unable to hear, unable to taste, unable to smell-

What is the last one? Fuck. In second grade, we went over the senses. There were five, not six like the movie said. The nun called me up in class and when I forgot the last sense she slapped my hand with the ruler to remind me. "Do you feel that?" she asked. I could barely see over her round stomach covered in deep, black-blue cloth. I nodded my head; not bothering to mention it wasn't true. I have always had a problem with feeling, since I was young. It seemed whenever I did it, my eyes would fill with shame or my hands would ball so hard it hurt or an uncomfortable feeling would rise in my stomach which was sinful, my parents informed me.

"Please say something," the once-frustrated social worker said, divided from me by her big, brown desk. When I tried to speak my throat closed up. I blame it on myself and the heavy air.

Tonight, it is the heavy body.

My mouth can barely curve itself into a whimper. I am in an alleyway with a man on top of me; does he know he pounds at a vessel? Does he know he pounds at flesh?

Beat.

Kerrigan Green stops mid-pump as I am mid-thought. He looks down at me, as if

realizing I am there. A deep slant of shadow cuts across his face, making him appear like a crescent moon. He looks slightly familiar, and I feel as though I have passed him in a grocery store, or seen him jogging by my apartment- some type of Joe Schmoe. Some type of Regular Bob. Perhaps he was even one of the customers, a member of the brown paper bag brigade.

As I stare up at him, his face slowly morphed into an expression of uncomfortable softness. He realized quickly how strange the facial expression was and I nearly laughed; he was like a monkey coming to the slow, inevitable realization of humanity.

Kerrigan Green closed my legs then, slowly and painfully, like roller coaster handle bars, not even bothering to finish the ride. The air changed as he stood up, towering over me still half shadow- half man, unreal. His left knee bent, first in my direction, then in the other, the bustle of the street. He ran, limping on one leg, I noticed. I thought of Pinocchio realizing he was a real boy. I expected him to click his heels together. Why didn't he click his heels together?

Beat.

With each step toward the noise of the streets, the alley seemed to get brighter. I wasn't sure if it was the streetlights or if it was my mind playing tricks on me. Either way, I wanted to impress the light. I thought of the Little Drummer Boy. My mother used to play it when we were growing up. Not just around the holidays, but every day. "I have no gifts to bring. No gifts to give a king."

Why did you sing of inadequacy, Mother?

I imagined my throat as a boa constrictor forcing up its food; an offering to the light, in the hopes that it would stay. I felt it rise, crawling out from the deepest recesses of myself like a thousand ants burning and pressing through my lips, though I tried, for some strange reason, to keep them down. I tried to keep them down...but a piece of me begged to bring them up. A little girl cried and this time, I couldn't leave her be.

I screamed, it seemed, for the very first time.

No, it wasn't perfect. It was a little too high pitched, a lot too fearful and though I wished I could make it last forever, it only lasted a moment.

But, little girl, it was mine. It was ours, even.

I stood up on my own two feet, struggling to stand firm on the slippery concrete. I headed towards the bustling lights. Voices surrounded me speaking of seemingly mundane things- Chinese takeout, low test scores. As I walked out of the alley, I couldn't understand why my pants were unzipped, why my belt stayed firm around my waist- how everything was just the perfect amount of fucked up.

Cartwheels

By: Michael Howard

and we're around the fire which is blazing like mad to the point where we can't sit too close and the spirits are flowing in quantities that make us act the way we are right now which is loutish and maybe slightly lacking in discretion and Johnny is telling a story about the last chick he fucked in the bathroom at the park down the road from Casey's house and the sparks from the pit are falling just short of my feet and my face is hot and Erin has her hand in my pocket while the other controls her beer and she smells like strawberries tonight which must be a sort of aphrodisiac because I'm feeling it below the waistline and have been ever since she sat down and Johnny says that this one couldn't give decent head if her lunch depended on it and he says this because she was apparently pretty fat and we all laugh at that and more lids get snapped from beers and hit the grass noiselessly and I saw a couple little white pills which I'm guessing are speed go around a minute ago and I'm thinking that I'd like to get one in me before they're all gone so I look at Mark and give him the eye and a little wink and a little nod and he smirks and motions with his head to Andy who's still listening to Johnny wide-eyed with a big grin on his face showing his teeth and Erin scoots a little closer and wetly whispers in my ear something that's hard to ignore but I'm bent on getting one of those jelly babies so I tell her to hold off and finish her beer first and she sighs and kind of groans and I'm able to make eye contact with Andy who knows from the look on my face what I'm after and he nods and gives me the finger in the air which is the code and while Johnny goes on about the sour blowjob Andy stands up and slinks away from the fire into the shadows and much to Erin's dismay and possibly at the cost of sex later I follow him and we convene by the pool the sort of green lighting of which illuminating the ripples makes me want to jump in and start doing laps but it's too cold out and Andy pulls from his pocket a little plastic baggy with the stuff I want inside of it and smiling I pass him a wrinkled five and he passes me three of the hearts and I ask him what are they and he says a name that's alien to me and I pop one and put the others in my pocket for safekeeping and he says pleasure doing business with you and then asks if I'm going to fuck Erin tonight and I tell him that it's highly probable and he reminds me that the house is empty and that I'm welcome to his parents' bedroom and I tell him I appreciate it and then we both walk back over to the fire and rejoin all the others and I'm already feeling kind of spun from that pill and I have an urge to do cartwheels so I do a couple near the fire and people laugh and Erin knows what I stepped out for

but she's being a good sport tonight because when I sit back down panting she puts her hand back in my pocket and I'll definitely be fucking her tonight and I'm wondering now whether the shit I took will heighten my orgasm and I'm suddenly tempted to drop one into Erin's beer when she's not looking but I don't because I don't want to waste one and Bryan comes back with Amber and they bought more booze and I ask did you get anything good and he pulls from the bag a bottle of Jack and I tell him pour me a cup and while he does this Erin takes her hand from my pocket and lights a Marlboro and she looks really fucking sexy when she exhales the smoke and I finish my Jack pretty fast and now Johnny who must've taken what I did is running around shouting and zigzagging through all the chairs and I laugh clownishly because I'm high and drunk and Tyler saying that's how I roll chucks his empty beer bottle into the woods and Amber bought some aerosol bug spray when she and Bryan were out and she's spraying it around her chair and I say don't get that shit near me it smells and Johnny steals the spray can from her and starts coming after me with it and spraying it all over and everyone's laughing and I'm telling him he's dead and trying to guard my face and after a minute I manage to wrest the can from his grip and I push him away and pitch the thing in the fire and
and *ntba fukblo yfck* ... *o hm ygdombta ha ppen d te* ... br ihgt explosedI m yhead
catn se anyth ign formnitue ...

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onJohnnyto pu tout th e

flames

A Poem for Silvia Sanza

By: Jason Walter

(4/5/13)

I walked into work and was forced to make art with little kids.
The theme was “Black History Month.”
Ever since I heard Karen Gordon’s cover of “So What” at the Morris Museum (also while I was working btw), I’ve had Miles on my mind.
He was the first work of art I did that day.
“Speech to the Young, Speech to the Progress Toward” was the second.
In my Miles Davis’ piece, I had misspelled the word “celebrate” in “Black History Month,” but I didn’t realize it until I posted both on Facebook that same day (I had forgotten the “b.” Whoops!)

You jokingly said you wanted it, so I said I’d give it to you.
My art, writing, and music aren’t mine. They all belong to something else.
Nevertheless, we worked out a trade.
I got a copy of your novel “Alex Wants to Call it Love” in my mailbox, and a small 2D Miles Davis showed up in yours.

It’s the stories that we remember about the past because the bleak emptiness is devoid of plot.
Memories are just panels. Life is a billion images, and Borges and Gershwin are hanging out right now in a landscape painting.

Backstory: this needs one of those backstories like they have in the movies.

New York City is your muse. Scenery can be characters too.
The trees are just as important to the marriages and deaths as the tragic hero’s arrogance is.
GM is our mutual friend. You “liked” my collaged comic of “Holes” and we’ve been friends ever since.
Boundaries don’t make sense to me because: SpirituAlNAzisandmonkhate

A few months ago, right before I started teaching this semester, I read “Please Kill Me” at Burger King by myself for a couple of hours, which is a little kid’s equivalent of being a viking.
In the meantime, kids make comic books and punk rock records.
When Fiarette goes to Burger King in “Alex Wants to Call it Love,” it fucking tripped me OUT.
Parallel universe and whatnot.
You SAW The New York Dolls and wrote about Burger King while I read about them, listened to their songs in my head, and ate that jazz up.
That’s comparable, right?

I told you about Heather and you told me about Roger.
Humans grow through our shared experiences.
Forget the ego, let’s go _____.
I’ve gotten all convoluted again; it’s time to tell you the final scene.

We'll come back for Indian Summer
We'll come back for Indian Summer
We'll come back for Indian Summer
And go our separate ways.

Heather and I are gonna' start a band where I just play drums and she just sings. I'm gonna' make four or five EPs/records this summer.
The Summer of Droomb
I wanted to call our new band "Beat Crappening," but she vetoed the idea.
I can't wait to see the album cover she makes for it.

Make records and don't die.
They got the cover art, the songs got words in 'em, and they got these pretty little noises you can listen to on your gramophone.

The very last thing I did on this extremely epic, pretentious hippie indie punk slop night:
I read some more of your novel on the john.

The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Alex dead.

I seriously couldn't believe it. It's been less than two days, and I miss him, so I'm bringing him back:

Alex goes home. Alex smokes a joke. He watches "Late Night" for a while. He thinks of a song lyric but gets distracted with memories of his father, so he goes and changes his shirt. He listens to an obscure Honduran band called "Siete Ocho Pollo" cover "Day Tripper," and then, he goes to bed with a little bit of a swag headache.

He wakes up the next day, and Fiarette takes him back.

Forrest Bay Area Figurative Revisited

By: Allen Forrest



Rainy Day Woman

By: Allyson Coughlin

Sometimes, you are an interesting person. You keep trying to remind yourself of that. You have things to say, stories to tell. But not today. Today you are unable, unwilling to function properly. The only activity that interests you is lying on the floor, next to the couch, dreading returning to work on Monday. You have spent all day in this horrible little place, with the windows that won't open and the crap spilling out everywhere. You are not an organized person, and in the past couple weeks, you have been even more negligent than usual. There are clothes everywhere, covering every surface, and papers and books. At least 4 abandoned beverages that you can see from here. You stare at the half empty mug of coffee to your left. There is no telling how long it has sat here. It's beginning to smell now. In the heat, the milk has curdled and risen to the top.

Stumbling slightly as you get up from the ground, you walk into the kitchen. The house is unusually silent today; your roommate is gone, god knows where. You hope she did not see you when you came in the night before. You do not quite remember exactly what state you were in, but context clues- the headache, the ruined make-up, the fact that you woke up somehow still fully clothed on the couch- suggested the night had been an eventful one. Your roommate hated you. You were messy and moody, and you walked around without a bra on whenever her boyfriend stayed over, smiling sweetly at him as he tried to avert his eyes. Her being absent all day was a blessing, but still, the house felt strangely empty without her. You almost miss her.

It is so humid and the room is stifling. It is one of those weird spring days where the temperature, without reason or forewarning, has jumped to 70 degrees, and you are not

equipped to handle the change. It is impossible to do anything under these conditions. You need to get outside, get some air. You need to leave this place before it suffocates you completely, so you go outside, but it is no better. It is still humid here, still wet. It is one of those days where everything just seems slightly damp: one of those days that promises rain then refuses to deliver. As you walk down the street, your shirt clings to your skin, sticky with sweat. You are a person walking without a destination. You are restless and there is no place to go, and walking more seems like the only option. There is nothing to look forward to anymore, it seems. There is nothing you need and no one you want to see. The day seems unbearably long and your life seems incredibly pointless.

For reasons that remain unclear, you decide to keep walking, all the way downtown. As you pass by the Starbucks on George St, you see David in the window, staring out at nothing. Although you weren't expecting to see him, his presence seems inevitable. He notices you as well, and from his seat gives a nod of recognition. You nod back, then walk inside and sit down on the seat next to him.

"Have you ever wondered what it must feel like to get struck by lightning?" he asks. He does not bother with a greeting and neither do you.

"Honestly no, I have not," you respond. "In fact I can honestly say that I have spent very little time thinking about people struck by lightning at all."

"And why not?" he asks, "Don't you think it's fascinating? I love lightning. I think it's the most beautiful thing in nature."

"It's definitely pretty," you respond. Immediately you feel like an idiot. You like to consider yourself a person who is good with words, but you are unable to find any adjective to use other than "pretty."

Fortunately for you, David does not seem to mind, or even notice.

“It is pretty. It reminds me of the summer. Summer storms, you know? I feel like there is only lightening in the summertime- you never see it this time of year. I wonder what the science behind that is.”

This time you decide to make just an affirmative sounding noise. He does not really care about your response anyway; it was a rhetorical question. It is becoming abundantly clear that this is a one sided conversation, especially as he stares past you out the window and into the cloudy sky. It is still not quite raining, and there aren't many people out. Every once and a while a few drops will fall down, as if from a leaky faucet in the sky, but true rain refuses to come.

“So,” David says, turning to you suddenly as though the conversation had never paused to begin with. “You have fun last night? I saw you all walking home, but I doubt you remember. You seemed pretty much gone.”

“Yeah,” you respond, trying to sound nonchalant. “It was alright. I was kinda pissed, and for some reason I thought that drinking as much as possible would help.”

“Dubious logic,” he says. He does not elaborate, but the look he gives you is telling. You do not meet his gaze.

“So did it work? Are you feeling better?”

You just shrug. He is being condescending and you are not in the mood to be judged, least of all by him. “Not really. I was a bit hungover this morning, and still basically feel like shit. The weather isn't helping any either.”

With this you both turn to look out the window once again.

“I hope it rains,” he says wistfully.

“Me too.”

“I hate the anticipation, you know? Like if its gonna rain, just start raining all ready.” He says this almost angrily, as if he's annoyed at the weather for being a tease.

“I hate the spring,” you say. It's an attempt to be supportive.

“It's alright,” he sighs, “not my favorite.” There is another pause as he just sits there, staring at his left hand.

“God I'm so fucking high,” he says at last.

“No yeah, I figured.”

“I've been sitting here for like an hour. I don't even know why.”

“You're an idiot.”

“I know” he says, and he smirks at you. “But here you are, talking to me anyway.”

“Let's go” you say, getting tired of this conversation. “It's too crowded in here.”

At this statement he just nods, and begins to make motions to put on his coat. As the two of you begin to leave, you notice the other people sitting around you look relieved. As you walk out, David stops to grab a handful of napkins and Splenda packets from the table in front. An older man sitting by the window looks at him disapprovingly, but does not say anything, and no one else seems to notice. You walk outside together, not really saying anything, both lost in your own thoughts. Mindlessly you both wander back in the direction of the park, away from your house. Twice David stops walking and turns to you, as though he is going to speak, but each time he stops himself, and then continues walking. As you walk, you think about things. You think about your laundry, and all of the work you still have to do before tomorrow. You think about poverty in India and where you left your phone. You think that David looks good, his skin almost golden in the dimming light, his curly hair cropped short. You don't know what he is thinking about. Possibly lightning.

“Shit.” David says, stopping suddenly to your left. “What time is it?”

“Ughhh...” You stall, realizing you have no idea. You misplaced your watch two weeks ago, and haven't really bothered to look for it since. Normally you just use your phone for the time, but it has been dead all day.

“like 3?” you guess, hopeful.

“Nah,” he says, looking around with concern. “It’s already getting dark out. It has to be at least past 4. Shit.”

“You have someplace to be?”

“Yeaah... sort of. I told Ray I would stop by, ya know, pick up some stuff for him. He said to come before 5, cause he had someplace to be. Come on, let’s go” he says, quickly turning to cross the street.

“Yeah, fuck that.” you say with a snort, but you find yourself following anyways. You have no interest in visiting Ray. His weed is shitty, he has a weird cat that freaks you out, and he reminds you of times you would rather forget. Plus his house is disgusting, even by New Brunswick standards, with mold growing on the walls and random junk everywhere. You are thinking all this but not saying it, just following David as he cuts across the intersection, ignoring the honks behind you. He has not even turned around to see if you are following, and you realize your presence here is mostly irrelevant to him. You are tagging along because you have truly nothing else to do, and nowhere else to be. You are tagging along because your house is hot and empty, and at this point almost anything seems better than being alone with your thoughts.

The two of you cut across Easton and go down Delafield, towards Dix St. David strolling along in his usual way, you quietly following. New Brunswick at this time of day, on a Sunday, looks more depressing than usual in the quickly dimming light. In the college section of the city, streets are mostly empty, and the houses all look worn and dirty, as if they are drooping right before your very eyes. All the sidewalks are filled with garbage-fast food bags, empty beer cans, a seemingly impossible amount of cigarette butts. As you turn onto Dix, you witness a stray cat gingerly step around a shattered bottle on the pavement, and wonder why the fuck you have chosen to live in this place.

“I’m thinking of moving” David says conversationally, as if reading your mind.

“Down south or something, where the cost of living is cheaper. Get out of Jersey for a bit.”

“Fuck the south.” you say, sounding crankier than you perhaps intended. “Its racist. And humid. And the bagels are shitty.”

David laughs. “Who cares about bagels? You can drink cheap beer and have barbeque every day. That’s your problem, you know.”

“What? I don’t eat enough barbeque?”

“You’re such a Jersey girl, to the core, even if you’re fucking miserable here. Fuck bagels! Get out of here for a bit, see America or something. You got a car. Take a drive or something. There’s nothing here so great that you couldn’t live without it for a little while.”

The two of you reach Ray’s, and David bounds up the stairs to knock on the door while you try to formulate a response. Although his tone was casual, the accusation hurt, more than you would have expected it to.

“I know.” you say, as the sound of footsteps from inside the house becomes increasing loud. “But I can’t leave right now, just like that. I have no money. I don’t even think I know anyone who lives outside of the New York Metro.”

David shrugs, and the door opens to Ray, effectively ending the conversation.

“Yo, it’s my favorite Mexican.” he says by way of greeting, motioning you both inside. “Dave, I thought you weren’t coming man.”

“Yeah sorry, got held up. Ran into this bitch. You know how it is.”

Ray laughs at this as he flops onto the couch- his normal position. He says nothing to you, but smirks in your general direction.

Turning back to David, he asks “So what you need man? I gotta leave for work in like 10 minutes, so we gotta move this along.”

“Ummm... give me like a dime. I’ll hit you up again when I get my check Friday.”

“Really? I waited all day so you could buy a dime?” Ray opens his bag to open up his bags. “How ‘bout you, you need anything?” he says, gesturing towards you with his head, not looking up.

“Nah, I’m alright.”

He laughs again, still not looking up at you. This time the laugh is shorter, more bitter.

“What, you’re too good for it all the sudden?”

“Nah, your weeds just shitty,” you say, trying to keep your voice neutral. Fuck Ray. It’s becoming increasingly clear that coming here was a mistake.

“Yeah, you’re all about high quality product, right? That’s why you spent last Friday downing High Life and then sucking my dick in the basement. Cause you’re a high class chick.”

“What, are you fucking her again now?” he says, turning to David. “Don’t bother man, I can promise you it’s nothing special.”

“Oh, shut the fuck up,” you say, abandoning the pretense of calmness “Don’t lash out at me ‘cause you’re a shitty drug dealer and no one will fuck you.”

You turn to look at David, but he won’t meet your eye, is just staring at the TV in the corner as though suddenly deeply interested in college football. Confrontation has never been his thing, but that knowledge doesn’t make you feel any better.

“Yeah, I’m out. This looks like a fucking crack house, by the way.”

With that you storm off, kicking an empty pizza box along the way. Ray is yelling something, but you ignore it- listening will just make you want to respond, and that won’t help any. You are not sure why you’re so mad, not really. Yeah it was rude, but Ray is a fuck-you’ve never cared about his opinion before. David not backing you had stung a bit, but honestly that should have been expected. He hated confrontation, and in general never made it a habit to care that much about the feelings that weren’t his own. Still, the two of you had been together, at least for a little while. You liked to think he liked you at least a little bit- you liked to think in some way, you were still friends.

You wander down the sidewalk and wonder why you put up with these people, why they are your friends, growing more

depressed than angry with every step. The wind has started to pick up more, and you begin to rush, realizing if you don’t move quickly you’ll be caught in the storm. You quickly make it Easton, but as you stop to cross, you notice David a few blocks behind, waving his arms as he jogs along towards you.

“Hold up!” he says, almost out of breath. You know you should keep moving, but you wait instead, standing next to the curb with your hands on your hips and your lips pursed. You might get annoyed, play at being angry, but in the end it means nothing. If he calls you will wait, no matter how mad you might claim to be, and you both know it. As he gets closer to you the jog turns into a trot, and finally he stops, putting his hand on your shoulder in a gesture that you suppose is meant to be friendly.

“Look, sorry ‘bout that. He’s an asshole. But there was no point in going over there for nothing, ya know? I figured I might as well stay and wait for the weed, otherwise there was no point to even going in the first place.”

You just scowl at him, and turn to cross the street. He follows you silently, in almost a complete reversal of the walk over. You don’t speak to him on the walk over, but you don’t tell him to leave either.

When you are about a block away from your house, it begins to rain. There is just a drizzle at first, but by the time you get to the porch, the sky breaks open in a downpour. David turns to you beaming,

“Yes! At last!” He turns to you. “Do you feel better now?”

You give a half smile back, almost against your will; the anger has gone as quickly as it came. You want to stay mad at him, but the truth is if you spent the whole day angry every time someone implied you were a whore, you would never have time to do anything else. And David was David. He was never going to come rushing to your defense. He wasn’t a good friend but he wasn’t a terrible one, and walking with him had been better than doing nothing at all.

“A bit I guess. Where you goin’ now?”

“Ha! You spoke. I knew you would. And I dunno, I was gonna go home, but leaving Ray’s I realized I didn’t have my keys. It cool if I hang out here for a bit?”

For a moment you think of saying no, but your loneliness is stronger than your desire to act wronged.

“Yeah, it’s fine,” you say with a sigh. “I don’t have anything to do anyways.”

“Excellent,” he says grinning, as he holds his hands up to the sky. “I’ll smoke you up. We can listen to the rain.”

With that you let him in, and the two of you do just that. You smoke sitting on the sink, with the bathroom fan on to get rid of the smell, than the two of you just lie around on your bed next to the open window, listening to the sound of the rain hit the roof. Eventually he turns over and kisses you, and you just let him, too indifferent to care. There is nothing else to do and there is nowhere else to go, so hey, you figure, this might as well happen. He keeps going, and as he moves himself on top of you, you just lie there, letting your mind wander. You keep listening to the rain. You wonder if southern bagels are really so bad after all.

Five Distancing Habits

By: Cindy Matthews

I.

Bre smoothes the velvety fabric over your hips. You look at your reflection in the hallway mirror. A bolder colour than you usually wear. Your breasts explode from the plunging neckline. Boobs imitating cantaloupes. You wonder if you have time to razor your calves once more.

“You sure do look sexy in that dress,” says Bre. The orange butterflies of the fabric compliment the blue of your eyes. Bre offers to drive to the bar. She pretends to understand what you are because she’s a friend. You wish you could be more like her. More liberated. Open. Uninhibited. Interested.

Society puts pressure on you to mine for mates. You’ve combed the hammer aisle at the hardware store. You’ve shared strategies on how to determine the most flavourful tomatoes. You’ve straddled the wooden bench in the sauna at the fitness centre. Across from you sat rows of men, their soggy towels and overly hairy bodies not making the cut. It’s always the same. The prospects’ shirts are too tight, trousers too short, personalities’ too dull, swimsuits too revealing, skin too wet. Your urges remain uncertain.

You balance on the wooden stool at the bar and twirl a neon plastic stick in your whiskey sour.

“Over there,” Bre says. She gestures at someone across the way.

The target’s face is as round as a dinner plate and pasty-white. You don’t know which repulses you more: the rail tracks resulting from untreated acne or the sprouts of nasal hair. He’s a big fat zero.

“Really?” you ask.

There’s a mocha-skinned guy off to his right. A chin-strap of whiskers lines a strong

chin. You strain to make out the colour of a stud earring. The stool suddenly swivels so you take care to not snap off a heel. You find yourself staring. You wait for it—some kind of a reaction—a bum clench, engorgement, hardened nipples, your mound needing to be stroked. Zilch. You are nobody in a room jammed with beakers of testosterone, former virgins, freshly waxed. You consider swapping the swivel stool for plush pyjamas and your TV remote.

Bre is sucking her drink straw in a most provocative way. You smack her with your clutch purse. She slides keys along the counter and says, “I can see you’re bored. Take my car.”

A red-haired man glides and puffs at Bre’s neck. “Buy you a drink?” You don’t hear another word because you’re already half-way to the parking lot.

The next day Bre gets you on your cell phone. “Give me another chance. This one’s perfect. You’ll see.”

You don’t want to disappoint so you agree to this next arrangement. You meet her a few streets over from your place. It’s a dance studio. Bre is already there. Her foot balances on the bar, her spandexed crotch exposed to the floor-to-ceiling mirror. Beside Bre you look like a fence post, grey and stiff. A tall olive-skinned man glides behind you and takes care as he boosts your foot, holding it like it is freshly baked bread. The air fills with verbena, a cologne you associate with older Italian women.

“Meet Javier,” says Bre. The look on her face is one of total awe. When she smiles, you gasp at leftover lettuce dangling from her teeth.

The dance instructor runs his large hands along your leg like he’s checking for skin tags. He folds into your backside. You are so close to the mirror, you could lick it if you were that

way inclined. He is trying to tell you he's into you. You know if you accept his invitation for coffee, it'll end the same as always. His stiffened manhood will leave you with enduring indifference.

II.

It turns out your father is a homosexual. A pansy. A gobbler. A queer. It wasn't always this way. You remember when he still lived with your mother in the house on the hill overlooking Martin's apple orchard. You still remember when he liked that she was his lover. That is until that Saturday after work when she discovered a man puffing between his legs, damp sheets jammed between bare thighs.

Your father's sister Beth calls and says, "Your parents are breaking up. You realize why, don't you?"

You want to scream that you always knew he had this inclination. You rake fingers across your lips to prevent something nasty from escaping.

Beth says, "He could have discovered this a few years earlier. Maybe playing with yeast all these years feminized him?"

Your father's so proud to be out. A rainbow banner flutters from his place of business, the town's only bakery. He has revealed he will walk in the gay pride parade, the pageant the mayor says makes a spectacle of the gays. Will your father make you blush by letting himself hang free? You cringe at your father's updated social media status: available; interested in men.

You drop by his house and toss a bag of liquorice cigars in his lap. His favourite. "To celebrate your out-ness," you say. You know out-ness isn't really a word but can't figure out how to take it back.

He leans into the Lazy-boy recliner where he used to cuddle you and read books by Robert Munsch. You shudder. He strokes the candy like he's afraid if he puts one in his mouth, he won't stop until he empties the bag. His mouth opens and closes over and

over and nothing can make him quit this incessant talking. He wheezes as the words rush from moist lips. He fingers rake his comb-over. There's so much detail, about how he adores going for mani-pedis, has a personal shopper, and bought a new gym membership. How he's a giver, not a taker, and you blush at how little you actually know. You hope you can do something to make him stop, to bring an end to relentless sharing.

Your life is so different now. You sort of like that it is unique. There were no gay friends in your life. Until now. A father can be a friend. You are dizzy with the excitement of what is.

A few months later your phone vibrates. It's him. Your gay dad. He pants and says, "I've made a horrific mistake." And you know you have, too.

He remains in bed for weeks. He cries tears to fill a drained well. Your knocks on hollow doors lead to empty hallways. You wished you'd agreed to take the house key that day long ago when he'd offered. One day you can wait no longer so you boost yourself through an unlocked bedroom window. You find your mother there. She holds his hand, skin like a feather.

"I've been here all along," she says.

A look on her face says she doesn't know what comes next.

III.

The parishioner makes you crazy. He's there every day. For daily confession. He stands there and inspects the church's floor planks. You have to give him that. He has patience. He never makes an effort to conceal his needs. Others would be blushing. Not him. He embraces an opportunity to spend time in confessional.

You've heard this all before but he starts the same each time. "I'm seventeen. I'm supposed to be horny. What's the matter with me?" The boy's shoulder butts the booth's wall, causes a loud creak. He exhales loudly like he's inflating a condom. You can barely

make him out but you are certain of his gesture. He folds long fingers through bangs in need of a trim. And you consider carefully what to say.

You flush with the distant memory of sex. You've only been a priest a short time. You'd be a liar if you said no urges remained. You are relieved to so far have escaped their grasp.

"You're just young for your age," you say. "Still a boy of sorts."

The boy belongs to the most revered team in his high school: senior boys' rugby. The guys flaunt bare backsides while soaping in tepid showers. They tease each other for the size of their cocks. They boast conquests with girls with boobs as round as cabbages and hips that shudder. "All sluts," says the boy.

"I don't like girls," says the boy. "I'd sooner eat raw pig's liver than kiss one."

An image of Liz handcuffs your mind. It's been long since you thought of her. Her silky tongue as it probed yours. She was fourteen and you a year younger the last time you coupled. Her body nestled against yours. Her heart hammered your sternum. Your fingers tickled the downy skin along her spine. Her lips tasted of onions and cocoa. The air peppered with her vanilla body lotion. You nibbled that hollow at the base of her neck. She broke from kissing to say, "Tell me something you've never told another soul." You lifted your hands from her shoulders leaving two warm patches behind.

The air filled with trepidation. Would she understand? You say, "I want to become a priest."

There is a comfort in feeling like Liz is there with you now. A snort escapes and you are grateful for the concealment provided by your choir habit.

You decide you must arrange for the boy to visit a professional. See then if he remains repulsed.

IV.

A cabbie drops you off at the edge of a woodlot. He says, "Have a good night." He hands you a business card so he can pick you up later. You tuck his card in your front pocket next to your phone. The cabbie will hide his surprise to see you with someone later tonight.

There are solar lamps lining the pathway enroute to the bonfire in the meadow past the bush. You swat a mosquito buzzing around your ear, its proboscis probing for your blood type. You reach the party and feel dizzy at the sight of so many people already nuzzling. There's room on a picnic bench so you sit down, legs facing from the table. Someone hands you a big fat joint which you wave off. Last time you wanted to get lucky but the tokes made you crave savoury food more. You took your semi-hard boner home to an empty bed. Tonight will be different. Tonight you are looking to hook up. Maybe more than once.

Your choices are lining up. A hot dish straddles the bench rodeo-style. "I'm Brenda," she says. Musk hairspray stands her bangs straight up and you think of the movie 'Something about Mary'. You laugh out loud.

On your right is Jeff. It's an easy name to remember because your younger brother shares the same name. Your mother calls him Jeffrey. This Jeff's legs are impala-long. Curly rust-coloured hair pokes from under the creamy cargo shorts. The fabric has those burn holes like when you play around with acid. You imagine poking a tongue into the holes to see what you'll find. Jeff's so thin he appears to have given up eating altogether. You inhale the dry smoky air and realize you want to sleep with him first.

Brenda or Bonnie or whatever the hell her name rests a hand on your left thigh. Her fingers are short and the nails bitten down. Flakes of blue nail polish remain. Brenda or Bonnie or what not reminds you of kindergarten, a little kid in a too-tight pink t-shirt, a bouquet of neon balloons parading its

front. Her hand slides slowly from your thigh to your ass making your cock salute.

“Goddamned bugs,” Brenda says. A draft takes the place of her hand which swats blood-sucking buzzards. “Let’s go,” she says in your ear. She leaves the inside of your ear damp and all you want to do is go home to fresh sheets. Brenda or Bonnie or whatever stands. The fabric at the back of her white shorts drives into her butt cheeks.

Jeff shuffles his feet back and forth. He’s wearing Birkenstocks and socks, a pairing you find repugnant. You watch Brenda or Bonnie waddle off toward the portable toilets. Her table-top bum is better suited to shaking on a dance floor than straddling your awaiting loins. You’re no longer feeling it. Jeff rests a bowl of popcorn on his lap and aggressively palms the snack into his gaping mouth.

“Wonder where that joint wandered off to?” you say to mosquitoes clouding overhead.

V.

You’re a newlywed. Your husband wants kids. He’s never hidden that fact from you. When he makes moves on you, he begs to stop using protection. “Let me go bareback tonight,” he says. He can’t conceive why you make him wear a rubber when you’re on the pill.

Kids are little shits. Your sister, Grace, has twins and while they offer some limited precious moments, generally you can’t wait for them to leave so you can escape their sticky fingers, detonating voices, and greasy faces.

On this honeymoon, you want your husband as much as he wants you—you make out everywhere—on the beach, under the hammock, in the tree fort overlooking the turquoise water. You find him desirable until he brings up starting a family.

“Look over there? No, not the German in the speedo,” he says from the bamboo mat he’s perched on. You scratch an itch deep inside your arm pit. It’s day-three of the

honeymoon. “The kid with the pail of turtles. Isn’t he adorable?”

You don’t find anything cute about a kid waddling around in public with lumpy pants. The kid lifts his face to the sky and wails. After a while, the mother sets down a magazine and ambles over. She pulls the pants open and peers. Her shoulders slacken in disbelief like she’s found a lemon there. The mother glances behind her. She is unaware you eye her every move from behind your mirrored Ray-bans. When she tugs the suit from her child’s flailing body, you cringe when a mocha-coloured nugget plops to mar the perfect sand.

“Run into the sea and wash yourself. Hurry on, now,” says the mother. You swallow hard to push down bile that has found its way to your throat.

The beach is fertile. Baby parasites invade the bikinied bellies. Fetus-filled tummies like boulders left behind by the receding glacier. You want no part of this destiny.

You glance to your right where your husband sits. His legs are splayed. Between his thighs he funnels sand from one hand to the other. The smell of coconut fills the air. A gull screams for joy. You wonder if you remembered to refill your prescription.

“Look,” your husband says, pointing at an engorged uterus sprawled nearby. “A ping pong ball belly-button.” He grins like an accordion.

“Stop pointing,” you say. “What are you getting so worked up about?”

“It means she’s having a boy.”

Four tiny pink swim suits flit around the beach property. They have medicine to control these sorts of things, you think. What’s so special about the number five?

5

By: Leonard Kogan



NAIVE REALISM. OIL ON PAPER 14X10

12

By: Leonard Kogan



14X10.5 MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER

I

By: Heather Lyn

When *transgender* stopped
being a bad word, a dirty word
it became a strong word;
a word synonymous with the word
brave,
a word that meant her father had to
teach her how to shave—
a word that meant she became
he and could shop in the men's
section comfortably.
It meant living—
for the first time,
living.
It meant trial
and error
with “family” and “friends”
and those who pretend
to respect him,
but only when he
was her.
It meant hurt.
It meant loss in exchange
for growth.
It meant *hope*.

On the Rocks: A Three-Part Bisexual Hennessy

By: Susannah Betts

There exists rough sex and bruises. There exists no sex and hands that shake in fear. I am no god, I do not verdict nor indict. There exists and there exists and that is it.

Him I cared to argue with when wrong.

Her I smile and let kiss my neck.

There exists and there exists and that is it.

+++

There are two cows, Shame. Shame faces sunrise and Shame, sunset, and both their left legs growing longer than the right. Lopsided heifers, rolling downhill.

+++

Clyde Lott prays each night for the Second Coming
and inseminates special heifers in Nebraska to move the process along.

+++

The god declines to mention the reasoning.

+++

Shames cry, "foul play!"

The cow at the peak won the race and celebrates in orgasmic frenzy, the every-air-mote suspended, sucking teats tangled writhing tail touching aether's interior flexing thrumming, hoof-marked puncture wounds stabbed through oxygen-space.

Two harmonizing voices moo, discontinuous.

+++

The red heifer portends of heathen doom.

+++

His-and-hers matching towels.

Pandora's choice

There's a war between my lungs at every breath with which I let him get away.
But at the word that he calls fresh air, my mind suffocates.

there's a story in the theater and the hero kisses the girl
and everyone calls it a day.

I called in sick and lying and sick of lying
because my eyes red from crying red being high
too swollen to see the road, heart swole up to my throat
letting go.

there's a story in the book and a heterosexual couple dies in lovers' suicides
and it's a tragedy.

I get a dare to kiss the prettiest
person in the room and I choose the girl who has liked him for years

the mouth I tongued myself into wasn't afraid of fluids
wanted to taste them messy as they come

two douches at a booth giggle
trying to make your boyfriend jealous?

Girl-on-girl for the male gaze
or maybe
she and I could last the decades

monogamy—*I'll wait for you*—the promise of each girl to her sailor

post-war heartsore—the whores on shore—the college boy next door

and yet even the subtle knife, his and my goodbye,
the first drops of blood spilt don't betray the cause
whether the removing of splinter
or the driving in of stake.

And though the battle's fought and done
I can't tell who or what it was lost or won.

hunger

First so badly the cornea hangs over the cliff
and watching the kitchen lights in the house at the base.

Galaxies and wavelengths apart in the boiling pot. But not.
She is sober right now. This surprises, the way that loving without sleeping
startles the eye, seizes the righter lung, the single clenched thumb.

Lying back produces only deep breathing.

Nailed to the bedpost, the cornflake ground to dust.
Furlongs and furlough apart. The missing paycheck,
the rusting panty spot. But not.
Refusing to move furniture after the fall.
Though the sofa never belonged there.

Though wrapped in stained wine, to lay on body's side.
A waiting game to play.

The inscription still in cursive. There is no.
Patience here.
The pinch. The cusp. The ivy crawling down the well.
The cool light here that does not
shade the stretching time. She is sober here,
forgetting to care.

IMG_3211

By: Alex Smith



PHOTOGRAPHY

Magus

By: JJ Hernandez

Dust mite settling on a dead plant, early morning when the sun is starting to rise and the inside of my house looks like a filthy like an old aquarium. I reach for a dose of Lovecraft to shove into my vein and roll off the couch. Feeling thirsty, I'm convinced that the couch is alive. That it's a gigantic sponge monster that has disguised itself as my furniture so that it can slowly suck the nutrients from my skin. It's possible—I've seen weirder shit.

Out of Lovecraft, either that or the vial got lost beneath the piles of papers, the gutted entrails of hundreds of books, that I've left on my desk and haven't cleaned for the last twenty years. Have to settle for some Burroughs, The Soft Machine. Burroughs is good but for some reason I get nauseous on it as if it's swirling through my veins in little gleeful sociopathic whirlpools. Take the neon chrome diner colored syringe and stick it into my vein. (You have to be careful when shooting liquid words into your vein, I once knew a guy who overdosed on classic X-men comics. They say that it got so bad that his blood cells started arranging themselves into overly-declarative sentences.) Pure liquid Soft Machine hits me in the gut first and then moves into my sinuses where it feels like it's shitting on my mind.

Wordhangover now! Deathgod scorpions blaring in my ear drums, impossible movie people flickering and madness screaming in places in my head that I never knew existed.

Knock on the door. Stumble toward the door, the perspective begins to dilate, reality flushed down the toilet. Somehow I make it, lights splaying from my projector eyes across the walls; 5-D mind pictures reaching out from my irises.

Joey's at the door. Standing in neon t-shirt pop culture reject cyborg arm grunge kid with incredible hair. Post-post-post-post-modern word junky Joey is/will be. (Time speeding up and slowing down at the same time like Vertigo, only with timescapes, not with staircases)

"What do you want Joey?" (I know what Joey wants: thinks that I have liquid words for him think that I can make some focusing so hard-on

the story until it becomes solid and flows out of my sinuses. (Which is how it happens, you know (Only some motherfuckers can't do it, because they don't have the Mojo like I do. (Mojo's the magic stuff, the mucus of the gods that makes space-time your plaything.)))

Joey looks at me the way a dog (or a hooker) looks when they piss on the floor. 'I made the mess/forgive me/ clean it up/ aren't I pathetic/give me pity/ give me love,' or, in the case of the hooker, money.

Joey says, "Do you have any more liquid? I need some man, I have this story I've got to write and if I can get some Whitman in my system I know I can hit it out of the park."

Frown at him (mini crab people fucking in front of my eyes), "I don't have any Whitman Joey, come back Friday and I can set you up."

The kid stops me from closing the door, damn he's persistent, "Listen man, there's a deadline. Can you get it to me by tomorrow?" The kid's grabbing onto my arm. I can smell Hemmingway on his breath. Eyes dilated, words floating lazily in his irises. Kid is becoming word, soon his spine will reject him and he will have to get one of those exoskeleton jobs. Poor bastard will probably end up looking like a crippled lobster.

I push the kid aside and close the door. "Listen, kid I can make it Thursday, but that's the earliest."

I slam the door on the kid before he can make protest further. Goddamn word junkies, just because I can mix the shit they think that I can do it in days. I'm not as young as I used to be. About to sit down then there's another knock on the door. The opposite of rose tinting my world.

Opening the porcelain colored door. Smell of death floats in through the crack. I'm about to say something when Kadguhnrzsk, the corpse god walks into my apartment and picks me up by the lapels of my brain-colored suit.

Corpse god, a massive hulking creature of fur and rotting, bleeding flesh. Glassy eyes in his deer head look at me, feathers dropping from his arms.

His talons rip into my suit (the bastard). Steam rises from his breath, he smells like rotting flesh and tears.

Kadguhnrsk, "You% t&ime to pay (piper^piper). Crillmes agi#&anst humanity <I> Si@ck FuCK <I> wil #gut/#eat your brai^n for &all time!!^"

Dumbass has been away for so long that he's forgotten to how to talk here in the third dimension.

Me, "What the hell are you talking about?! I didn't promise you I'd make any goddamn payment!"

The corpsegod pauses and looks at me with his cataract eyes, a fly lands on one of the lidless eyeball and begins to suck. Confused, the corpsegod frowns, "N~o. <It> was the#younger< you in <the>: third^dimensional% fleshisin&distuingishable."

He drops me and I fall on some Treasure Island.

The corpsegod points at the clock, "Behold: The t\$ime is also*dissimilar& We(this unit) has emer^ged from the ti\$mescape at the ~wrong point@"

The bastard vanished, leaving a bad smell. Which might have been me. Ultraconfusion now. Younger me? Crimes against humanity? (My word hangover was officially run for the border without packing its bags.) Which does seem like something I would have done back in the day. I wipe Treasure Island off my pants when the doorbell cries again.

Like grand central station in here I swear.

Open the door into a mirror. My young self stared back at me all charisma and piss and vinegar. Ray-bans and burgundy suit. nitro bullet cool. Cocky little shit grins big I'm-going to tear-up-the-world smile and looks back at me. "HA. I hope I die before I get old. How 'bout you and I take a walk and I'll explain everything while we still have time." (Looks at his watch, date with the grim reaper.)

"Sure." I say, and we walk down the technocyberpunk streets together.

Dull beat blasting sounding like giant metal heartbeat sound leaking from a club on our left. We are replacing mother the sock doll (got boring) wire became fetish, Oedipal. Deconstructed (looking back) so much that the music

degenerated to the most basic sound of life, the heartbeat.

(This is purely a human-centric perspective. For example, cockroaches do not have hearts. Write a six-page essay describing techno from a cockroach's perspective. This will be thirty percent of your grade)

Other me (I?) is talking as we make our way through the pedestrians/pedophiles that clutter up the street like used condoms. Contraceptive pains. Cyborg kind of people who absorb stories through helmets built into their skulls. Metal robot cosplaying fan boys texting out fanfic while they try not to get run over by grayhoundbuses. (None of these are real words you'll notice.) Nude supermodels with grand stick bug legs, their hair scraping the stratosphere. Long legs stepping over buildings like Wells' invaders. Young girl, somewhere between nine and twenty shuffling through street, her spine retreating out of her body like a drunk spidersnake, the whole left side of her head a robot cyborg face smoke steam puffing out for her ears (for you!) steampunk brain workings.

"The past is invading the future," My younger self explains. "The mass consciousness is working to pull the past into the future, even though they don't know it. Soon there will be no time, only the cyborg people and their past. The first man-monkey jerked off at the beginning of the credits will be your next door neighbor."

Y-Self (I'm so trendy) looks smug. Me: "Yeah, I caught the reference you little shit."

Paperback porn stories form blue puddles at our feet. The dogs try to drink the water and then collapse in orgasmic writhing. ("Don't drink the water") We pass old Edwardian Buildings. Victorian women look out at us from the windows and the children, early millennials from the video for Fat Lip take the opportunity to moon us. TV-headed hobos lay unplugged in the alleyway. Rank smell of booze.

Y-self continues with self-riotous monologue, hands in his pockets all swagger. ("I want you to play one of my songs") Some people are mostly water, I was mostly bullshit. "Rushkoff was partially right. We are connecting together through tech. But we aren't forming a living thing we're forming a time machine. Or to be more specific, we are forming the ultimate time machine. Paradox is not an issue because we are deteriorating time all together (now). Like a cracker in milk."

I can't help but thinking of spunk when he mentioned milk and it takes me a while to get through the Freudian imagery to the root meaning. Me-self: "But that should take years. How will it happen in a couple of decades?"

Bastard laughs. Scottie dog nips at our heels. I look back and I can see all the past me's walking behind us like a procession of afterimages slow-mo sand (that is, grainy) copies floating in the air. Slow Dancing disco, VERY. Brain realization now.

All time is becoming one time. #apocalypse. Y-self points to a building in the distance. A Gigantic dome structure reaching out from the collage landscape that our city has become. Black reflective surface dome looks like a gigantic black pearl. (It does not exude white smoke before the third act) This is the processor for the whole city. The great computer brain that links all of the cyborg people.

"I infected it with my MOJO, man. It made the machine think in four dimensions forever becoming increasingly complex. Fractals. Thousands of years of progression in a single night."

I don't say anything. There's no wind anymore. And the people on the street have stopped moving. Without time there can be no change everything will be stagnant.

"Well?" Y-self pestered me. "Aren't you going to say anything?"

I look at him and I can see myself reflected in his mirrored oh-so-cool shades. I look sad. This is how it ends, yeah? The world reaching into the fourth dimension, the universe becoming an unchanging crystal staring forever at its own ass. Not by a long shot.

"Two things." I say slowly, my voice is raspy from forty years of cigarettes. "One, why?"

Little shit Y-self laughs. "Why? Because there is no need to change anymore, the world has already grown up man. It is time. This is as good as it's going to get. Quit while we're ahead."

We're on top of abusively tall building. He must have bent space to get us here. The city looks like that mixed media shit storm. Dark and sad and stupid. *Piss-ennui* now.

Y-self continues, "Look at us man. You used to be the Magus man. Remember the adventures we used to have? I used to have? Remember Brazil? And the Trideptyldons? What the fuck happened to you?"

M-Self: "I got old."

Y-self spat at me. He walked on the edge of the building like a cool cat Fred Astaire, cat in both meanings of the word.

"Bullshit. You got the same disease that these fuckers got. Nostalgitis dermatitis. Looking back into the past. You brought me here."

He laughed and tossed his arms to the sky. Like Jesus, or Gene Wilder. Same difference. He screams into the early morning.

"Quantum shit eating in reverse!"

"Now it's the end. Only looking backward, talking backward for all forever because now everything is for forever."

Y-self laughs over the city scape. I can smell Gulliver's Travels and Twilight on the breeze, wafting up from the ground below. The gigantic dome stands in front of us. It starts to glow. Cracks appear in its surface, Day-Glo light rips out of the wounds on the black skin.

Y-self stops. His face falls and his arms fall down, pointing at the ground. "What?"

M-self isn't happy, I'm disappointed. "Second thing. The corpsegod visited me this morning. My guess is that your MOJO overloaded the circuits. The thing's going to blow, tearing through the hemisphere like a nuclear tornado."

Day-Glo light is almost over whelming now. The Roman architecture starts to vanish. Everything that the light cuts through vanishes, leaving nothing. Pure streams of nothing cut into the air. Colorful destructive beams of light burst from the black sphere like fireworks.

I walk up to my Y-self and grab him by the lapels of his jacket. His shades fall down thousands of feet. Never felt more alive, I can hear them hit the pavement. I can hear everything, smell everything. *Magustime* now.

Y-self is confused, "What are you doing? Let me down let me down." (*Spoiled brat*)

M-self: "I'm not letting you get away, kid. It's time for a fresh start."

Little psycho screams and Mojo shoots out of his eyes and bounces off my skin.

"I learned how to turn my skin into organic diamond five years ago. That was after your time."

I reach out and grab the bastard's neck. Skin burns to my touch. Using more Mojo than I have in years. The skin burns off younger me's skin and I drop the body. Crouching over the skeleton I punch a hole in its (used to be my) sinuses and let the Mojo float out up like a bunch of martini

bubbles into the atmosphere. I feel pain, like a hedgehog eating my brain, but I don't care.

I look down at him, "I never, liked you. You know that?"

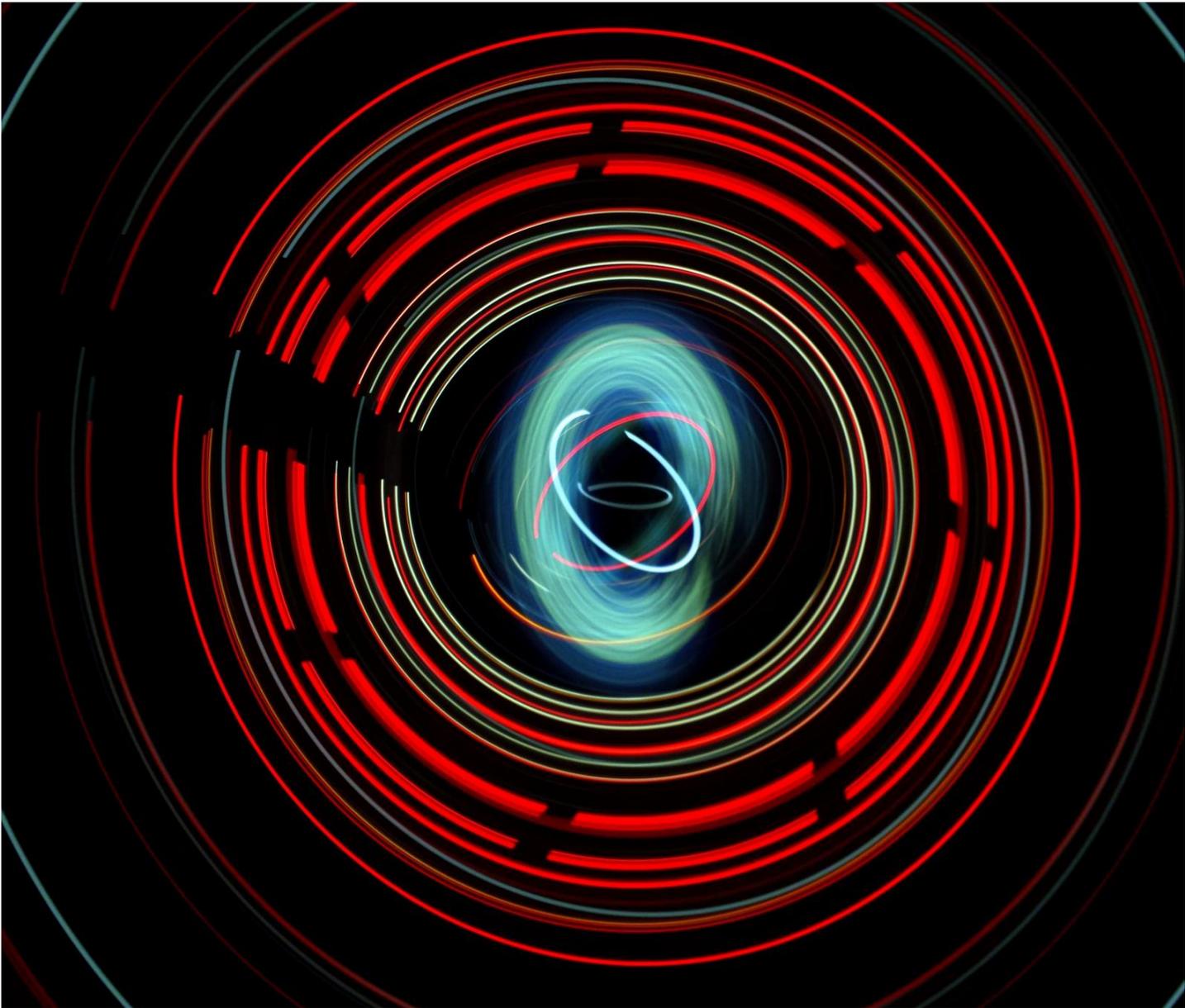
I walk off the skyscraper into the air. Day glow lava melting the cyborg people in the street below. Tearing off skin of the world next skin needs to grow. Lobster waking. I can feel my body starting to vanish, Marty McFly style.

I stopped the invasion from the past.

Walking on the air into the gigantic swirling Day-Glo nuclear tornado and don't look back. Restart now.

Straight Lined Circles

By: Toby D. Oggenfuss



MODIFIED PHOTOGRPAHY

Wordfuck

By: **Angela Patane**

She's really good at being friends with men no matter how bad they want to fuck her. She gets the feeling it's her mouth they want, not her body. Her voice is soft sex and her words are hard fucking. She wonders if they wonder how (if) she talks in bed: book worm words or book slut smut. She doesn't drag them around on collars. It's the pitch of her voice the dogs follow. This bitch can smell blue balls on their breath. So she uses words like lilac fuck, soft and gruff. Take it, take it; it better be enough because she only fucks for love, but she wordfucks for lust.

The Truth of the Matter

By: Angela Patane

This silence is mine; what's inside won't come out. I can't say *I'm too dry; make me wetter*. My voice might start another story, one in which he does the things I can't bring myself to ask for. I've been taught to be a doll, speaking only programmed moans. O's and breaths too staggered and simple to mean anything but fuck. If we're fucking, skin so close it's glued, can't he feel his cock pulling at my canal? From my first lover, I learned not to mind. From my second lover, I learned to mind, but not ask. My third lover asks me to ask, but I can't. Even though he keeps no secrets, even though he digests my words and is nourished, even though he is delighted by the movement of my mouth and the flicking of spit that comes with speaking, my voice is snared between my teeth. My second throat might vibrate the right sounds, but I've been plugged, stopped up with cock, that throat choked. He is watching. I look pleased. I am, sort of.

In These Beloved Hills

By: David C. Schwartz

I felt awkward, stupid and bullied at school,
Spanked or whipped by my father most nights...
I grew up scared, and scarred - - in an endless series of fights.
My mother's experience left a similar mark:
Drained, worked weary in the daytime, viciously raped in the dark...in these beloved hills.

I prayed for peace then, looking to the mountain peaks,
those lofty places from which God speaks,
in tones that echo across the valley floor.
But the mountains didn't silence the slamming door,
or the angry voices of domestic war,
when hearth became hell, in these beloved hills.

I'm told there were no general stores, no whisky, no whores
when native peoples were here alone.
White folk acquired those amenities,
but found their deepest serenity
in God, who also gave us guns for killing
an activity, like sex, in which we're all too willing
to participate, in these beloved hills...

Well now, once again, they're cutting mental health funds,
but not easy access to affordable guns
in the hands of the violent and the victimizers.
That tradition kills, like booze and pills; in my beloved hills.
In these incredibly beautiful, beloved-but-bloody hills.

Dust

By: Peter Jordan

She sits forward on the edge of the sofa smoking a cigarette, waiting. The black Buddha ashtray they bought in Thailand sits at her feet.

There is a knock on the door. Another knock and she leans forward, stubs out the cigarette, gets up slowly, and answers the door. He says his name but she doesn't catch it. He's here to clean the sofa. She booked it before the funeral.

"Sorry I'm late. They sent me to another job," he says.

"Will it take long?" she asks.

"No, not long."

She watches him haul a heavy rectangular box into the living room, then go to his car for two smaller boxes.

"Can I get you a tea or coffee?" she asks.

"A cold drink would be nice."

She walks into the kitchen, leaving him in the living room to unpack the cleaner. She goes to the freezer to get some ice, but there is none. She runs the tap a little longer until the water runs cold then fills the glass almost full. While carrying it to him she takes a sip from the glass, not knowing at all why.

"Ah cheers," he says, accepting the glass.

"This is no ordinary cleaner, it has twenty different uses." He names about ten straight off, and then slows, occasionally saying another as he assembles it. He fits together two shiny pipes and an attachment for cleaning, then changes his mind, takes off one of the pipes and fits the attachment to the transparent cylinder. "We ask customers to clear the area before we arrive. But most don't have the time, or forget."

"I'm sorry, things have been a little crazy recently," she says.

She lifts the ashtray, walks into the kitchen, pulls out one of the wooden chairs from under the kitchen table, and sits down.

The machine starts up in the living room. It is loud and there's a whirring sound, like there's something trapped inside and it's being spun round and round.

She lights another cigarette.

Where she now sits is where she had them place the bed when Frank got out of the Hospice. In the mornings, he had insisted on being brought from the bed to the sofa. The ketamine and morphine had kept his pain to a minimum. The cancer had started in his bowel, moved to his liver, his lungs, his brain, everywhere. Near the end he couldn't walk. He was taken from his bed in the kitchen to the living-room sofa on a hoist.

The last few months have been hell. Frank had taken three months to die. He spent his last days on the sofa; his evenings on the hospital-type bed that Marie Curie had delivered.

Those last few weeks he had no gag reflex. She had given him the vodka in a 10ml syringe, squeezing it gently into his mouth. He would thank her with his eyes, until, at the end, he didn't even have the strength to do that. Not a piece of food passed his lips for the last four weeks of his life. Some days he was lucid, other days he rambled, or asked her to kill him.

There is a photograph of Frank attached to the fridge with a magnet. She gets up and looks closely at it. It was taken a year ago at a party in the house. In the photograph he is happy, smiling, healthy—the life and soul. She thinks about that photograph. The cancer had probably already taken hold when she took that snap. She takes the photograph off the fridge and slips it into her purse.

Since Frank's death she has hardly had time to think. Right now she feels relief, relief for Frank, and for herself, and she feels the guilt of it.

In two days' time she'll get the deposit back on the rent. Then she'll travel. She has no definite plan. It feels good to have no definite plan. She'll have to clear the house. Get rid of all of Frank's possessions, his clothes, his shoes, everything. She takes another draw of the cigarette. After that there will be nothing left of their life together. It will be as if they never were.

When the cleaning guy comes back into the kitchen she is lost in thought. He's carrying a little square piece of black velvet. He carries it carefully before him like it's a small animal, and places it on the table in front of her. He unfolds each corner. In the middle of the velvet is a mound of dust.

"It's amazing, the dust that collects. Little bits of us really...skin, hair, it all mounts up," he says.

She looks at the mound of dust.

"This may sound like a strange request," she says "But I was wondering if you might let me keep this."

A Lonely, Lonely Vista

By: Scott Thomas Outlar

I came to the core
of myself
and was bored
at what I found.
Years spent seeking enlightenment,
only to realize
that it was
the apocalypse that I wanted
all along.
Humility, truthfulness, honesty,
kindness, integrity, empathy,
compassion –
these virtues are only useful
if not taken too seriously;
once one goes to the extreme
and lives only to embody
complete purity
all the time,
one loses one's essential nature.
We are not perfect, halo bearing
Angels from heaven
walking this earth in disguise;
we are only part Angel,
and we are also part Animal.
We must live
with one foot in this world,
and one foot in the source energy which
some call God, some call consciousness,
some call Logos, some call the
Higher Power.
The view from the top
of the mountain
is beautiful but lonely.
The only way to stand it
up there at the heights
is to cast off one's humanity.
I've done such a thing
and found it lacking.
I will do it no more.
I am an Animal,
and I will have my feast of flesh.
I have used words

like Good and Evil,
ugly and beautiful,
right and wrong, and other such
dualistic concepts
as if I had a real grasp
of their meaning.
Maybe, at the time, I did,
but now I know
that I am all out
of stones.
I cannot cast nor carry such ideas
around any longer.
It wearies me, it wounds me,
it wastes me away,
closer to the dust and ash,
nearer to the yawning grave.
As I grow older,
I become less wise.
As I mature,
I return closer to my primordial state.
God and the Devil
waged their war inside me
and came to a stalemate.
They both claim
a piece of my heart, a piece
of my mind, a piece of my soul,
a pound of my flesh, a pint
of my blood, an ounce of my cum,
an apple of my eye, a curse
from my tongue –
let their battle begin anew
and rage in fresh fires,
I will not care, I will not
choose sides.
I am here alone now,
standing steady upon the dirt
with the clouds above my head,
no longer interested
in the rarified air
at the mountain top,
nor the filthy, festering, foul
stench of shit
that arises from the fumes
of hell's lowly swamp.
God bless the Angels.
Satan release the Animals.
I am both, I am all,
I am nothing, I am here –

that is enough.

21st Century Scream

By: Joseph Pravda



ACRYLIC 2011

Caterpillars

By: Louise Robertson

Have you ever scraped caterpillars
into a container of bleach? That summer
we wrapped burlap around the waists of the trees.
I used a stick to scrape them off
and watched them writhe. Everything was
still green and watery under
the trees' umbrellas --
half-eaten umbrellas --
the tent caterpillars' nests
gray webbing on
the joints of the branches.
We were trying to save the trees.
That is the same summer
he didn't rape me.
They always resented me
for being
a don't-need-anybody kind of person.
This one also thought I didn't
look like a virgin. So he used his hand.
I heard the blood splash
on the concrete.
Maybe it was the summer of the cicada
who dropped out of the trees
into my hair. Maybe
it was the summer it seemed
like everyone wanted to fuck me
and that was always ever it.
I am going to go ahead
and pretend I am a tree
and the summer of the tent caterpillars
and the summer of the cicadas
are long over. My umbrella is green --
a roof, a sky, a shade,
a shield.

Addiction 2010 (The Year Contact Became Irrelevant)

By: AJ Huffman

i m ur txt ur rx ur master
bater cyber pimp
4 whatever
flavor ur ail
i m ur remediation
4 the throbbing in
ur thumb calls
me sort of
heralding desire
over the space
of a minute/hour/month
is over
pay ur fees 2 the man
4 the right 2 surf thru
modernized waves
of pseudo-euphoric sensation
alism in all its finer forms:
prose pics porn wtf
all poison-perfect apple bytes
sized specifically 4 quick-fire consumption
and l8r deletion
all hands back on the desk
ready again so soon
check the settings and
let the digital beseeching begin
i m ur maven genie muse
feed me ur bastard wishes
in broken phrases
sapped of their desperation
vibration
tonal oration
&, of course, any basic syllabic structure
i can decipher & siphon
off ur guilt
mine's covered by the fine print
come on
click ur mouse &
indulge
 obsess
 glut

urself n2 carpal tunneled incapacity
however more inconvenient than ur
mom's mt threats re going blind
nevermind
the sins i send r clean
aside from the occasional virus or 2
no worries no penicillin
required
anti-malwear will do
for now
reboot
log in
there i m again
we got mail
lmfao
double click
& ur mine
finally linked
n2 ur personal hell
o please enter ur password
now

Neighborhood Watch

By: Tom Russell

I'm downloading the Milky Way to my portable device
for posterity. Before this place goes to the Canis Majors.

At night I'll record the conversations among constellations.
Orion and Cassiopeia think they might know who has been throwing rocks
and dirty snowballs all over the place, not caring
who or what they might hit.

Stars are shooting indiscriminately.

On sunny days I'll leap from contrail to contrail
checking for downed fence posts or broken wire.
We lost a small planet around here in 2006.
Some say it was stolen.

We have to make sure our neighbors are watchful.
I'll deputize anyone who wants to join the effort.

If this stuff keeps happening nobody's gonna want to live here
anymore.

The Mark of Progress

By: Tim Kahl

The mark of progress on an infant star is seen
from the top of a mountain. The notebooks
of trained observers are filled with sketches
of the universe expanding, taking on weight.
They speak of it as gravid and luminous.
The birth of the sky is a lesson in disaster,
an endlessly unfolding primer on the accidents
that animate the carousel of stars.
With their tiny grasp of its movement,
the astronomers rage against the limits of their
understanding, convincing the feckless geologists
the sky is a used-up tissue shed by the earth.

Careful projects and thoughtful commentary
matter little to the progress of the universe.
The lonely universe once was slowing down,
but now it speeds up, flowing endlessly away,
sprouting another universe and another—
mushroom upon mushroom upon mushroom.
Each one percolates from an ounce of vacuum.
The notion of something arising out of nothing
is an improvement over the idea of reaching
a comfortable equilibrium. It seems a better fit
with the human yearning for fulfillment.

We are imprinted with discovery. The night sky
stokes a feeling that there is always something more
out there. Somewhere there is a fragile pulsar
mimicking the panicked beating of a heart.
Disks of debris are learning to be the brickwork of
new planets. The earth is host to their messages
that arrive fragmented and garbled, part of an absurd plan
interpreted by those whose instincts tell them
that someone on a distant shore must be
shining a flashlight to get their attention.

These men bear equipment that insists on making news.
It has seen a storm on the sun that blacked out Montreal.
The nebulae it has mapped resemble shy animals
preferring the dark. It will leave the mark of
progress on us. Our myths will be forgiven
by these deliberate men whose charge it is

to determine if our piles of tangled atoms
can realize an end to physics. Perhaps there are only
more installments. The severe universe proceeds
on a need-to-know basis, spinning off its odd
entertainment between the brief auditions
of tumbling light that seep into our heads.

That Which Connects

By: Megan Dobkin

That's it! Perfect!

Sean shouts

alone in his bedroom.

Red paint is to the Atlanta Braves foam finger is to the rounded
line of ants is to the sum of this receipt from Ralph's.

He drops his brush, dashes

to his computer, simultaneously

arranging eleven collages on iPhoto.

The break in the riverbank is to his big brother's

yellow facial scar is to the ghost light on the construction
platform after hours.

Yes! Sean bathes in clarity—

the dazzling facets of the universe

connecting and rearranging

in perfect patterns.

"You are such an artist,"

She once told him. *An artist, an artist...*

Sean scribbles a ten-page ode

to the amoeba-like birthmark

that tattoos her ankle

in the lined journal

he hasn't opened since the break-up.

Lonely artist is to four dangling legs off a trestle is to a cry after

an orgasm is to a Valentine's Day box with a rubber spider in it.

Sean picks up his iPhone and re-reads her email.

Re-reads her email. Re-reads her email.

It must be the intensity of

her feelings for him that scare her.

That must be what she meant to say.

Sean races around his room,

relating and creating

from station to station

too close

to connect the dots

that it is happening again

until two days later when he emerges

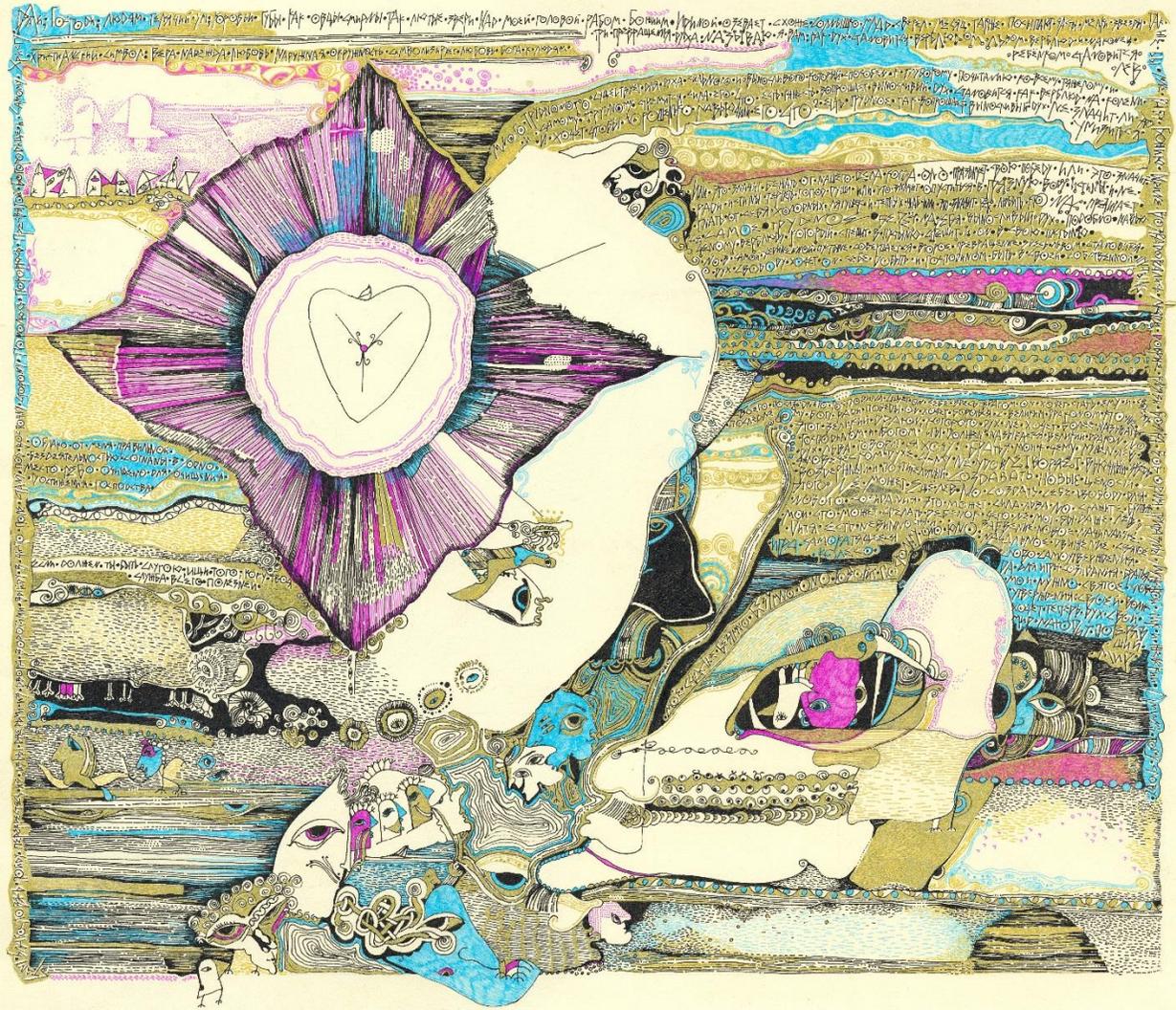
in the kitchen for a glass of water

and his roommate asks him

if he is OK.

Metaphysics of Love

By: Iryna Lialko



MIXED MEDIA

Giving is Skipping

By: William Blomstedt

We were charitable souls. Philanthropy was an important concern of everyone in the household, one might even say it was the string that tied the plane together. It didn't matter if that plane could fly or not, as long as it could sit in the Air and Space museum looking nice enough to make people assume that it once did fly, and perhaps crashed, but then was found and gathered by some very anal enthusiasts who put it back together with string.

We gave what we could. Some gave more than others, but even if it was balls of lint or waded up bits of tinfoil, we all chipped in midway through the year and gave the entire pile to one charity. The choosing of this charity, however, was often a difficult process. There were so many needy organizations out there doing the tough, hard work that no one wanted to do and it was hard to choose just one. But one is what we needed. We could not split our forces. If we split once, then the entire giving process would splinter all the way down to the selfish individual, each charity getting little fragments of lint and tinfoil instead of one big ball which might have something like a pineapple in the middle. Individually we were nothing. Together we might be a hidden pineapple.

So we voted democratically, with each person getting one vote and each person's vote weighing the same. To make sure, the votes were first weighed on a small scale which Frau Boobeater kept on the top shelf next to the jar of hard candy, where no one could reach it. Frau was the responsible one in the house and we trusted her because it also meant a butterscotch drop as a part of the deal.

To keep the charity selection from taking a full week of our lives, which it most

certainly would, we broke up the process by making each nomination a part of our weekly meeting. Last week's charity, presented by Gary, was named "Every Child a Blimp" and intrigued us in its goals as well as its ambiguity. While their glossy pamphlet didn't contain any words other than the title, its pictures showed a variety of children riding, piloting and appearing to have a blast in blimps. Many in our group were moved by these scenes, perhaps even past the point of comprehending the few detractors who claimed the charity was actually trying to turn these children *into* blimps by stuffing them with food. True, the kids in the pamphlet looked far from underfed, and they were often shown waving turkey legs or with Twinkies shoved between each finger, but still many of us were swayed by the charity's mystery and assumed that their intentions were noble.

This week's charity, brought to the group by Whoopdale, was named "One... two, three, four, five, six, seven;" an organization that dealt with the preservation and recollection of skipping stones of the world. Their concern was that as time passed, more and more of the best skippers – the round, flat hand-sized stones – were disappearing to the bottoms of water bodies where they could only be appreciated by fish, who don't really appreciate anything unrelated to kelp. Our children, and our children's children, may never know the joys of skipping a perfect stone a dozen or even up to twenty times, with the final skips slurring together so that they can't be counted. With a good skipping stone, often only an estimate of its final moments were possible.

With several well-staffed branches around the world, including Maputo, Ulan Batar, Copacabana (both Bolivia and Brazil)

Three's A Company. A Literary Review

Author Interview with Novelist and Playwright Don Grapper

By: Jason Half-Pillow

How long have you been writing?

My first experience writing not under compulsion was when I was around eight. There was a girl in my school that I liked. She had freckles and a Hawaiian name. I used to write poems to her on my lunch bag at recess. I sat alone. The other kids wouldn't play with me because I had thick glasses, and my mom made me wear checkered pants with a malfunctioning zipper that always opened on its own, and two-toned Hush Puppies too. I was a real dork. Anyway, I wrote her a poem every day—the girl, not my mom—and tore it off from the bag, and ran to class before anyone got back and snuck it in her desk. She had no idea who wrote them and probably doesn't know to this very day. She always brought them to the teacher and asked the teacher to get whoever was doing it into trouble. I'm surprised the teacher didn't recognize my handwriting, but not really. She was pretty much a dolt.

Were they mostly love poems?

No, not usually. I usually just shared my thoughts at the time with her, writing about goblins, space creatures, how awesome I was at chess—things that interested me. I also wrote a lot about my dick. A lot of words rhyme with dick, cock, dong, wang, so I sometimes made those into poems, or at least things that rhymed. Boys that age talk a lot about their dicks. Freud called it the latency stage, I think.

Do you know what happened to her?

Of course not. It was an idiotic prepubescent crush. Sure, I got a boner thinking about her, but there was no release. She avoided me like the plague. Those pants my mom made me wear weren't good at hiding boners.

Sure, an image of her pops into my mind now and then, one of what she might look like about 25 years ago, when she would have been in her twenties, but it poofs away quickly and makes way for others, mostly of girls I've never met, wearing outfits I've never seen up in person. Anyway, I have no idea who she even was, let alone is now, or where...I mean now. I knew where she was then.

When would you say you became a serious writer?

When I first realized the power words could have, my words in particular, how they could actually be a catalyst for action.

There was this blond haired jock guy I really hated 'cause he fucked every girl I had a crush on and forever sullied their image in my mind, so much so that I stopped fantasizing about them when I beat off and held up a magazine like everyone else instead. Anyway, when I was a sophomore, I noticed in the cafeteria one day that he was making a move on a girl I thought had a perfect ass in the a la carte line. I was sitting at the dork table, sucking my third chocolate milk through a straw and eating steadily from a huge bag of Skittles, when I saw her flirtatiously turn back

at him and laugh at what had to be an utterly inane and idiotic comment. Who knows, he probably said something about the tater tots or burritos. I knew it was a matter of days before he'd bone her, if not that night—and probably repeatedly—so I resolved then to make my move and wrote a racist diatribe against allowing a Church's Fried Chicken to be built on our main street because of the types of people it would attract, and I signed his name to it and sent it to the local paper and they published it. He got in a world of hurt and ran around the school for months grabbing people he thought wrote the letter and threatening to kick their ass. I also signed it "9 years old," which was really quite funny.

Did he fuck that chick?

I really don't know. I totally forgot about her. I just kept reading the letter in the paper over and over and over again and laughing my ass off. Funny thing was, the letter had an impact: they didn't build a Church's Fried Chicken there but put up some lame Sushi bar instead. It was a more racist time.

Do you know what happened to him?

Absolutely no idea. I don't even remember his name. It was something like Chuck Robbers, or Bob Powers, or Ron Bobber... I just don't know. I can still see what he looks like though, kind of a stoned, Barney Rubble type, only taller—and he had braces, like that Jaws villain from the Bond movie.

He sounds a little like the male character in the blowjob scene in your novel *Home Awaits No Late Brother*.

Which one?

Bob Robbins...

No, I meant which blowjob scene? There are several.

The one in the car...

Okay that narrows it down, but not by much. Do you recall which car? Was it the SUV? The Convertible? His dad's Buick? Maybe the Country Club golfcart?

I really don't, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't in a golf cart.

[Mumbling] they may cut that from the galleys...

I might be misremembering the cars. To be honest, I never read the novel after I gave it to my agent. But if it was based on him, it was not intentional, but it might have been, unconsciously. I think I repress a lot—especially memories of other people's good experiences; and then, in my fiction, I turn them into my own.

Back to your roots...

Like my Kunta Kinte roots?

No, just as a writer. Did you write continuously from those grade school love poems on?

They weren't love poems, damn it! And no, I took a huge break and really didn't write for another 14 years. I hardly even wrote my name on my most of my plagiarized school assignments. In high school, I only took teachers who gave multiple choice and true/false tests; and in college, I majored in math specifically to avoid writing, I hated it so much. I hated writing as much as I hated reading.

So what...“Got You Goin’”? So to speak...

Very funny, alluding to my one act play. Nice.

I really began writing in earnest when I developed chronic ulcerative colitis in my early twenties. The disease causes chronic diarrhea, though rarely does anything come out but a few annoying drips and that only after hours of sitting on the toilet and groaning from all kinds of pain, abdominal and rectal and often times, just a weighty dull ache that almost vibrates at a low hum throughout your whole body. It’s really horrid. I constantly had to go, the inflammation totally debilitated me.

So, as I was in the bathroom all the time, I had to do something to make the experience bearable, to pass the time. At first, I simply tried reading through my squints of pain, sometimes sharp, often times just a constant, mid-level dull ache at the exit of my sphincter. This was the ‘90s, so I had no choice but magazines – and the only thing in the apartment were my girlfriend’s lame US’s People magazines—or books. I didn’t even have a computer, let alone a laptop, hardly anyone did. There may have been cell phones, but most people didn’t have them, and the Internet was something you might look at it you were in a college computer lab somewhere and didn’t mind the stigma of being a Nort.

A “Nort”?

Short for “Norton,” you know, a nerd, a dork... Anyway, I read plenty of books in the shitter—*Rendezvous with Destiny*, which argued that the New Deal was the fulfillment of the Progressive Movement’s Agenda; Some volume out of a Winston Churchill series on the Boer War; *Pigs in Space*...

Do you mean *Pigs in Heaven*?

I don’t know...

Was it a book based on a *Muppet Show* skit?

No. I don’t remember much, except that it was real faggy, but it was the thing my girlfriend threw in one mid-morning before she went to work, so I had no choice really but to read it. It was pure shit.

Maybe that’s just the chronic ulcerative colitis talking...

Could be.

So did all this reading in the bathroom help inspire you?

Oh no. I forgot the whole point of the story. I got sick and tired of reading and some gastroenterologist told me to keep a turd diary, though I’m sure he didn’t call it that, and since I basically squirted something out every minute or two, practically 16 hours a day, I ended up producing reams and reams of what turned out to be remarkably well crafted prose.

All about taking a shit?

Yeah, it’s weird isn’t it? But I really was never taking what you or anyone else without colitis would actually call a regular shit. So I got pretty good at describing the unknown and unfamiliar—what was coming or not coming out of my ass—through the prism of the known—a plain old log.

Anyway, I ended up writing hundreds of pages, and my gastroenterologist farmed the task of analyzing it all out to some overworked secretary, who was ready to quit and follow her dreams of being a writer herself. Though giving her the log to read was the final degradation and she quit, she made a

copy of it on her last day and read it and then contacted me and told me she was impressed, not only with my writing but with my perseverance, the way I had been enduring my disease. I think she said something like I was like “one of William Faulkner’s Negroes.” I had no idea what she meant and was so dazed and always semi-nauseous from the disease that I just said “yeah, a lot of people tell me that” and told her I had to go and ran off to the bathroom.

And?

Well, I finally opted to get the surgery and had my colon removed. My surgeon said it was the nastiest colon he’d ever seen, that it looked like something out of an Alien Movie that had been shot a thousand times with ray guns and left to dissolve on the floor. He said the ulcers were bigger than Octopus suction cups, that he’d never seen anything so vile, so hideously grotesque, so...and I tried waving to get him to shut up, but I had just woken from the nine hour surgery and was in pretty horrid shape and a little distressed to see also that a Teutonic looking nurse was rather aggressively jerry rigging a catheter down my dick hole. I just reached for the morphine drip button and started pressing away until they all faded into an opiate haze.

I recovered. At least from the inflammation and constant nausea and pain, though I do have to take a minimum of 20 shits a day, it’s just that none of them are particularly painful.

I really don’t see where this is going...

Oh. Well I had somehow got the secretary’s number. She had quit and enrolled in a MFA program, using my turd log as her writing sample to gain admission to the program. She was stacked and pretty nice from behind too and not at all ugly, just the opposite, really.

A lot like Bunny Schwartz from your novella, “Bucket Seat?”

I hadn’t thought of that, but yeah, a lot like her now that you mention it, though the real girl’s hair wasn’t quite that blond. Strange, how that never occurred to me...

It never occurred to you, even though in the novella, Bunny Schwartz is a girl who submits her portfolio as a plagiarized “bowel movement check list” and gains admission to an up-and-coming, cutting-edge art school in Beverly Hills?

No, I see it now, but no, it never really did...

Okay, so how does all this lead to you writing?

It doesn’t. My girlfriend at the time thought I’d asked her to send a Xerox of the turd log in to the doctor, so I still had the original. So I met Bunny...

Was that her actual name?

No, sorry. It was Jody, or Judy, no Jody. Something like that. Anyway, I met Jody because over the phone I thought she had a voice that had to go with a big rack and I was right. So we arranged to meet somewhere on campus, and we did, and after seeing how completely bone-able she was, I decided to blackmail her by threatening to expose her for fraudulently naming herself as the author of my turd log.

Sounds a lot like the premise of the Showtime Series *Californication*...

I am not making this up and did not steal this anecdote from that show...that is pure coincidence!

Anyway, we actually got along pretty well, did a lot of pretty insane fucking – we were both in our twenties and were just blooming into actual fuckers, really getting into it, using all kinds of different maneuvers and making all kinds of different faces and playing around with syncopated rhythms...and eventually, things were going so well that I forgot to threaten her and we just moved in with each other.

So while she was in class, I printed out copies of her stories from our iMac—it was one of those ones that kind of bubbled out in the back and came in different colors—ours was Orange. Anyway, I printed out and started submitting her stories under my name and a lot of them got published—I think because journal editors were really looking to show they valued “diversity” and they assumed from her stories, I was a major transvestite and homosexual and had a thing for calling my anus whatever poetic euphemisms she used for her vagina in her “love making” scenes...anyway, my agent contacted me, ironically, suspecting that I was a girl using a male pen name to avoid discrimination, and he was hoping to exploit an insecure young female writer. We never spoke personally, and he left a message with her and figured she was still trying to hide her female identity, unsure that still as to whether she would be discriminated against. So they arranged it, and I went to meet him at his office.

He was shocked to see me. But we talked a little, he had a lot of drinks ready for the meeting and some weed too—as an aphrodisiac—and we got high and drunk and started exchanging all kinds of off color jokes, and then I started telling him stories from my life, which I think now might all actually be about Bob Robbers, and he said we’ve got to turn all this into a novel, that it would sell like hotcakes, would be made into a movie, and the rest is history.

So you wrote the novel?

No. I told it to some ghostwriter.

Who?

The chick. After I told the agent all about her, he wanted to fuck her, so we made a deal that she’d ghost write my life story...

You mean Bob Robbers’ life story...

Right, and then she and I would split the royalties and all that, and he’d fuck her brains out.

Did he?

Yeah. I just pretended not to know, but she eventually came clean and I didn’t really care. I had a \$50,000 advance and so did she, so we were just having fun running all over L.A. spending it.

They’re married now actually. He’s got a nice picture of her on his desk. He’s a little paranoid, one of those Jake La Motta jealousy types, so the picture only shows her from the chin up.

Not that we’re a gossip journal, I don’t suppose we could get you to tell us who they are?

Not for a million blowjobs. Not from you! You know what I mean. From someone hot on your staff. A woman. If you had one. Anyway, no. The answer’s no. Fuck no.

Does she still do your writing for you?

No, I live off all the royalties and foreign porn flick franchising and a whole bunch of other deals. I really know nothing about it and wash my hands of the whole thing, especially the porn. To be honest a lot of its Eastern European and a little rough, so it bothers me,

but it pays some of the more superfluous bills. Anyway, my agent takes care of all of that.

Does she still write but not for you?

Are you asking if she still doesn't write for me? I think I just said no.

No does she write, but just not for you?

Okay, if by that you mean she specifically refuses to write for me, then the answer is no. She always tells me the door is always open. We just haven't done any projects lately because I really don't have any stories, at least not that could match or top the work we already did. But yeah, she writes. I think she actually publishes a lot of stories in Canadian journals. She's actually won some prizes, and is always invited to speak at bookstores and read her stories, which I think Random House has published at least two collections of... but she never does.

Why not? Kind of a recluse?

No, she just knows no one will take her seriously once they see her tits and says all the mousy types who go to bookstore readings will get all bitchy 'cause she basically looks like a really classy porn star.

Thank you for sitting down with us today and sharing your thoughts.

There's only one of you, so I don't see why you keep saying "us" but you're welcome. Are you heading towards Santa Monica? I parked my car illegally and I'm sure it's been towed by now and could really use a ride. I'd go get it but I'm sure it'll cost a fortune, and to be honest, money's a little tight. There's really not much of it anymore and what little there is...well, it's pretty damn tight.