

THRICE

FICTION™

ISSUE No. 6 – NOVEMBER 2012
FEATURING...

John M. Bennett, Peter Colwell,
Michelle Matthees, Michael Dickes,
Eric J. Guignard, Gloria Garfunkel,
Andrew Stancek, Jaylee Alde,
Robyn Parnell, Nick Sansone,
Stephanie E. Dickinson,
Kevin Tosca, Don Thompson,
KJ Hannah Greenberg,
AND James Claffey



THRICE FICTION™

Issue No. 6 • NOVEMBER 2012

RW Spryszak, Editor
David Simmer II, Art Director

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Turning A Blind Eye by Kyra Wilson



Thrice 6 Notes

RW Spryszak, Editor

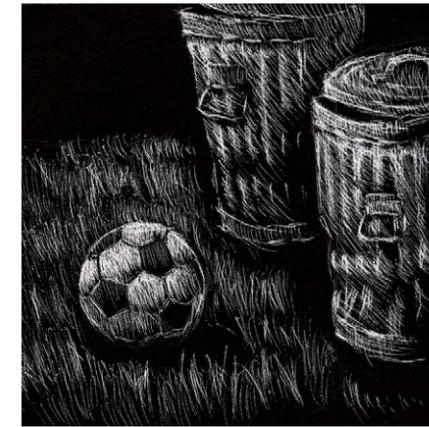
There is a specific ambiguity to our 6th issue. Cognitive dissonance sometimes. Other times a take on dark reality. Flights of fancy. Voices from the grave.

We began Thrice with themes and asked writers to play towards it. We have since done away with this approach and then discovered that the work coming across our desk sometimes contained its own kind of organic continuity from one piece to the next. It was strange. Like particles in the quantum world, seven million light years apart but still connected to each other by some unknown principle. The connection is sometimes obvious, other times eclectic. In the quantum world it is called Spooky Action at a Distance. You could look it up.

In any case, and in point of fact, it happened here.

Here is the stark reality of the death camp legacy. Here is dark illusion in the subtle connections of blatant fact and near-metaphor. And here is still darker allusion in the minds of the watchers, revealed. Here are conversations with the self and one with the dead. Here is specific ambiguity. Cognitive dissonance.

Here is #6.



Absent

Kevin Tosca

There was a little boy wearing a hoodie, standing in the driveway. He was North African. You could tell by the color of his skin and the language his owners spoke. It was early spring and a Tuesday and late morning and the chestnut tree was in full bloom, its green, dangling leaves looking like thousands of impotent fingers.

The boy was separated from this tree and its courtyard by a wall, thick and about three feet higher than the top of the hood of his hoodie. He was holding a half-deflated soccer ball in one hand, and he was taunting Villain with it. Villain was a Jack Russell terrier, cruelly named and the small apartment complex's unofficial mascot.

With arm outstretched and ball extended, the boy approached the wall, never took his eyes off Villain.

Villain trembled in anticipation.

The boy faked a toss.

Villain ran to fetch what wasn't there, and the boy turned, let his balled hand fall to his stomach, let it rest there. The boy grinned and he smirked. He did a little happy dance of hip, twist, and shake.

Eventually, Villain returned, and Villain stared at the boy, still ready to play, but more distant from him now, more... wary?

The boy faked the toss again. Villain ran. Whatever

consciousness came, whatever went on in Villain's head, Villain never learned, and the boy soon tired of Villain's gullibility.

The boy dropped the ball and went over to the five big garbage cans laid out in an "L" shape by the apartment's Spanish proprietor, Villain's owner. Villain looked at the ball, then the boy, and then he found a sunny spot where he could lie down, breathe, and wait for the game to begin again.

The little boy shook one garbage can, and then he mounted a second. He started to rock back and forth on the can. He rocked back and forth and back and forth and back and forth on the can. Eventually, he, and the can, fell.

The boy, from the pavement, looked around, thought that no one had seen him, and then he got up, felt his hooded head, wiped his hands and knees and elbows and righted the can. He remounted it and he sat there this time, drumming his feet against its side, louder, and then louder, and then louder still.

Villain stared at him, and then Villain put his head back down between his paws and closed his eyes.

The boy stopped drumming. He curled up on top of the garbage can and he, too, went to sleep. 🐾



KEVIN TOSCA's stories have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Fleeting*, *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Underground Voices*, *The Smoking Poet*, and elsewhere. He lives in France. Read more at www.kevintosca.com



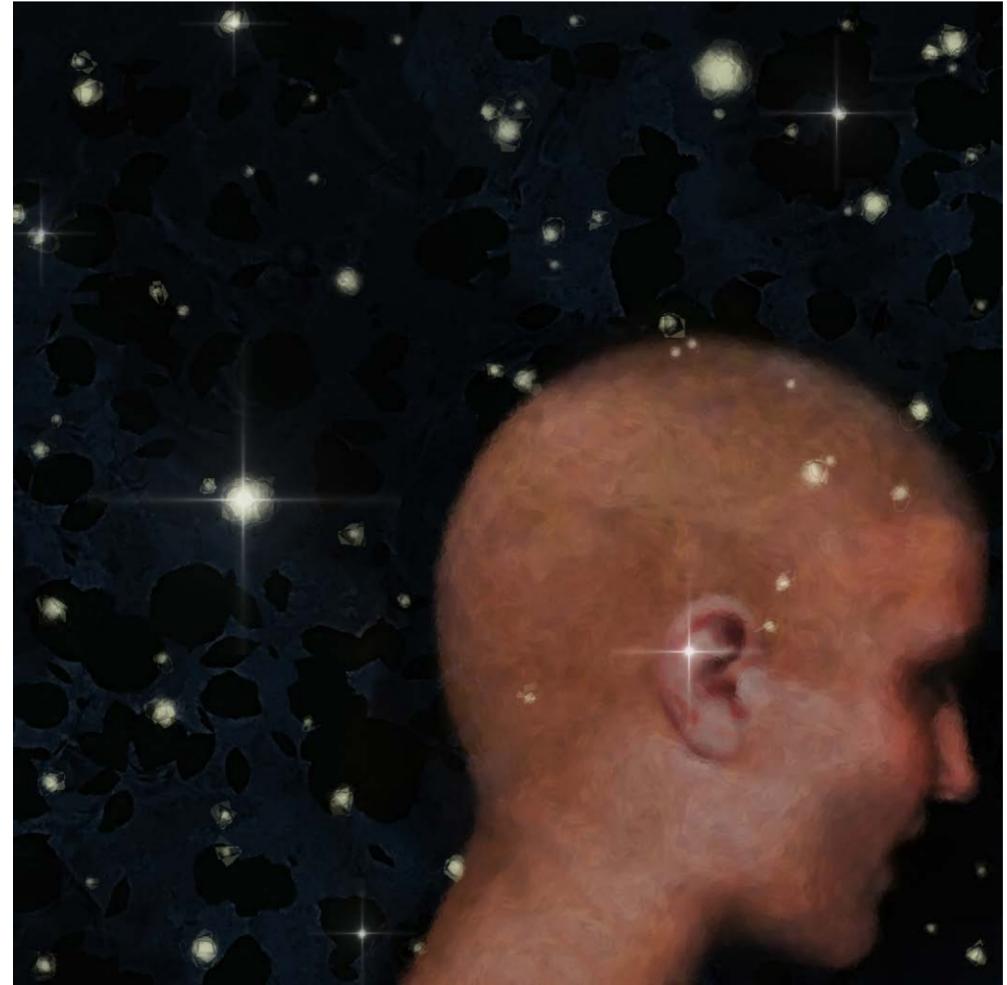
Bypassed

Don Thompson

Some little towns hold their breath and play dead when the interstate comes too close. Prickly with fences and shy behind tear-stained curtains, they look deserted to anyone lost enough to find them. But there's secret life in them, slow crises that take decades to resolve, drama with dust on it, lust tucked under linen in bottom drawers, antique rages, sagging garage doors with springs snapped from too much tension. But you'd never know. "It must be boring there," you say and drive on with hundreds of eyes watching you, relieved that you're gone. 📖



DON THOMPSON was born in Bakersfield, California, and has lived in the southern San Joaquin Valley for most of his life. He is retired from teaching at a nearby prison, and lives with his wife, Chris, on her family's cotton farm. Publications include *Been There, Done That* (2002), *Sittin' on Grace Slick's Stoop* (2006), *Turning Sixty* (2008), *Where We Live* (2009), and *Everything Barren Will Be Blessed* (2012). *Back Roads* won the Sunken Garden Poetry Prize for 2008. Allan M. Jalon's profile, *Planted in the San Joaquin*, appeared in the LA Times and remains available online.



Ash

Gloria Garfunkel

Ash covered everything in the concentration camp. At night, sparks flew up from the chimneys of the crematoria filling the universe with more stars. But there were also sparks that circled like fireflies until they each found a lucky prisoner and hid deep in her ear as a speck of ash. This ash would eventually become a part of the prisoner's first born child. I was one of those children. Whenever my mother's will-to live wavered, my ash would whisper, "Live, live." 📖



GLORIA GARFUNKEL is a clinical psychologist with a Ph.D. from Harvard University. She has published short stories, flash and micro fiction and memoir in *Natural Bridge*, *Eclectica*, *Six Sentences* and a collection called *A Perilous Calling*. She currently posts stories at the online writing community Fictionaut.



The Book of Joel

Robyn Parnell

It had become obvious to Joel that God – anyone’s god – was a woman.

Joel took no pride in his realization, nor found the slightest comfort therein. He accepted it as a man should, even if his acceptance meant that he could no longer handle any other insight. It no longer mattered if he handled anything like the man he knew he would never be.

Scriptures of all faiths, tongues and centuries are mangled through translation. Caretakers and scribes cloak, soften, and mitigate; their manipulation of pronouns, however faithful their intent, makes their complicity all the more callous. They slip up (Joel had caught them, more than once), and It slips out. It oozes out, through translucent, ancient and ongoing narratives, creaking, seeping, and finally cracking. Dribbling its dusky marrow from primordial papyrus through megabyte modem, Holiness is thus revealed.

Jealous, petty, and whining.

Expecting total devotion and exacting impossible demands.

Vengeful and bitter; proud and resentful.

Haughty, and Exclusive.

Female.

Which is why, on that justifiably raw November morning, when Joel buttoned his long-sleeved, Pendleton shirt over the seven-round mags jammed into his shoulder holster; when he zipped up his Nordstrom outlet gang-banger denim baggies, donned an oversized, mud-spattered, knee-length khaki raincoat and rolled his gray woolen soccer socks up and over the seven inch, double-edge, spear-point Peace Keepers sheathed to each ankle, he knew the visit he must pay would be to a gathering of the most clueless of Her blasphemers.

Joel grabbed a stapler and a pair of tarnished haircutting

shears from the kitchen utility drawer. He removed a frayed yellow notepad from underneath the answering machine. Scrawled throughout the notepad’s pages were the names, addresses and descriptions of the churches he’d been evaluating since May.

Joel flipped through the notepad with his left hand; with his right hand he dangled the shears, point down, over the notepad, and closed his eyes.

One and two and three-four-five....

When he reached eleven he dropped the shears, stifling a gasp when the shear’s point nicked the end of his thumb. He opened his eyes and beheld the name on the first of the four pages the rusty point had pierced.

Of course. The goddess denouncers of the Reformed Independent Baptist Church of Vernonia.

Joel thrust his thumb into the pocket of his raincoat, using a wad of tissue he found there as a pressure bandage. He hawked a gob of spittle onto the notepad, aiming for the drops of blood that had obscured the church’s Sunday service start times. He smeared the fluids around with his finger, careful not to tear the paper, until the red had been diluted and he could make out the blurry black ink. Wielding the open shears like a razor, he sliced out the notepad pages that the shears’ point had pierced. He stapled the pages together, crammed them into his shirt breast pocket, and removed two .32 semiautomatic Beretta pistols from a plastic bag in the cupboard above the answering machine.

The crisp click of boot heels ricocheted off of the church’s checkerboard-tiled floor, and the notepad pages crackled in Joel’s shirt pocket, rubbing against his clavicle with each step. Joel did not soften his step. No snapping twig would divulge his approach; the Independent Reformed minions

were long enfolded in the 9:30 a.m. service. He strode down the church hallway toward his intended position: the main sanctuary doors that led to the Fellowship Hall.

“Hello.”

Joel whirled about and dropped to one knee, his hands fumbling in his coat’s front pockets.

“My name is Vashti.”

A she-cub, perhaps all of five years old.

Joel slowly rose to his feet and attempted to return the shock of her impaling gaze. Though ensconced in a pale-cheeked, pink-lipped, golden tresses-framed face, the eyes that bored into his were as fixed and dark as a barracuda’s. It was as if a Kewpie doll had switched assembly lines at the toy factory and had received the Ninja warrior eyes by mistake.

“You passed it.” She pointed behind him. “It’s that way.”

“What’s that way?” It was out before he could stop himself. Joel fingered the pistol butts in his pockets and looked down the hallway. She seemed too young to be unaccompanied.

“Bathrooms,” she said. “A boys’ one and a girls’ one. Grownups can go in both, when they take their kids. You can choose.”

“I don’t need...”

“When you’re big, you can go alone.” Vashti looked him over. “It’s okay; you can go by yourself. I’ll wait for you.”

And his countenance fell. As it is written.

Joel wordlessly rebuked himself. A five-year-old had declared, Thou art the Man. And because God is what God

is, Joel resigned himself to one last realization. Vengeance would have to wait, even as, throughout the resounding void that would comprise his eternity, so She would wait.

“Right here.” Vashti wriggled her foot, tapping the toe of her vinyl, Vaseline-polished, black ballet shoe on the floor. “I’ll wait right here.”

Which is why, on an ice-bright Sunday morning, before he entered the Gentlemen’s restroom of the Reformed Independent Baptist Church of Vernonia; before he threw the latch and jammed a stack of paper towels in the crack between the floor and the bottom of the restroom’s door; before the ringing, staccato *pop-pop* was followed by a muffled thud sliding down the door; before the brown paper towels turned crimson and crackled as they expanded with absorption, Joel tore off a piece of paper from the stapled-together bundle he’d stuffed in his shirt pocket.

“Yes,” he said to the girl-child. “You can wait.”

Joel tore the paper in half, spit on each half and rubbed the pieces together between his palms, shaping them into small, moist, plug-shaped wads. “Here.” He gently placed a wad into each of Vashti’s ears. “Now, go like this.” Joel took her hands and cupped them over her ears. “It’s going to be loud.”



ROBYN PARNELL’S fiction has appeared in over ninety books, anthologies, magazines and journals, most of which have not yet filed for Chapter 11 protection. Published works include her short story collection, *This Here and Now*, and *My Closet Threw a Party*, a children’s picture book. Coming attractions include stories in *Stoneslide Corrective*, the *Joy: Interrupted* anthology, and her first juvenile novel, *The Mighty Quinn* (Scarletta Press, 2013). Current projects include finding publishers for an adult novel and her second short fiction collection and note-taking/“world-making” for second adult and juvenile novels. While not working on innumerable fiction projects Parnell annoys PETA members by campaigning for the extinction of the spineless weasel.



Apartment 461, Oakland CA

Jaylee Alde

I am sitting in my apartment. It is the size of a shot glass. It has been my home for years. My walls are as blank as bleached bone. My fridge is empty. It's quiet except for the scuttle of roaches. This is my home. Outside, Oakland is burning in small riots.

The lease will be up soon. They won't rent to me anymore. They say I have to be out by the end of the month in a few weeks or else. I made exactly \$293 dollars more this year than is allowed for this low-income building. I shouldn't have picked up those extra shifts. I am alone except for the roaches. I watch them sprint and stop along the white walls almost every night. Tonight, there are four roaches. One of them, with two brown ovals on its back, stops in my eye-line. This feels like a taunt. I swipe my hand at it, trying to scare it away. It doesn't move. The creature flicks its antennae at me. It then ruffles its many legs but doesn't move an inch. We watch each other.

I hear glass breaking beneath my window. Smoke rises from a burnt car and snakes over the building across from me. I hear angry screams, thrown from blocks away, that tumbles slowly up 4 floors and lay themselves down quietly at my feet.

I don't know where else to go.

"You've misplaced your hands again. Those hands are anchors. Even I know that, you fool. Look at those things—the deadest of weight." The roach accuses.

"My hands are a full sail. They are green lights. Sir, you insect, these hands have taught the trigger to be the bullet." I answer with bluster, with everything I've got, with...not much.

"But here you are, talking to bugs and staying put. This place, this building, this town, they all eat but you don't eat back. And yet you stay?"

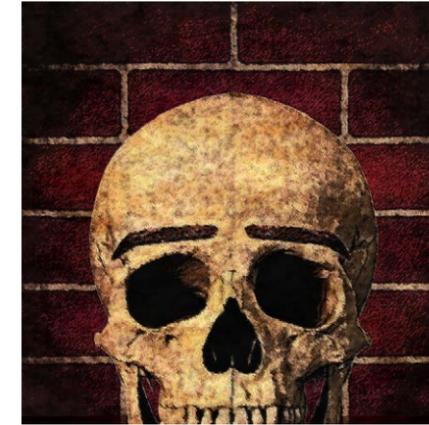
I'm sitting in my apartment watching the roaches paint the walls. The loneliness is stealing the laugh out of me and I'm wondering why I never listen to music anymore. Before I answer the roach, I realized that I have never hung a photograph on these or any walls, and that fact alone, almost crushes me.

"Because this is my home," I answered.

They all laughed. ☺



JAYLEE ALDE lives in Los Angeles but cut his teeth in Oakland, CA. He has been published before, but more importantly, he frequently dreams of owning a '72 Chevelle and taking long quiet drives and that says more about him than anything else.



Softening of the Skull

James Claffey

Dried skin collects behind my ears and on the top of my head. The doctor says it's a version of "cradle cap." The bumpy patches are lonely islands, abandoned areas that contain childhood memories: the Old Man singing "the Rogey" at the dinner table, the Waterford glass tumbler amber-stained, the clock on the mantelpiece chiming the hour. Soft and low, his words a fog of confusing messages transmitted from the wireless set that came from the dead uncle's house.

The coalmen dump their sacks in the shed, avalanche of stones and dust pillow into the air. My old therapist told me to paint my eyebrows and accentuate my best features if I wanted my parents' love. He said the disease might cause a softening of the skull, allowing coal dust and other ephemera to seep into my brain. For my part, I bore this pretty well and did as I was told.

At Deveney's off-license I ask for a naggin of Powers and a six-pack of draught Guinness for my father, and the shop assistant stares at me, leaning over the counter toward me. "Are you wearing make-up?" she asks. I nod, straightening my back in an attempt to look manly. She narrows her brow and wraps the whiskey in brown paper, then counts out the change from the tenner I push across the counter. "Well, I think you look smashing," she says, handing me back the change.

After the news on RTE1 we listen to the weather report—*Forecast for coasts from Rossan Pt to Carlingford Lough to Carnsore Pt and for the Irish Sea. Wind: Northwest to north force 4 or 5, decreasing force 2 to 4 this afternoon, becoming mainly northerly tonight and continuing the same on Friday morning.* The neighbors are fighting again, and through the brick wall the radio announcer is interrupted by shouts of, "Hell to pay," and the Old Man kicks the skirting board and fires a string of curses their way. The radio says there's a boat in distress off the Kish, and when I go to bed I say a Hail Mary for the sailors who will drown in the storm. At the bottom of my drawer is a copy of *H&E* I stole from the shop across the road. I slide under the covers with my flashlight so I can look at the pictures of the nudists on the beaches in the South of France. ☺



JAMES CLAFFEY hails from County Westmeath, Ireland, and lives on an avocado ranch in Carpinteria, CA, with his wife, the writer and artist, Maureen Foley, their daughter, Maisie, and Australian cattle-dog, Rua. His work appears in many places, including *The New Orleans Review*, *Elimae*, *Connotation Press*, and *Word Riot*. His website is at www.jamesclaffey.com



More Than What You Ordered

Don't harass me. That blonde you're with, the one who keeps twirling that long straw in her drink and lifting the permed hair out of her eyes with the back of one hand? She's thinking about grocery shopping right now. When you're not looking I'll wink at her, and she'll scowl back at me.

You've met me on the wrong night. I've got no sympathy for you—I'm away from home and so lonely. You'll do this blonde because she is desperate and because you can.

Here's your pizza. Let's call it twenty bucks even and I won't call you a prick to your face. You're too drunk to do anything about it anyway. And your suit fits you poorly, as well, a bit too tight. Pizza won't help that.

I'm sure you've got some good qualities; you're just not exhibiting any of them tonight. I'm staring at you, right through you. You're every man I've ever hated. How does it feel? Don't make any assumptions here, just give me your money. This is it. Your last supper. ↻

Vice

More people answer their motel room doors naked at the Bay Inn than in all other Duluth hotels combined. What are the lives of these people made of day in, day out, that they come here and go to such extremes? What would make them turn me into an unwilling confessor? Is this how a priest feels? By now it dulls me: women dragging bedspreads towards the door too drunk to realize how much skin they've left exposed to the open air; a three-hundred-pound man passed out face down on the carpet, his angry date fiercely watching television, refusing to even acknowledge my presence; the woman with the black eye crying alone in the whirlpool suite.

I am a poor sounding board for vice. For instance, I have no desire to reach out and touch the deep bullet welts on this beautiful man's naked chest. He is no risen miracle to me. ↻

Getting It Together

The storybook woman opens the door to receive her pizza. You've nearly rammed the rear end of her minivan in the driveway, but you don't tell her that. Your car door dinged the maroon sedan you parked next to, but you don't tell her that either. She feels sorry for you and has begun, for some reason, to speak in simple sentences, doesn't use dependent clauses or conjunctions. Her house has a lot of green in it and dark wood. Her bare feet are warm on the grouted tile near the door, and you think she's kind of sexy in spite of the pictures of children moving diagonally up the split-level steps.

Her husband comes out from behind the island in the well-lit kitchen wearing glasses and chinos.

He says, "Honey, have you got the check?" You look back to your car at the end of the long driveway, at the end of the even longer sidewalk, and smile. You look into her pupils. She stares back hesitantly, and you think what it might be like to kiss her, just to annoy the piss out of her husband. *Don't you see she's dying*, but instead you hand over the pizza and squint a little. She hands you the check with the dollar tip, which you know will not bounce. Stepping back she shuts the windowless aluminum door, and you shut the ultra-light storm door. Mirror images, you walk towards what you know: her the oak kitchen table; you the rest of your night filled with people who don't know what they want. ↻



MICHELLE MATTHEES lives in Duluth, Minnesota, where she writes poems about life without running water and electricity, pizza delivery, and the coming apocalypse. More info at <http://www.mnartists.org/artistHome.do?action=info&rid=257841>



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She Saw

Michael Dickes

She grows weary of keen eyesight and the seeing of things that only she can see. She grows weary of the sound of the machine and its thrashing; tired of the turning of wheels; of the sweat that forms at the pounding of keys; of studying the strange texture that surfaces the darkening circles and the haunting of poverty for the price that was paid. They will speak of hers as a wasted life, because they could not see.



MICHAEL DICKES is a writer of fiction and songs from the mountain roads of Lake Chelan, WA now living in New York City. His stories have been or are soon to be featured in *Southpaw Journal*, *Tree Killer Ink*, *Kerouac's Dog Magazine*, *Thunderclap Press*, *Apocrypha & Abstractions*, *Connotations Press*, *THIS Literary Magazine*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Fictionaut Editor's Eye*, *Pure Slush*, *Flash Flood Journal*, *Duality-The Book*, *Do Hookers Kiss Magazine*, *The Istanbul Literary Review*, *Metazen*, and others. His numerous CDs include *Trouble*, *Dig*, *Loose Ends*, *Moveable Child*, and *Thirty-Five*. His latest self-titled album is available at: cdbaby.com/cd/michaeldickes
A story vignette set to film entitled *New York City* is free to watch at: youtu.be/bZu-lxg48cA



The Spanish Dwarf

Eric J. Guignard

According to many legends, time—and I mean time in a prophetic sense—moves and marches on, cycling around itself, swirling.” Claude looks to Danny proudly, enunciating his final words for scholarly effect. “Like—a—siphon.”

“Whatever we do is predestined, since the world and events repeat themselves. Just look at religion or wars or political policy. Evolution doesn’t progress, it just alters itself with subtle differences which don’t matter, because we are all the same, we have always been the same. You and I, here, possibly or even probably, have had this conversation or a similar one like a broken warped record in time, over and over again. It’s déjà-vu, man.”

Danny quietly picks at a thumbnail watching a young woman across the aisle with a smiling sad-eyed baby. The baby listens intently to Claude’s impulsive theories,

perhaps dumbstruck by the bewildering complexities and mannerly waiting to interject his own life experiences into the conversation.

Outside the train’s blurring windows, a greenish frost decorates wandering streets. The young woman rests her head against the small, silver window, gazing carelessly out. Hazy dawn skies sweep slowly over the carpet of stars, rolling onto tight cobblestone streets, waking weary merchants, eager, anxious tourists, gypsies dreaming in the despairing gutter... and Lisette. Posters of San Fermin festival adorn shop doors and rickety stairwells, garlands of Spanish promises and exclamations. Crude representations of steaming bulls and majestic matadors rule the walls, tattered and noble in legend.

“All that I think, that I do, is a warped copy of some unfathomed original, as though an eternal play, where the actors simply change roles to offset societal weaknesses or

tedium or whatever. I mean, look at all our lives, the world, what purpose to it? So it just continues recycling itself. Druids would offer sacrifices to stop change, they understood in their beliefs to break the cycle of time. Buddhism and Hinduism talk about this, like karma and nirvana. A lifetime of cleansing your mind and ridding yourself of Earthly desires and traits to escape the rebirth. You see, reincarnation is just the continuation of time, just one great rhythmic circuit of suffering.”

The baby closes his sad eyes in contemplation and the young woman, golden strawberry lips, whispers soothingly to him and looks across to Danny. It’s a gentle glance, so easy to fantasize something more, but Danny lowers his head away, dull and shy. The train’s steady cradle-like rocking begins to ease. Pamplona, Spain.

Claude continues his monologue, broken ideas flowing together like a sun-beaten mosaic.

“I know, I know, you ask, but then why is life worth living? Are we already planned to repeat ourselves, to have no decisions, no choices left, only miserable regrets to renew? But listen man, that’s just it, we don’t know what decisions we will make, it would seem fresh, new to us, though of course we have already made these decisions, have been conditioned to make them, and will continue to do so. History repeats itself, we are doomed to our past mistakes. You know those old proverbs? Well everything has a bit of truth in it. You kinda understand?”

The baby nods.

Danny stands up and the train stops. A gentle drizzle drops onto the town.

A conductor’s voice announces: “*El tren esta a la ciudad de Pamplona. Gracias.*”

That night the city lights burn bright as glowing embers, smoldering and sparkling throughout the stone buildings and dank alleys; roaring of revelry and rock bands, singing outdated Euro-American thrash. Claustrophobic throngs of tourist students and punks and elderly locals crowding and crying and laughing and fighting and urinating in the streets. Over a million people packed into the small town to celebrate a holiday few understand.

Crushing through the swelling human tides, Danny and Claude squeeze into La Taverna rubbing against a pair of queer Latinos, immaculately dressed in dark suits, kissing. Past American kids obnoxious, downing bottles of cheap champagne; past over-muscled long hair rockers kicking the jukebox.

“Over here,” a dim shout that Danny recognizes immediately, has been longing to hear her voice this past eternal month, imagining her and seeing her, his lover, Lisette. Beautiful, tall, with ebony-black hair, silken red slacks, raven halter-top. Danny embraces her, a light-headed relief to feel her arms around him, a caress, and kiss, so deep, so fulfilling, the terrible impeding noise vanishes.

“I’ve missed you,” he says.

Lisette smiles, her eyes drop momentarily, but she catches and looks into Danny. “So have I.”

They pause against each other and Claude moves in, unwilling to be left out. “Hello, dear,” he says in mock charm.

“Hi Claude, nice to see you,” and an air kiss.

“Gentlemen, meet a new friend of mine, Simon.”

A tall, young Spaniard steps alongside Lisette, a sidled glance at her and shakes hands around.

Danny feels a twang of disquiet, a defensiveness that flares and ebbs in his heart, calmed by the logical voice of reason, claiming overreaction. “So what does the night hold in store for us, my love?”

Lisette has been in the city for three days already, and thus becomes the implied tour guide for the new arrivals. Instead of her answer however, Simon, with drink in hand, cries out, “The bulls *mi amigo*, the bulls! We shall celebrate life and in the morning tempt death.”

“You mean running with them? That’s insane. People die every year from that.” Danny replies, although suddenly self-conscious as to his quick retort. It was too easy for him to exclude himself from anything lively around him, an immediate bore, a reflection of his own life.

Claude, not to follow his friend’s faux pas, “I’ll try it out. Stories for the grandkids, y’know?”

Lisette laughs wide-eyed and Danny and Simon the Spaniard catch each other glancing in distrust at one another.

Midnight rolls past unwary, as the streets keep the riot of revelry with drunken strangers induced in dance and bottles of Sangria. A naked girl with green hair pirouettes through the swarming masses of slippery bodies and statuette beggars, spinning through pools of spilt beer and sewage.

Fat men, passed-out in the gutters, dressed in traditional white cloth and red sash, pile as fallen corpses. The war of the night has bested them.

Moving from dazzling discothèques to cafes, Danny finds himself now lying in Turkish pillows, competing over his own love with this stranger, Simon. He smokes and wonders what may have transpired in the three days that Lisette has been here before him.

As if to answer him, Lisette speaks in a dreamy tone. “Oh Danny, you’ve missed so much these past few days.”

“I know. I wish I could have come here earlier, but you know how work is going these days.”

“Yes, you’re so committed... to your work.”

Simon snickers and tries to cover it with a cough.

Lisette is in high spirits, warmed by liqueurs and her friends. “This town is an impending heart attack. It is just drinking and drugs and dancing, Danny, with no sleeping. It reminds me so much of Carnival in Brazil. I wish you could have been there with me, dear.”

“God, I must seem so boorish. Work kept me from that travel as well.”

“Of course, I understand,” she replies and turns to Simon. “My darling Danny is an architect and helped design the *Hôtel de Blanchard* in France’s Bourgogne region, among other masterpieces. He is so brilliant, but his occupation steals him away from me.”

Changing conversation quickly, she turns to the next member of their group, “Claude, you are rather quiet tonight, so unlike your rambling self.”

“Hm, Lisette, if only you knew.” He winks at Danny, in preparation for the unveiling of his spiritual awakening. “I have discovered the meaning of life! Do you know that now,

nothing feels new to me anymore? Because I have lived all this before, these events or at least a similar variation. My road is mapped”

“You are too drunk, *amigo*, or *loco*,” Simon interrupts and turns to Lisette, suddenly loosening a brayish laugh.

She turns to him and giggles enthusiastically.

Claude smiles, almost approvingly. “Hey, that’s what I expect. But I tell you, how secure I feel, happy, because I believe what I’m saying. I have made a discovery about myself. It’s fulfilling. My time is like a pattern, placed and repeated over itself that I will escape from.”

“C’mon, don’t start this again,” Danny confides to his friend.

“Claude took a semester in philosophy at the university,” Lisette explains to Simon, almost concealing her ridicule. “He’s a free thinker now.”

“Listen, I’m not saying this is the ‘Twilight Zone’, like we just live a cloned life, but that each of us makes his own choices, and that each of us have already made our choices and will continue to make the same choices which causes the perpetuation of our lives. We just don’t know what we have done previously, although we’ve already done it. Good deeds or bad, you will repeat them and their repercussions.”

Simon purposely glances at Danny, “So if you’re a loser in this life, that means you always were and always will be a loser?”

“Well, I wouldn’t say anyone will always be a loser, but they may make poor decisions more often.”

“What if you’re deformed like that little guy over there?” Simon points dramatically at a dwarven man squeezing against the legs of the drunken crowd. Like a porcelain figurine, he wears the same staunch white pants and shirt ornamented by rose-red sash and scarf as his peers, baby faced, short black hair slicked down to an oily gleam, martini glass in hand and dumb smile forced across his face. “Will he always be a half-man?”

Lisette touches his shoulder, “Oh, Simon, don’t.”

Claude answers, “No man, I think physical appearances change completely. Like reincarnation, you change into any new person, only to re-live your same experiences.”

The dwarf, seeing that Simon is pointing at him, lopes over, used to the jeers, but welcoming any attention.

“Hello my friends! Happy San Fermin!”

“Hey little *hombre*, what’s the good word?”

“Ah, just the celebration. It is beautiful tonight, *no?*”

“*Sí, sí,*” and Simon rambles on in rapid Spanish to the dwarf for several minutes laughing and nodding at Claude. The Spanish dwarf turns to Claude in amused bewilderment. “So he tells me that you will make me a new man.”

Claude stutters awkwardly.

“My name is Jol,” he announces to the group.

Each responds to Jol in like: Danny, Claude, Lisette, Simon.

“Say, Danny,” Simon speaks loudly so all will hear. “Why don’t you go get us a round, on me.”

“It’s okay, I have a running tab.” He knows Simon is trying to demean him, to send him away, but doesn’t know how to respond without sounding rude and creating an altercation.

“Then your generosity abounds, *amigo*. I’ll take a Guinness and Champagne. Lisette is favoring Mojitos tonight. I trust she wants another. Thanks, pal.” Simon dismisses him and turns to speak feverishly to Lisette. Claude and Jol begin into their own conversation and Danny suddenly feels a lonely distance. Excluded, and not wishing to appear morose, he makes his way to the crowded bar and waits behind the throngs of revelers.

A half hour later, Danny emerges from the thick, humid crowds, returning to his friends. Lisette and Simon are gone. He sits next to lecturing Claude and wide-eyed Jol, the dwarf. He is tired of hearing Claude drone on about cycles of life but Jol listens so intently, drink forgotten in his hand. They are surrounded by empty bottles and glass cups.

“...at some point, in some life, one will find their meaning or their value. It’s different for everyone, man.” Claude taps Jol twice on the forehead, “But I believe that you’ll know it when you know it.”

“And the human spirit—what is to become of it?” Jol asks with a slow slur.

“It transcends to another realm. Heaven or Nirvana, I suppose it depends on what you call it, but it’s all the same place. There is no Hell afterwards, man. Hell is our lives here on Earth, the suffering and the

uncertainties. That’s why we keep living it over and over and over again. It’s all laid out and only when you have built up the strength, the...the... what’s the word I’m looking for? Oh, *fortitude*. Yeah, the fortitude and conviction to break the cycle. That’s when you will free yourself from the shackles of this cycle we call life.

Lisette returns to Danny and the group alone, smiling and in a flush. “It’s hotter than a preacher’s knee in here.”

“Where’s your friend, Simon?”

“I sent him away. He’s so wild.”

Hours later, the sun yawns across the dawn and Danny and Lisette march up smeared stone steps, along a street’s edge, a bridge, staring down into the narrow alley below. Around them the dreary-eyed braggarts still yell in drunken delight, although now to a slower rhythm. Leaning against a rickety wooden fence, Simon the Spaniard stands quietly, as if waiting for them. Danny silently curses and Lisette leads him over so that they can watch the running of the bulls beneath them.

In the narrow street below, the bull runners gather. Proud and anxious they crowd together, shifting on legs brazen with alcohol and sliding on the slime-slick cobbled stones. Many hold rolled-newspapers, the traditional weapon against charging, raging beasts.

Chants cry out for several minutes and a morning prayer is announced. The bull runners shout and cheer,



false bravado, as soon discovered once the first rocket explodes in the air. The signal of preparation.

Suddenly the runners turn and flee, excitable panic spreading easily through the crowds as many surely regret the sarcastic dares from the evening before. Though the runners are given a head start, the street has no escape for the first few blocks and after that, one must jump and climb over the rickety wooden fences amongst the guffaws of the gawkers.

Lisette stands between her two men and gasps in fascination as the next single rocket whistles through the cold morning. The signal means the first bull has been released and Simon laughs gleefully, watching the stumbling and frantic bull runners on the street below, scrambling for safety.

“Look around for Claude,” Danny suggests to ignoring ears.

The first bull bursts through the white and red crowds, sinewy, thick legs, sprinting down the road’s center, carrying the bellowing beast towards futile escape. Burning eyes bulge from the bull’s giant head and Danny thinks of the wicked dreams of his childhood.

A bearded man, running in leather sandals, with drugged appearance looks back as he races forward and rushes directly into a brick wall. His head cracks open and he collapses into the road lauding jeers and taunts.

“Oh, *amigo*, what a moron,” Simon announces.

More rockets burst through the sky, one each per released bull. From the waves of stampeding runners, a sight emerges loping along on stubby legs. An oddly disturbing image of his taller companions, dressed in his doll-like white pants and red sash. While those around him flail frantically, hugging the walls of the alley for safety, Jol, the Spanish dwarf, steadily trots freely, as if jogging on an ocean’s edge. Behind him a line of bellowing, bursting, bulls careen forward, almost proudly following the dwarf, moving along in slow motion.

For a moment Danny dreams Jol to be a dancing bandleader in a Disney cartoon, marching along in smiling uniform, the musician bulls on parade, following in leaping step.

The image is torn asunder however, as the lead bull leaves the pack and crushes over its bandleader followed by a torrent of frenzied bull-followers in its path, rushing to trample the body of the Spanish dwarf. Jol’s arms shatter and splay askew and miniscule legs crack to the stone streets, flooding crimson blood across the granite.

Lisette and the crowds scream in horror and the proverbial moment of truth occurs. From the tragedy before him, and frozen in time, Danny knows it, helpless to act

but omniscient in knowledge and consequence and stands in place, considering.

So simple and so honest, this next moment will be the absolute revealing of Lisette’s true desire.

For when one is in terrified shock, it is driving instinct that he or she will turn to someone for embracing contact, to hide their head in a semblance of comfort or escape from the trauma at hand. Lisette stands immediately between Simon and Danny. Simon the Spaniard, who is dashing, arrogant, worldly, and lacking of any sensitivities. He, Danny, who is conservative, quiet, dull, and now dreading his foresight. Simon to the left of her and him to the right.

Lisette clamps her hand to her mouth and shields her face, turning sharply to the left, the side of classic betrayal, the side of Simon, to his embracing arms as she buries her head to his chest. In moments of sudden horror and despair, no thought is given; simply natural instinct and Lisette could not hide her yearning of choice.

The murderous bulls have now run from view towards the distant arena and their own impending execution. Medics rush into the streets to gather the crushed and lifeless body of Jol, the Spanish dwarf, and Danny turns away, turns walking whence he came, down the stone steps.

Whatever we do is predestined, he thinks of the babblings of Claude’s words repeating the same events over and over again.

Despairing, he sees Lisette falling to Simon over and over again.

Time marches on and the world repeats itself, we are always the same, we have been the same, over and over again.

Claude and Jol had spoken at length and perhaps the Spanish dwarf had misunderstood, or perhaps he had truly discovered what Danny could not in his own lackluster mind. Perhaps Jol had sought to break the cycle on his own terms. Danny could only imagine a loss in his own life, a searing loneliness replayed over eternity, Lisette forever falling away from him, to Simon.

For the Spanish dwarf, his was the release of the cycle of repeated time.

For Danny, his was the cycle of suffering to begin anew.

He replayed these thoughts. A cycle of suffering. Was this to be his life? His eternity? Perhaps he would just walk away. Take a train to the airport and fly to his empty home. Perhaps he would work through this... perhaps he would fall in love again. Perhaps Claude was wrong.

He thought perhaps... just perhaps, he would run with the bulls tomorrow. 🐂

Memory

Peter Colwell

Memory is a radio station that only comes in every now and then. I can’t adjust the antenna and get a clear sound or image. The time and place have to be exact for memory.

I don’t turn the dial on to call memory. Memory just arrives. I don’t want it to come. I would prevent memory if I could. Destroy all the memories before they can come. That is what the numbers and the ratio suggest that I should do. Memory delivers far more bad memories than good ones.

Memory has no precursor. At least no precursor that I am conscious of. It interrupts. Conversation. Thought. Sleep. Concentration. Happiness. Sadness.

Memory is so powerful. It can wake me up. Make me cry. Make me cringe. Make me sick. Make me excited. Make me believe. Make me doubt.

When memory comes, it plays only what it wants to deliver.

Say it is a dark recollection. Memory might only play a portion of the dark event.

Maybe the portion where I didn’t prevent the event. I saw a bike accident form before it occurred. Saw the car and bike rider. Never shouted “Stop!” or “Watch out!” Never helped the biker or the driver after the accident. “Someone else will help.”

Or where I created the dark event. I kicked him while he was on the ground. He was already bleeding. And he was smaller than me.

Or when I felt sad. I can’t change it. I can’t make both of them happy. I can only please one. At the expense of the other.

Or I was fuming. Fuck everyone. Everyone is cruel and self-serving.

Or ashamed. I just said “yes” to get it over with. But it mattered more than that. Mattered enough for me to carefully decide. To give it time. Think it through.

Memory plays good recollections too.

A made three-pointer. The crowd screamed my name. Town hero for another night. If only it could have lasted.

The first day I got my dog. Everything was new to her. Her leash. Collar. Treats. Petting. I introduced her to toys, even though she was already an adult. She had never played before. A *rescue* dog. Fuck that. She rescued me. Gave me purpose. Before her, if I had a loaded nine-millimeter it would have found my mouth. Discharged and splattered whatever is in my head.

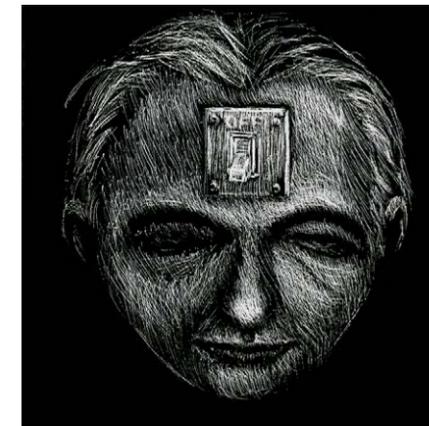
There it is. Memory—or is it my brain?—always counters the goodness in a recollection with something bad. It plays my missed free throw in the fourth quarter of the regional championship game. There were just seconds left. The game was tied. We lost in overtime.

Memory plays when my dog ran away. Lost for three weeks during the winter. I maintained hope for two weeks. I searched every dark corner. Zeroed in on every golden-haired tail or ear. After two weeks, my soul gave in. I gave up on her. Then someone called us. My dog was in the caller’s shed, just a few miles from our house. She was scared. She bared her teeth for the only time in her life. She

wanted to be home. Safe. We picked her up. I felt elated. But ashamed. I gave up before she did. She must have loved me more than I loved her.

Memory is so ruthless. Rewinds and plays again. Years later, we put her down. I decided to put her down. I was too hasty. I just said “yes” to get it over with. I should have given her more time. Given God more time to save her.

Please turn memory off. 🐂



ERIC J. GUIGNARD writes (mostly) dark and speculative fiction from his office in southern California. His most recent writing credits include *Stupefying Stories Magazine*, *+Horror Library+ Vol 5* (Cutting Block Press), *The Horror Zine Magazine*, and *Indie Gypsy*. He’s a member of the Horror Writer’s Association and the Greater Los Angeles Writer’s Society. Although his passion is for fiction, he’s also a published essayist and editor, including this year’s acclaimed collection, *Dark Tales of Lost Civilizations*. Look for the next anthology, *After Death...*, to be released in Spring, 2013. Visit Eric at: www.ericjguignard.com



PETER TYREE MORRISON COLWELL is from a small, bucolic town in Maryland. He now lives just outside Washington, D.C with his beautiful wife (green eyes) and beautiful dog (boxer). “Memory” is Peter’s first published fiction.



Perfect Execution

Andrew Stancek

Simon runs a white cloth over every gleaming surface. The windows squeak as he buffs a third time. In the scalding tub his pores sigh; he runs a straight razor over scalp, face, chest, arms, genitals, legs. Inhale-exhale, breath regulated, he lingers on each movement, allows no skin to be broken. After vein-opening, just how red would the water be, he wonders. Stench after decomposition is the stumbling-block — no reason for the carcass to be discovered. He disposes of all the hair after scouring the tub.

The oversized white jug of Superbleach glugs as he pours its contents into the fish tank. The shrieks bounce off the glass but he pays them no mind. The water curdled and opaque, black shapes litter the surface.

Among the belly-up bodies, Scorpio, his Black Phantom Tetra, gazes at him with an “I should have known” look before he pirouettes in the roiling water where even the Vallisneria plants curl. Simon embraces the imagined flight of the tank off the balcony, down twenty-three floors, the thud of ground contact.

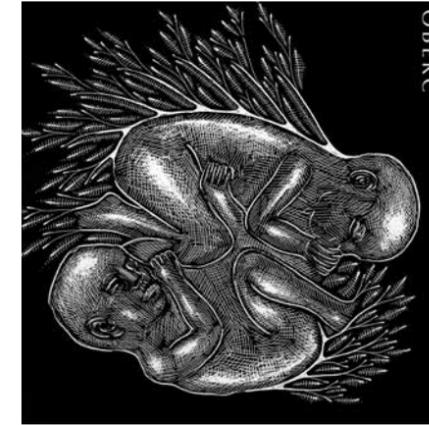
Three days since his last supper, he thinks. The caress of the surface of a giant strawberry in a Swarovski bowl, one side oozing, pleases him. He chomps half off, relishes the juice trickle and squishes the rotting half into the Paul Klee *Castle and Sun* reproduction on the wall. Mush oozes through his fingers.

A line of ants crosses the kitchen counter, following the leader. Simon considers a bleach holocaust or a thumb staccato typhoon but refrains from action.

Blinding sun streams through the slats; he flicks them shut. Over a hundred degrees three minutes before noon. On the balcony he divests himself of clothes, startled at his hardness. He climbs the railing, chuckles at the thought of a parasol. Eyes wide open, he springs. Going past the seventeenth floor he slows to wave at a raven-haired beauty in a black bikini and sunglasses. She looks up from her raw steak and returns the wave. 🌀



ANDREW STANCEK was born in Bratislava and saw Russian tanks occupying his homeland. His dreams of circuses and ice cream, flying and lion-taming, miracle and romance have appeared recently in *The Windsor Review*, *r.kv.r.y*, *Tin House online*, *Flash Fiction Chronicles*, *The Linnet's Wings*, *Connotation Press*, *THIS Literary Magazine*, *Thunderclap Magazine*, *Istanbul Literary Review* and *Pure Slush*. His novel-in-stories, starring a teenager named Mirko, set in Bratislava in the sixties, is nearing completion.



A Dearth of Exploitation in Southwark

KJ Hannah Greenberg

Rachel's first trip to England didn't go as planned. Whereas she had suspected, all along, that Darcy would dump her to marry her flatmate, Beth, it hurt Rachel that eight short months later she had not been included in their celebration. She had already purchased an indigo fascinator of feathers, of flowers, and of jewels, as well as had made a final payment on a matching suit. As for her transatlantic plane ticket, Rachel had saved significantly by buying one that was nonrefundable.

Hence, she found herself sorting through cards and envelopes in a London stationary shop and stopping, intermittently to dab at her face. All the curry in the world could not compensate her for her delicate situation. In the past, speaking softly and acting primly had served her well. At present, though, her bump, to which I had contributed, was showing. Rachel had rocketed toward our rebound romance.

I had remained much less teachable than she had anticipated, making her rebellion that much more exciting and making her journey into motherhood that much more burdensome. Perhaps my silver whiskers had belied my character although I never claimed to be more than a retired European history teacher. With flame and fury, Rachel had demanded my carnal attentions, and, once fecund, had demanded, my full emotional devotion, too.

When confronted, I responded in a voice that shook light fixtures. My words were plain; I meant to remain engaged in my middle class life. Rachel answered with small civility, spitting that she was taking a permanent leave and that my person had not evolved past a toadstool blossoming in swine swill.

Nonetheless, she sent me a cell phone self-portrait sufficiently detailed as to reveal both of her chins. That youngster also sent me a photo of her stomach extending over ramparts. The bridge in question could have been the Southwark or the Blackfriars. That woman could have been sharing a view or threatening suicide. Our dalliance

had been long on scotch and short on talk, so, even today, I don't know. What's more, I wonder that she managed to scale those parapets; the British police are protective of their bulwarks.

A few days later, Rachel texted me, informing me of her fiduciary state, and claiming, indelicately, that our future child deserved more tea time at Brown's Hotel, and its mother deserved hosiery of at least 110 deniers. She added that she was no longer a woman of means, having maxed out her credit cards a fortnight after her arrival in the United Kingdom, and her savings shortly thereafter. It was an additional pity that I happened to lose my cell phone following receipt of that text.

The following week, Rachel sent a fax to my home office. That telecopy, somewhat belligerent in tone, declared Rachel was giving our baby up for adoption to the highest bidder. The market for healthy, fair-skinned newborns still thrives in Britain. As well, she made mention that hospital delivery, abroad, even when overseen by midwives, cost a princely sum of sterling and that halfway fashionable maternity clothes are anything but free. I wired twenty dollars.

Her next fax was a scan. That message was built from letters cut from assorted magazines and newspapers and arranged without regard to font. Further, that missive consisted, mostly, of profanities.

I believe that little Rachel's personal aspirations, the ones she saw herself failing, had been constructed from myths about family harmony and about the merits of a college education. Her parents enjoyed a silent marriage. Rachel's studies of social anthropology, prior to her sojourn to England, had only brought her into urban centers twice, both of which times she was accompanied by butt-kicking aikido friends from her womyn's circle. When the two of us had met, the summer after her graduation, I had already been her father's bridge partner for three years.

Rachel's last successful fax contained an advertisement.

A moneyed family was seeking a wet nurse;

Wet Nurse Wanted 100 GBP/week: Healthy, nonsmoker, nondrinker, nutritionally educated and compliant, needed to help with our newborn's feeding. We'll loan you portable, cordless, advanced breast pump equipment, which frees up both your hands while you are extracting milk simultaneously from both your breasts. You can pump and surf the Internet or pump and have coffee with friends.

We are only asking for your milk. You can pump at your convenience. We will pick up. Preferably, you have good milk output (0.5-0.8 L/day) and are a seasoned mother (3 or more biological children). Your services will be needed between 6 and 12 months. Please reply to milkforbaby@riches.com or call 20-354-7434

I pulled a few wires, at random, from the guts of my fax

machine. My own teenagers were inconvenienced at not having that apparatus functional, but I knew peace, again, for a while.

When Rachel and I had become an item, despite the fact that she was their only child, her parents had disowned her, even wrote her out of their will. Her father went farther, dropping me from his life. Subsequently, he took up poker. Her mother got plastic surgery, liposuction, and filed for divorce. My own spouse tells me that Rachel's mom is currently teaching belly dancing in Minnesota.

A short time after my office equipment malfunctioned, Rachel began to buy notices in our hometown newspaper. Mostly, she posted that she was seeking contributors to a book about the discrepancy between medical institutions' intended portrayals of childbirth loss and common folks' understanding of the same. Allegedly, she had delivered a stillborn at seven months of gestation. Sadly, for little Rachel, few persons participated in her project.

Time passed. The warm air of summer became, once more, the brisk draught of autumn. I received a final communication from Rachel, a telegram. She was studying Farsi and was seeking to emigrate permanently. Specifically, she was preparing to join the Foreign Legion. ↻



Retaliation

Nick Sansone

Out of fear, I spend a large proportion of my time researching bears. Nine out of ten forestry websites agree: if a bear hassles you in the woods, you can protect yourself by finding that bear's personal weaknesses and exploiting them.

These websites often include expert testimony in regards to a bear's vulnerabilities. Some say that a bear's underbelly is tender; others say that you can strike a bear on the nose at surprisingly little risk to yourself.

Personally, however?

If a bear begins to inconvenience me with its claws by shredding and ripping? Well.

Personally, I would like to have a secure Plan B.

The thing is: I understand where my fear comes from, even though it isn't rational.

When I was much younger, my brother's hand froze to a chain-link fence. The school nurse utilized a resternotomy saw, a reaming system, and a self-retaining perforator to cleave him free, scattering frozen tissue in wide red arcs across the foursquare court. I have since realized that this event has had its effect on me, though it has affected my brother to an even greater degree.

My brother, you see, survived, physically speaking, but today he lives alone like a scavenger, limbless and jaded. His eyes occasionally flash in an ursine manner. So.

I don't think it's unreasonable to conjecture that my fear of bears is really a fear of all things untamed.

This is why I sleep with a pistol—or, speaking more honestly, this is why I clutch a pistol as I fail to sleep at night. This is why I am awake always. ↻



KJ HANNAH GREENBERG snorts and snuffs in poetry and prose. In 2009 and 2011, Hannah was nominated, in the genre of poetry, for the Pushcart Prize. In 2012, also in poetry, she was nominated for The Best of the Net. Hannah's most recent books include: a full-length poetry collection, *A Bank Robber's Bad Luck with His Ex-Girlfriend*, Unbound CONTENT, 2011; two poetry chapbooks *Fluid & Crystallized*, Fowlpox Press, 2012, and *Supernal Factors*, The Camel Saloon Books on Blog, 2012; and a short fiction collection, *Don't Pet the Sweaty Things*, Bards & Sages Publishing, 2012. In 2013, Vagabondage Press will launch one of Hannah's novels, *Ten Kilo and One Million*.



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NICOLAS SANSONE holds an MFA in Fiction from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and is the author of the novels *Shooting Angels* and *The Calamari Kleptocracy*. His short fiction has appeared in a number of venues, including *PANK*, *Pear Noir!*, *Denver Syntax*, *Bartleby Snopes*, *Whistling Shade*, *Big Lucks*, *Word Riot*, and *The Los Angeles Review*. More information, including a complete listing of his publications, is available at his website: nicksansone.yolasite.com

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John M. Bennett
Aug 2012

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...porque se puso el jabón en la boca.
-Nicanor Parra

Interview with Jean Seberg, Part 4

Stephanie E. Dickinson

Q: *The question has been asked, that if you had been only half as beautiful would you have married, had children and been an Iowa housewife not an iconic actress.*

SEBERG: The Iowa River schooled me, although I was already bigger than the place I'm from. At age four, my father brought me here to watch blue gill and carp bite the hook's surprise. In water they fought the line but once on land, the knife glinting its cornsilk light, they gave up. *What world is this? Where can we swim?* I saw their wide-open sun-scalded eyes begin to die. What a pitiful struggle. It clenched my fists and stole my breath. *Throw them back!* The fisherman laughed and cut. Slit open you'd see the blue gill's petal lungs still pumping. Tiny, translucent clouds of river weather.

At fifteen, I lived for *Screen Lives*. You couldn't drag me to the cast and reel. I'd trace the sneer on Marlon Brando's lip and kiss his leather jacket elbow's crease. I didn't yet know about the depression that comes from having a public. I'd repeat his words. "Success on the screen usually means failure as a human being."

I was always drawn to metamorphous.

The four stages of a butterfly. From egg to pupa to chrysalis to butterfly. I supped the flowers of a six-week life. What could be more sacred? I colored walls apricot brandy, scarlet creeper, and breeze. I wore pigeons and tulip trees and learned the language of ceilings.

Q: *The French say you have to break an American girl in like you would a horse. Give me an unforgettable childhood memory that broke you.*

SEBERG: Once my father snagged a snapping turtle. Its jaws clicking like triggers. Tail, neck, eyes ferociously alive. The rocks oozed heat. Bass trees hung heavily with grape vines and the current tugged the river's melting chocolate sludge along. I could see pink suns everywhere imprinted with my face. It was fame. A foretaste. In an instant your world flips its channel from black & white to Technicolor. The snapper outfought two men, the third brought him in. When my father cut off his head, I wept. They stripped the captive from his river shell and ate his strength. I screamed that heart meat is meant only for the chief. Notoriety baits you like that and then you're cooked. When the world learned the name Jean Seberg, I died. Although it took years for me to realize.

Q: *In 1970 The FBI planted the false story that you were pregnant not by your husband but by a member of the Black Panther Party. The story's purpose was to "cheapen your image." Subsequently, you took an overdose of barbiturates. Why?*

SEBERG: They called me the last all-American girl and so I could never forsake the Midwest. How could I shame Marshalltown? My watching parents? My first child Diego floated out of me in a dark house in Spain, an old lantern room that once burned a thicket of candles in a revolving chandelier. His father, Romain Gary, who believed we made love best in noonday sun, I later married. No one could accuse me of frigidity. Still, I refused to do nudity on-screen and Hollywood concocted a skintight body stocking. Then pregnant with my second child, the LA Times broke the Black Panther story.* A gift in fuchsia and lavender. Bees buzzed above me like a trance. I followed a trail of butterfly corpses leading me to a water lily world. I overdosed and accidentally lived, but two days later my baby died. *Nina, darling, my white-coffin baby. Forgive me, my barbiturate infant.* The lily forest swamped me. My feet sank in muck and I couldn't free them. I became psychotic or so said Romain, but how can you trust the word of a novelist? Everyone knows about the silences that must be filled.

Q: *If you could redo one event of your life, relive it with a different outcome what would it be?*

SEBERG: If God would allow it I'd give birth to my daughter again. Once I dreamed it real. My first two husbands are the midwives and I'm back in Iowa at my great-uncle's. The orchard. I'm lying between apple trees and filling my lungs with the cider perfume of the cool ground. Romain is feeling my belly to see if the baby has fallen down. Above me black grapes tug their wiry vines. Francois elevates my pelvis. Back arched, my mouth's a croak. I rake my fingers into earth. Romain smears fresh butter on my stomach and between my legs softening my uterus, touching, widening the place for the baby. Francois wetting my face. Don't look too hard at the ceiling. The girl

**Privately, I'd slept with two Panther men but not anywhere near the conception. The LA Times story was factually untrue.*



will never grow breasts. *Don't stare at the black green leaves or the child will ever be green with envy. Moon watching creates a sleepwalker.* Pushing, the legs propped, the hardest work. My head singing with dusk mourning doves. Romain's hands catch the sluice, fingers there to cradle the girl-thing sliding into this world. Jelly-being, creature fresh from infinity, held up by her feet, crying. I'll blanket us both in ground-soaking summer rain. The cord cut. Test the baby girl's cry, count her toes. I make her breathe.

Q: *In the late '60s and early '70s when you began to immerse yourself in radical politics, did you have any idea the FBI had actively begun a smear campaign against you?*

SEBERG: I couldn't imagine huge catfish ready to devour me. Not the scaleless wonder my father called the night-hunter who hides in deep water mud preying upon frogs and fish, that can snatch small birds. Think of a thrush trying to fly inside its gullet. Gossip columnists might come to mind. Or the FBI. Catfish touch with their barbells. Like eyes on stems these whiskers endlessly reaching out of the flat-headed bluish-black slime. J. Edgar Hoover kept Nixon himself informed about the *sex-perverted white actress*. Monster catfish five feet in length are said to eat small children. And boy-haired gamins. Vampirna catfish with poison spines hook themselves to other fish and gorge on their blood. *Promiscuous bitch* they named me, the wiretappers. I picture the underwater world, a frightened existence, a merciless food chain. They auctioned the armor I wore in *Saint Joan* for \$50,000.

Q: *You mentioned wiretapping. What was it like?*

SEBERG: They're listening. A radio alarm is blinking. A noise that chants Bible verses and translates into Chinese. *Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.* In my kitchen I make circles with my feet to throw them off my trail. I flint blades from blue stone. COINTELPRO. Wiretaps make it difficult. I grind my heel into the carpet rather than chat. They're everywhere. Hunched in vans. In my refrigerator. The sky's a legion of wiretapping men in suits and ties with close cropped hair. I hear them mutter. *Jean Seberg must be neutralized. The promiscuous wench.* J. Edgar Hoover prances through my dreams in a black satin off-the-shoulder dress and a string of long white pearls. *How would she like an FBI .38 shoved into her?* My crime a \$12,000 contribution for an inner-city soup kitchen. The migraines come. I darken my bedroom to full night. The surveillance team has set up a volleyball net in the flat above. Wrist bones spank the ball like claps of thunder. The concierge tells me no-one lives up there. Yet day and night I decipher planted messages. Nembutals soften the hook they're pierced me with. My soul's hiding under a fish rag. While the white trout moon suckles all of Paris, I nurse on my pillow.



Q: *Your interracial love affairs or friendships were said to be triggers for the FBI. On May 1, 1973, your friend Hakim Jamal, a black activist, was murdered.*

SEBERG: I stood in a tee-shirt and white skirt and leaned over the railing, then I stepped back and pulled my skirt up, fanning my slip and legs as if airing myself. I bit back my breath. Jamal thought he was the Almighty. He wanted to speak for the cosmos. To free us all from slavery. He liked to lay his women on two folding chairs, head on one, feet on the other, and by his consciousness cause their bodies to vibrate, and then levitate. Your soul might be breaking from snow's weight, but when he spoke it flowered into a pale orange monarch.

That's what his voice was. Inside his eyes the forests of Mexico waited, high altitude humid ones where butterflies migrated.

I flew a continent to him. Stupid. Thousands of silken soft wings ricocheting between treetops until a million fluttered. He gestured and my torso rose. Could I doubt him? An English heiress introduced us. It was pure belief. Sometimes he applied the blindfold.

Who can't remember the dark of one monarch trembling on your skin then hundreds seeking warm in your body's crevices, sounding like a great sob. You are the tree and your arm-branches flood. Afterwards you write checks. More and more checks until you realize you'd been duped. The weight of that more crushing than a wall, a living weight in pieces—the gilt silkiness shorn by amber wings. A con man's cocoon. I suffocated standing up.

The night four killers buzzed his door, he let them in. They were friends who put bullets through his temple. They left him wearing a leather thong that cupped his groin like old coins in a Rome fountain. A huckster's death. Still I wept.

Q: *You survived two suicide attempts and even had thoughts of a comeback, what happened?*

SEBERG: What is a comeback? It means you've gone somewhere. Everyone knows about the barbiturates and liquor, but they don't know about the apples trees growing from my chest. The knobbed bark of my skin furrowed like a sun-scorched lizard. Who poured apricot nectar in my veins? Like copper electrical wire my nerves are eaten by mice. Today I am hollow. My only friends are junkies and film students. Tomorrow I'm a pair of leafy wings parachuting into the Moulin Rouge. I crash a party of squirrels. They are gnawing the pronoun I in my marrow. Food no longer tastes like cream gravy and cherries jubilee. If what they take in their nostrils is me, I'm a haunted aroma. A vanishing image, a yellowish-white mist. Persona.

Q: *Your Renault was discovered by an off-duty policeman near the Champs-Élysées He saw you on the floor in back*

bundled in a blue blanket. Rumors still abound about whether you were murdered?

SEBERG: Third try. I like pills with tragic Greek names, Ativan, Ultram, Xanax. After I shake out one, I fill the waterglass. I sit on the toilet for a long time. The drops pinging against the side of the bowl turn into a gushing waterfall, then back to gentle spring rain. I chew the purple pill. Two is a perfect number, two is twins. Pill crumbs stick to my tongue like croisants. A terrycloth robe hangs from a hook on the door. I like the way I disappear. When I kneel on the carpet, it feels like I'm sinking. It's nice here in the warm grass. I don't know how long I've been kneeling when my teeth start to chatter. The temperature of the carpet is dropping, and the robe feels like snow. I'm almost too frozen to stand up, and I have to claw my way out of the terrycloth. I take the pill bottle with me into the hall. I open more doors. Bedroom. Bathroom. Bedroom. A shaft of icy sun hits my face from



the skylight. My shoulder bumps into the wall. I bounce back and forth. I think I'd like to have wings growing from my back like that man in the photograph, the one with gold hair. Then I find my car keys. How can I be cold? It's August. A heat wave is on. Thousands of fish dead in the River Seine.

Q: *Did you think you would miraculously survive?*

SEBERG: I can hear the Iowa river. I'm back at the start. A river surrounded by cliffs rises from the cornfield countryside. The green has a divinity to it. It's my druggist father's fishing day. No one believed I was burning with fever. Like Saint Joan when Preminger put me to the stake. I dragged myself along, before dropping to the ground. Visions filled me. I lived the future. I blink my wide-open sun-scalded eyes. *What*

world is this? Where am I? I can see a stone house on a cliff set way up on the coolest rocks. Who lives there in the sky house? A beautiful actress? An aging celebrity God? 📖



STEPHANIE DICKINSON raised on an Iowa farm now lives in New York City. Her novel *Half Girl* is published by Spuyten Duyvil as well as the novella, *Lust Series*. She is the winner of New Delta Review's 2011 Matt Clark Fiction prize judged by Susan Straight. Her work has appeared in many journals including *Fjords*, *Nimrod*, *Tusculum Review*, *Bluestem*, *Mudfish*, and *Stone Highway Review*. Her new novel *Waking Water* will appear in 2013 from Rain Mountain Press. Along with Rob Cook she edits **SkidrowPenthouse.net**. Although she was once a farm girl she's a member of Farm Sanctuary and American Fandouk, a veterinary clinic that serves the working animals of Morocco and their human families. Her website is StephanieDickinson.net

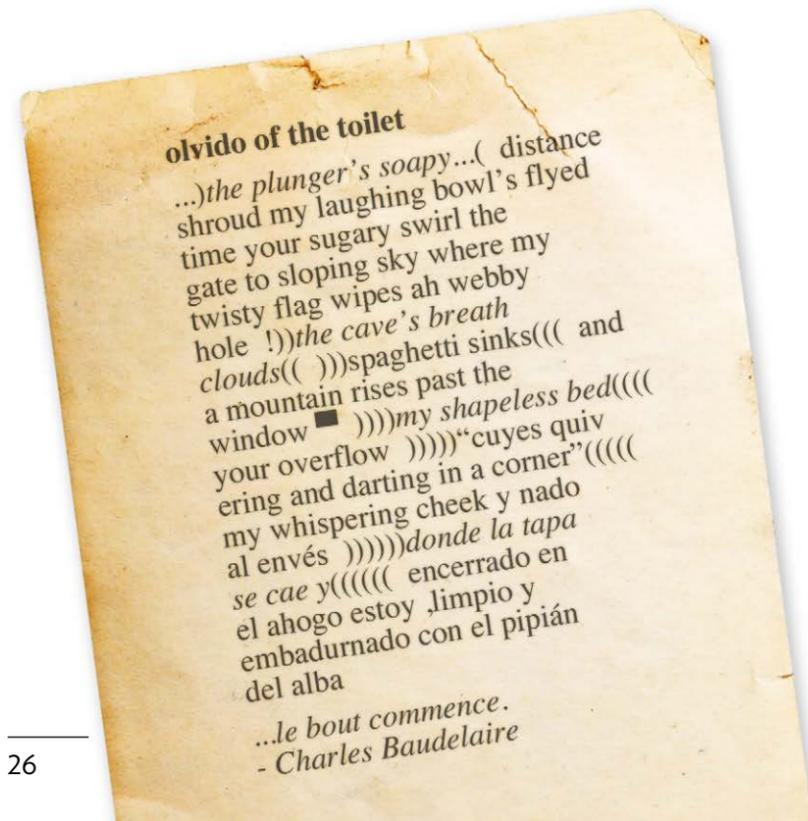


The Cane Flays Bare

James Claffey

Church bells disturb morning, bubble down from rigid waterfalls of stone. Chapters read and reread with unmitigated grayness, the joy of celestial bodies moving through time and space, the point of a ballet slipper as it touches on polished wood. The river billows over polished rocks, natterjacks in trees, dirty gray clouds streaking across steeped sky, snow turned to slush in a musical interlude. The stonemasons' guild shut forever, next-door to the hardware shop. In a classroom they learn of punnic wars and juried decisions, the tin can filled with pennies for the curses uttered on the playground. Bother only yourself, leave the others alone. The words of wisdom, the bangs, the bells, the falling bodies, fingers and toes counted over and over. Three touches and you must pass the ball. Bundled up coats are goalposts, a game of skill, as John O'Connor flakes the ball towards the goal, his thick curled hair unmoved by the east wind. Small boy grits his teeth as the master swishes bamboo arsewards. A sadist. The way the man hikes his sleeves up, thick, knotted arms—three cheers for savagery and prayers of mercy wordlessly muttered to a tin god. The first blow, a bluff, the hand stayed. On the second one the cane flays bare skin and cries from small lips chime in unison with the disturbed church bells. 📖

— James Claffey's bio can be found on pg. 9



the clotted plants uh
crawl beside my cha ir
uh linty pill uh break
fog's crispy sugar or
your uh dungk lap sticky
clock uh spattered
L ea F

John M. Bennett

ARTISTS & STORYTELLERS APPEARING IN THIS ISSUE



JOHN M. BENNETT ... Pages 22-23, 26, 28 ...

has published over 400 books and chapbooks of poetry and other materials. Among the most recent are *The Gnat's Window* (Luna Bisonte Prods) and *Drilling For Suit Mystery* (with Matthew T. Stolte; Luna Bisonte Prods). He has published, exhibited and performed his word art worldwide in thousands of publications and venues. He was editor and publisher of *Lost And Found Times* (1975-2005), and is Curator of the Avant Writing Collection at The Ohio State University Libraries. His work has been collected in several major institutions, including Washington University (St. Louis), SUNY Buffalo, The Ohio State University, The Museum of Modern Art, and others. His PhD (UCLA 1970) is in Latin American Literature. JohnMBennett.net



CHAD ROSEBURG ... Pages 3, 15, 17, Back Cover ...

is of possible Jewish descent. Superstition, Klezmer music and Chinese candy wrapper designs inform many of his artistic works. He is interested in the places at which art, music, technology and language intersect.



KYRA WILSON ... Inside Front Cover, Page 10 ...

is an artist residing in Vermont with her family, and has been painting for over 20 years. Kyra tried going the expected career route in business, but ended up working in an office with flickering fluorescent lights, zero windows, way too many spreadsheets, and people with suspenders. She escaped, and embraced color and movement as her passion. Creating in Oils, Acrylic, and Watercolor, she works in a predominantly fantasy style, but visits the contemporary and even abstract realms on occasion! Kyra's work can be found at KWilsonStudio.com



DAVID SIMMER II ... Art Director, THRICE Fiction Magazine ...

is a graphic designer and world traveler residing in the Pacific Northwest of these United States. Any artistic talent he may have is undoubtedly due to his father making him draw his own pictures to color rather than buying him coloring books during his formative years. He is co-founder and art director of *Thrice Fiction Magazine* and blogs daily at Blogography.com



RW SPRYSZAK ... Editor, THRICE Fiction Magazine ...

participated in the alternative zine scene in the 80's & 90's and wound up editing *The Fiction Review*. Some of his work from that era (*Slipstream*, *Lost and Found Times*, *Asylum*, *Version90* and others) is included in John M Bennett's Avant Writing Collection at the Ohio State University Libraries. Currently editor at *Thrice Fiction Magazine*. He can be found online at rwspryszak.com



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