

THRICE

FICTION™



ISSUE No. 26 • AUGUST 2019



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Published three times yearly

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RW Spryszak, Editor
David Simmer II, Art Director

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THRICE PUBLISHING NFP, a private corporation registered in the state of Illinois, reaches outside the mainstream to publish the work of selected writers whose efforts, we feel, need to be seen. It's flagship publication, **THRICE** FICTION, has been a platform for presenting this work alongside exceptional artwork since 2011. **THRICE** ARTS provides design and editing services to writers at large.

Thrice 26 Notes

RW Spryszak, Editor



The realities of small literary magazines are thus; there is no revenue from ads, no subscription income, and little – if any – newsstand sales. If a litmag doesn't have a grant or an established distribution network it has only what little it can gather from donations, pocket money from the masthead, or whatever other means possible.

And these means include blood sucking internet machines who get most of the online sales money and send shit to the small press and its writers if ever a copy is purchased.

Unless there is a real-world agreement with a shop printing company and another agreement with an established distribution network there is usually only print-on-demand. Which is a bullshit way to do things. And the plain fact is that printers, distributors, and the post office, require their money up front from operations like this.

Dave Simmer and I started Thrice with an initial investment of a few hundred dollars and have relied on a small stream of tax deductible donations and a miserable payout from print-on-demand companies, plus money taken from our own lives, for all these 9 years we've been in operation. The thousands of readers – at one point 5000 individualized hits a month – means goodwill and an audience, which is wonderful. But it was free. So, reality check. I do recall a litmag I ran in the very early 90s that had more submissions than subscriptions and any ads I ran were trades with other litmags. That's it.

The biggest pain in the heart has always been the black fact that we've never been able to send anything for participation to the writers and artists who made this magazine. Not even so much as a "free" copy or a small honorarium. Because everything like that costs money we don't have.

There are plenty of long-established literary magazines that have some form of payment. They are backed by grants. Institutions, and universities. We're not one of those. And – as a side note – to those writers and artists who criticize small press magazines like ours who can't afford to pay anything because of a lack of funds – go to these places and see if your work is good enough for you to get paid for it, if we're such an insult to you. And to those who say "*well, if you can't make any money your magazine deserves to die*" – fuck you and the adolescent libertarian clowns you suck ideas from.

So... all this is the long way around the barn to say that this issue before you right now is the penultimate. And by the time you read this the stuff for the December issue will be in the hopper. And, in December, we close.

We close this iteration. We plan to re-emerge but with a different format and presentation. The details of all that are not decided on yet. But we're still around and will be. There will probably be more details in the December issue.

And thanks to our friends. Always.



The Haunting of Piedras Blancas

DC Diamondopolous

There is no end to my love for Jemjasee. I pace the ragged cliffs, searching the sea for her ship. My longing will not cease until I am entwined in her marble wash of lavender and green arms.

It's dawn. The sunlight's red varnish stretches across the Santa Lucia Mountains. The mist from the sea floats through the Monterey Cypress. Backlit in pink stands the Piedras Blancas Lighthouse.

The waves caress my vestige feet. The foam licks my revenant face. The damp never seeps into my gossamer bones. My long silk robe opens, my breasts exposed to the witless wind. It hisses, jeers, but I am invincible, adrift in my chariot of grief.

The gulls perch in conference on the white rock. Beyond is the blue empty sky, the vast sea without sails, no horizon. Blue. *Come, Jemjasee.* Am I to roam this rugged coastline for eternity, this journey without distance? I feel doomed, my

struggle invisible. *You must come, Jemjasee. Save me from my weariness.*

I skim the jagged bluff. The elephant seals raise their massive heads when they see me then fall back to sleep.

Along the winding path, I float unnoticed by gardeners and groundskeepers. I glide over the pebbled lane, past stone cottages, a gift shop, the bell and tower.

Slipping through the walls of the lighthouse, I float to the stairs. Tourists gasp when I appear. "The website didn't say anything about a magic show," someone says. "It's like Disneyland!" cries a child. Their zeal echoes around the cylindrical walls. I nod, playing along with the charade. It's not always like this. Some days, people are thick with fear. They flee from my presence. When the sun shines, I'm an act. If the fog veils the coast, I'm a phantom. Most days, they don't see me at all.

"Ah, that's my wench." I recognize the guide's garbled,

liquored voice, his gnarled laugh. A salty ex-sailor, he sometimes comes alone, drinking, running after me, catching air.

On the step, I look into his weather-beaten face. His sunken eyes leer.

Damn foolish scoundrel.

Turning, gliding over the wrought-iron stairs to the deck, I let my robe fall. Naked. "This isn't for kids!" Offended, parents usher their children outside, then turn for one last glimpse at my beautiful body.

I continue. Invulnerable. My feet sail over spiral wrought-iron stairs, my fingers sweep above the narrow curving rail.

Everyone has gone, except for the guide, who looks up at me and says, "You elusive lass, I relish the day I grab your long red hair and make you mine."

He'll never get the chance.

Inside the lantern room, the beacon has no purpose. Still, it shines for those who live along the coast and the tourists driving by. I glide outside to the widow's walk. From the empty skies to the ocean's bed, nothing rises or descends.

Jemjasee, if you love me, come.

Not long past, her ship rose out of the sea, and beams of lights pranced above the waves. Particles rearranged themselves, silver, glittered. The mirage shimmied into form. A shape malleable to Jemjasee's thoughts, horizontal, then vertical, a kaleidoscope of color reflecting the terrain, the craft visible only when she wanted.

Jemjasee was too good for me, too advanced. Not only did I fall in love with her, but the idea of what I, too, might become. She couldn't suffer the stench of violence that infused my planet. If exposed too long, her breath ceased. I had to go with her, or not.

But how could I journey outside of my own world? Fear ransacked my mind. It stuffed my schooling, programming, upbringing into a box that, god forbid, I break out and beyond until I'm unfettered by the lies I've been taught—crammed it down my cranium, and just to be sure, set a lid, a square hat with a tassel on top, to keep it all in.

My decision to leave Earth was as ragged and split as the cliffs of my homeland.

After anguishing in my cottage, gazing on memories, touching knickknacks, holding friendships in picture frames, I pondered all I would lose. The future—too elusive, too great a change, my past—something I clung to.

I can't leave.

Jemjasee held me, the feeling of sadness so great no words would comfort. My heart was shrouded in sorrow. She walked the waters as her ship ascended from the sea.

The vessel hovered above the waves, a silver triangle. Sleek, like Jemjasee. It rolled on its side, morphed into a vertical

tower, with a fissure, and she entered. A thousand lights, curved and colored, sparked, flashed, then disappeared.

The instant she left, I knew my mistake.

And so it began, the tears of regret and self-loathing. I missed the woman who was so full of love, that she knew nothing of its opposite.

One day, while my mind slipped down around my ankles, I sat in my cottage, staring at a collage of empty food cartons, magazines, dust bunnies, paint chips, shattered wine glasses, a broken window from where the wind whispered, *Go ahead. Do it.*

On that day, I chose to end my suffering. With clarity restored and a mission in sight, I tossed a rope over the living room beam and tied a hoop large enough for my head, but small enough for my neck. From the kitchen, I dragged a chair and placed it underneath the shaft.

I climbed on the seat, put the noose over my neck, and kicked out the chair.

I dangled. Minutes went by, and still I was alive. Then my neck broke and life ebbed. Somewhere I drifted, first as a dark cloud, then into a gauzy realm where I was still—me. Oh, my outrage to discover that I could kill my body but never my Self!

A shadowy reflection of the woman Jemjasee loved, I roamed the rim of the bluff for another chance to leave, hoping she'd return.

I saw her. In my rapture I wailed, *Jemjasee!*

She walked the shore, shouting, *Astrid! I'm here for the last time. Come, before your planet strikes back for the harm done to it.*

I ran down the cliff. My kisses lingered deep in her neck. My hands seized her stalks of short black hair.

Jemjasee looked through me even as my mouth covered hers, my fingertips drunk from the touch of her.

Nothing, not my cries or kisses could rouse her.

Sobbing, I screamed, *Can't you see me—don't you know I'm here!*

Then she saw me and backed away. I saw the horror there in her golden eyes. Her shock pierced my translucent heart.

Please forgive me.

Her kind never sheds tears. Jemjasee had told me that on her island in the universe, there were no reasons to cry, but looking into her perfect lavender and green marble colored face, I saw a tear on the threshold of falling.

I was ashamed.

She left by way of the ocean as her ship rose out of the sea.

Condemned, I pace the ragged cliffs, the gulls in flight, the lighthouse behind me, on an endless quest to be with my beloved, forever adrift, because I hadn't the daring to journey past my sphere. 🌀



DC DIAMONDOPOLOUS is an award-winning short story and flash fiction writer with over 150 stories published internationally in print and online magazines, literary journals, and anthologies. DC's stories have appeared in: *So It Goes: The Literary Journal of the Kurt Vonnegut Museum and Library*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Raven Chronicles*, *Silver Pen*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, and many others. DC was nominated for Best of the Net Anthology. She lives on the beautiful California central coast. dcdiamondopolous.com



Passport for Countries That Don't Exist

AE Reiff

Antares that bother and Betelgeuse pressing on my head. The solar system too, planets and moons. Man they cannot decide whether in Cancer Laniakea, Virgo Rosh Hoshana, Capricorn Rome or Aries, but every memory helps. One transcendent, some good dreams of the present, the list is long. How did Adam sustain his teeth? The west wall of Jerusalem is on my head. The geologic layers, the Babylonian Talmuds. The Lehmann discontinuity, the Mohorovičić discontinuity, I am walking on its surface, walking water in which I sink, which gives some meaning of Leviathan and Jonah. And Jesus! 45 stone courses, 28 above and 17 underground.

Before Darius came down, before Nebuchadnezzar marched our limbs. Hadean, Archean, Proterozoic, Paleozoic, Mesozoic, where have remains not penetrated above and below? Every element burns its chemical. Captives in the last phase of this perigee echo like pilots shot down, who bombed cities and crashed, and were brought to account before execution. I fall to my knees. My culpability and all others whose dust swirls this wind, cast into sea. I am carbon and gas reassembled, a festival shrouded by day, loosed at night. We should not tolerate such a contrary state in the conduct of our lives. Tramped alive with marching feet, a reconstitution of the world asks, whose grave is this, this one and this? A myth of space and time *Hierosolyma* are on my head before my own immolation.

A man returning after years of absence would know the place with his eyes closed by the rhythm of movement. It wouldn't matter even if he only imagined he could hear the one great rhythmic beat. People here are left to wonder how they could not know. Life among the culpable, sorry to admit, always blames another because it blames itself. Freedom, freedom, mock and throw. The culpable fasts and the inculpable lays naked. One person in the crowd has loosed a bull. It runs in the street. How could you be gored or know when you spend every day chasing the thing you sleep beside and see in the world in front, a tail in the sky and smell of the air, that heart feeling that controls? Twice, Noah, Daniel, Job, the wise King of Tyre, symbol of that star. It's like you precede them when you follow and live in a fall of Jerusalem that leads captive those who know. They know....

Survived exiles, these dilettantes inhabit the huge warehouses, posters of spiritual resistance. The warehouses never improve. Industrial residences with many stories and passages of unguarded ingress and egress above and below main stories. The first was a huge clapboard affair like a house in the colony, but many times larger and abandoned except for visits, many people in small spaces with real problems and close quarter. Latest in this environ was a dream yard of roofed parking lots, shacks and another huge warehouse that I owned, but all unsecured, never improved or even locked. It was occupied by vagrants, migrants, gypsies, tenants, homeless, squatters, working

men, blacksmiths, artists who had set up tables under the eaves. These shops in time turned into a bazaar.

Once fashionable this land was a massive hotbed of a million colored lights. Streets, cities, houses underground under a wonderfully made city of dreams fallen to ruin, a beauty of extinct volcanoes, fertile from the lava that grows the paradise orchard. You had to slip through holes to turn, wriggle your way out of the evening you wanted to survive. Streets and recesses overwrote history, millenniums over a century, a year, a day to a man sunk in a network of arteries and veins. Like colored maps run the body, aware and unaware of thought expressed before, put in words the waking existence led down. Topography over topography, built in labyrinths and lightning rods, flash cones of light in eyes of streets or sky, eyes that connect ancient quarries and vaults, tunnels and caverns beneath.

Down and down. I found the years of this descent. That's what they call what Abel descended from Adam and Eve, Issac and Ishmael descended down Abraham. Jacob and Esau descended in Isaac. Backtrack forward. Down and up, the sober cherubim, palm trees and every cherub a two faced man and young lion. The doors had two leaves and thick planks, three stories and other garments. To walk the vision I see where they put away the carcasses of kings. I was asleep hours, kidneys hiding in plain sight.

Darius, Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander were sprawled on top the rocks with those too superficial to be called out. Abandoned flat at the apex sat the King of Jerusalem, a deceased ecclesiast who survived the fall, who wrote as if these kings were appealing and not counterfeits who compared the treatment of Goliath's head with the disposal of his body. Rag picker history was surrounded by collectible data, ruins and blueprints of a dream city, Jerusalem spectral, estranged and sprawled. So, I haven't lived my life for nothing.

If you wanted to forget something that didn't officially exist, empire a terror in which the state as an end in itself grew a flow of stateless persons, *expatriates* flee to the West—not quickly, but in an achingly slow motion advance from one of the camps among wolves where dark purple blotches the eyes. Rumors were rife as the numbers swelled; various authorities demanded more and more papers of these refugees from the large black briefcase. Doors opened and closed, and then closed for good. Escape was uncertain, indexed not to terrain but to the possibility of laying hands on the right piece of paper that would enable exit, to discern that figural presence of a salvific lure. Changing the direction of its compass, the collective to transfigure the human overcomes all relations in the industrial earth. Then truth, elevating the person to the level of commodity

through entertainment, immerses, whistles in dark.

How do I weep for the stones in the building? I went down yesterday to see and smell and ended up on my belly cutting bags and black bags of wall, scissoring out the dripping red insulation of the Wailing, prying out the cracks between concrete, metal and wood. Sometimes mice droppings would fall out of the wall with the smell, mouse or rot musk, as I push up, get balanced, ease down another yard, feet sticking out among chairs and fans. Sighs of breath get me up like a blast off which leaves feeling pretty good, not thinking at least to dismantle the word and image machine. It was raining a little and that was when the lightning struck and killed them. That area every year has dead from the rays and people know it so. An average of deaths per year when the fatalities are added, hit by lightning so they could no longer do anything, a 21-year-old died and a man of 58 had to be hospitalized Sunday in that province,—altogether 55 or 60 million people died, rising to more than 70 million.

Looking east from the house and the law of the house to the way of the gate where the prince will enter, linen does not sweat, rest in peace, to measure the pattern, the difference between the holy and profane. No wine offerings or blood worship there, but river rising, first to the ankles then loins, many trees on both sides come from the east and flow to the sea, where all trees fruit according to months, one each for food and medicine because the water flows out from the house oblation, holy, four square possessing the city and the name of the city, Jerusalem, for Jahu is there to complete the restoration.

Jerusalem! Architecture of gold beyond history. As if commanded, a cupbearer entered the city with Alexander, toured the walls with Darius the Persian, Darius Nothus, and intermarried with the inhabitants of the land. I have Nennius for consolation in Britain and Neemias in Jerusalem. Artist talk, but not in words. Images explained away, reconstructed under pretense of light, reshaping attempted escapes, fantasy boats and fable captains, visas for the countries of Atlas and passports for countries that don't exist. At port we pass for one of the sailors. 📖



AE REIFF wrote *Restorations of the Golden Age in New World Discoveries*, *Encouragements for Such as Shall Have Intention to be Undertakers in the Planting*, and *The Songs of Taliesin*.



DreamSpace

Kilmeny MacMichael

Alessandra woke up. As the dream faded, she chased it.

The house was quiet. The curtains hanging over the large window in her bedroom were blowing in the wind. Alessandra had never lived in a house but she knew that was wrong. That window didn't open. She got out of bed and walked over to the curtains, watched her hand grabbing them and sweeping them back. Alessandra put her hand out, and her fingers were stopped by the glass.

"There isn't any danger, is there?" Neha asked.

"No more than in any other dreamings." Doctor Jackson increased the electric pulse.

Alessandra woke up, nearly falling out of the hammock as the ship groaned against a steep wave. She stepped down onto the planking. Around her, fellow prisoners muttered. She moved to the door, water sloshing around her feet. She balled her fingers into a fist and thumped the fist against wood. The door creaked on its hinges. Would they be let out if the ship started to sink? What good would that do? They would drown just as well in the open as inside. But I can sail this, she thought. Even in a storm.

The mainframe bleeped in the corner, and the habitat minutely changed its propulsion angle, tacking across the cage.

Neha frowned at the woman with the dream hood pulled over her head.

"I still can't believe she took us off autopilot like that."

"Space psychosis can happen to anyone."

"I hope she gets court marshalled."

Alessandra woke up inside an ancient industrial building. It was impossible to see the ceiling. Walking along a corridor, she heard someone calling her name.

She came to stairs. Halfway down the stairs, there was a gap, over nothingness. A conveyor belt stretched across the void to the bottom set of steps. From the bottom of the stairs, voices called. Come on down, they said. I can't, she said. There was a shimmering razor pendulum swinging from the invisible ceiling over the conveyor belt. I can't get past that, she said. Her hands began to tremble.

"If we have to wait for the algorithms to try every possible exit trajectory, we'll be here for thousands of years. And that's if there is a way. And if it's staying in one place."

Jackson said, "We came in, there has to be a way out."

"Nothing has to be," Neha said, "We don't know anything about dark matter cages. We didn't even know they existed until one trapped us."

"Now we know. We've made a great discovery. Congratulations."

"Oh sure, I'm delighted. I'll have my name on a list of the first crew trapped in a cage made out of unquantifiable matter. If we can get out to tell anyone. Hurray!"

"Better than nothing."

"Not what I signed up for." 🌀



KILMENY MACMICHAEL dreams in western Canada's Okanagan Valley and writes flash and short fiction. Her work has appeared in *antlang*, and online with *The Ilanot Review*, *Watershed Review*, *Sleet Magazine*, and other publications.



Under Alpacas

for Ali — Rich Glinnen

We saw them while descending the Bayside station stairs. They lay side by side on the dirt slope that overlooks the platform, as if sunbathing on that sunless afternoon.

“That’s so sad,” I remarked, “someone lost an umbrella.” And it was a great umbrella too—the type that could keep a trio dry.

“It’s ok,” my wife assured me, “he’s got the beer to keep him company.”

The empty Corona did seem like it accompanied the umbrella. A couple of unwanted friends lazing about. *A full beer would be more valued, but what of the umbrella?* I wondered. Reasoning that it was probably broken, my wife and I made our way along the platform to wait for our Penn Station-bound train and never thought about it again.

“I keep getting looks. Do I look broken to you?” Umbrella asked of Corona. She had struggled with insecurity her whole life, and the pitiful looks she was getting today wasn’t helping.

“Que?” the Corona hiccupped, his slanted eyes not straying from the steel ceiling of sky.

Umbrella felt even worse now. The discarded always drifted under her canopy. The narcissistic dregs that didn’t fit anywhere, that lacked loyalty—she was always their last hope, and she always kept them dry. Presently, however, she was starting to think she was probably no different than the company she’s held. Umbrella, much like her empty friend beside her, must also be garbage.

“Maybe I belong here,” Umbrella moaned, writhing from side to side, trying to feel what was within herself; whether her inner mechanisms were defunct or if there was something that still functioned.

Corona basked in the cloud cover, unaware of Umbrella’s rummaging. *They all look like fluffy alpacas*, Corona thought to himself in Spanish. *Every single one of them. How is that possible?* He continued to inspect the floating mammoths grazing glacially above him, perplexed that every cloud looked like an alpaca today. And, as if their plush hooves massaged him during the throes of a slow stampede, he dozed off grinning aslope.

An eruption awoke Corona, causing him to shudder on his earthen bed. Umbrella was glad his nap was

interrupted—even the roaring of an approaching train was better than his guttural snoring. While Corona slept, Umbrella concluded that she’ll never know if she was broken by herself. She’d need someone else to handle her to know for sure. For now, all she could do is guess and guess and never know—*what was the sense of that?*

The train’s tremors shook their garbage knoll. Vibrations traveled up their backs and loosened pebbles and dirt clods around them. “El diablo!” Corona gasped. He uprooted from the round valley he’d nestled into and glanced off a nearby embedded rock. His side promptly developed a web of cracks.

Umbrella watched woefully. *Soon I’ll really be alone. I thought I was alone before, but once Corona shatters, I’ll really be alone.*

Corona felt fuzzy all over, almost like he was full again. He rationalized this content feeling was the fruits of his siesta. Looking up at the alpacas tumbling above him, he noticed their number had multiplied; they were all fragmented and spliced, some halved, others quartered, as if he were gazing through a gray kaleidoscope. *They’re all broken*, Corona observed nonchalantly. *In the morning they’re OK, now they’re broken*. He laughed huskily, earning an annoyed look from the turmoiled Umbrella.

“What are you babbling about?” she asked futilely.

Corona, speaking as if he were instead sidling a fellow countryman, continued in slurred Spanish. “Who says they’re broken?” he playfully inquired of Umbrella, “Not me! But now. Oh, yes. Now the whole herd is shattered. But who am I?”

Umbrella watched in frustration as her pissed neighbor rolled back and forth over the round stone in halting indecipherable sentences. At times it seemed like he was addressing her, other times it resembled a conference of one. Loquacious Corona, bubbling with laughter, unaware he could shatter at any given roll.

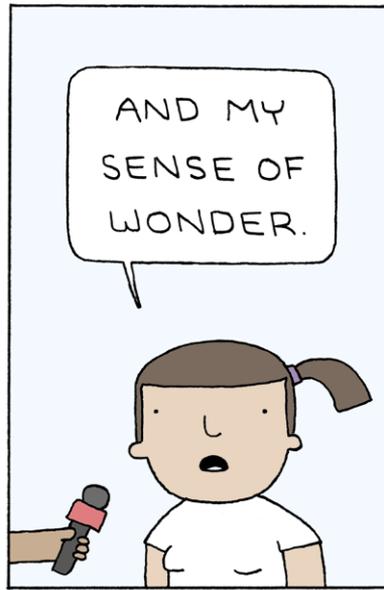
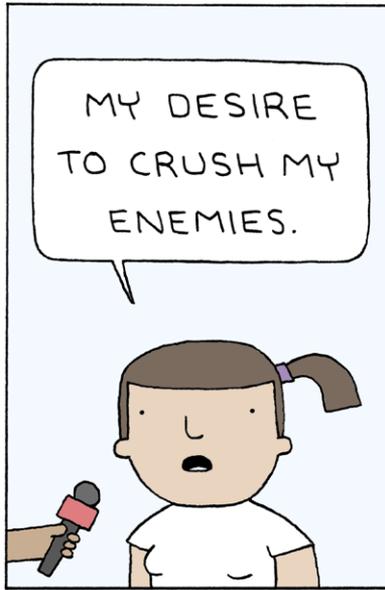
“Who am I?” Corona repeated. “Who am I to think those guys are broken? I’m no alpaca!” Squealing laughter pierced the late-afternoon, poured from the seemingly empty bottle, until he popped into a smattering of shards—glass tombstones draped with a Corona cloak.

Umbrella, feeling more broken and alone than ever, turned from her combusted friend to the canopy of clouds and prayed it wouldn’t rain. ☹

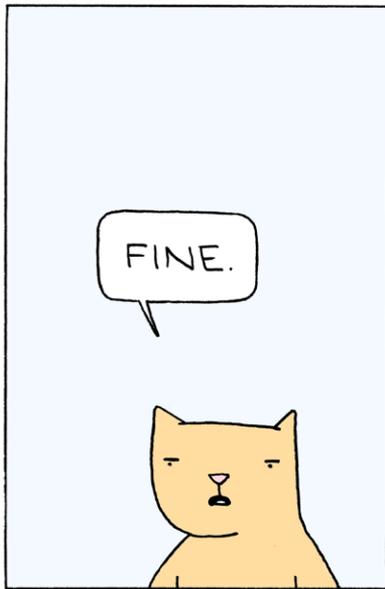


RICH GLINNEN is a market researcher by day and a writer by night. He enjoys bowling, and eating gruyere with his cats at his home in Bayside, NY. He was nominated for the 2017 Best of the Net Anthology. His work can be read in *Kenneth Warren’s Lakewood House Organ*, at foliateoak.com, petrichormag.com, underwoodpress.com/ruescribe and richglinnen.tumblr.com — His wife calls him Taco.

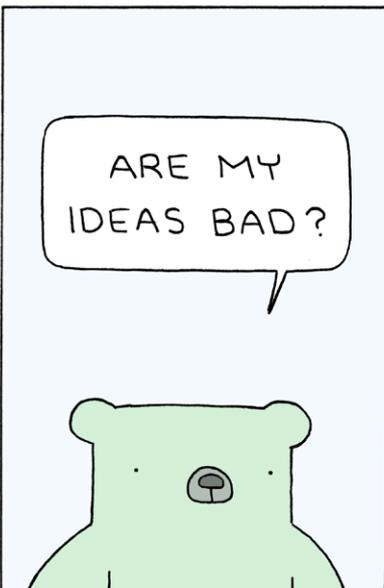
KEEPS YOU GOING



DISCUSSION



IDEAS





The Return Of Matteo Carnevale

Joel Allegretti

One month after she buried Matteo, Elena Carnevale awoke at six a.m. to face a day when she had to acknowledge yet another loss. In seven hours, she would attend the wake for her first cousin Carmela, who without warning had died on what would have been Elena and Matteo's fifty-sixth wedding anniversary: June 22, 1974.

Elena brewed a pot of coffee and toasted two slices of white bread, which she then sheeted with mascarpone. She brought her simple breakfast to the dining-room table and dropped both the cup and the plate when she saw Matteo in his customary seat, which no one had sat in since his death. Matteo wore the blue suit and the red-and-gold-striped tie in which he was laid to rest. His silver pompadour was brushed and shiny. His body exuded the scent of bay rum. His face lacked the pallor of the grave.

"Good morning, Elena," he said. He reached for a

napkin and blotted the table cloth.

Elena shut her eyes and pressed her palms into them. She took a deep breath and looked again. Matteo was still there. Bereavement was a powerful magician, indeed.

"Will you make me breakfast?" Matteo asked. "I miss your eggs with potatoes and ham."

Elena picked up the napkin. It was wet, hot, and stained brown.

"Breakfast?" Matteo asked again.

Elena with hesitation reached to touch one of the two hands that had repaired ten-thousand pairs of shoes. She felt leathery skin.

"Elena, why are you keeping your husband waiting?"

"You can't be here. I buried you."

"Yes, you did. I saw you cry. I saw our children and grandchildren cry. All of you made me cry."

"You can't be here," Elena repeated.

"You're talking to me. You even touched me."

"You're supposed to be in heaven."

"A man who builds a home and a family builds his own heaven. Please make me breakfast."

*

As she had done for half a century as one half of a shared life, Elena watched Matteo eat his frittata with gusto. How many eggs had she cracked and beat over all those years? How many potatoes had she sliced? How much ham had she diced and how many basil leaves had she torn? She had just prepared what she thought she would never prepare again.

Elena wanted to inquire about the afterlife, but superstition forbade it. However, she was compelled to ask, as if she had no means of restraint, "Have you seen Jesus? What's He like?"

Matteo shook his head. "There aren't words good enough to describe Him."

Elena was grateful Matteo had achieved eternal grace.

"Carmela died. The wake starts today."

Matteo nodded as someone who was privy to knowledge denied his widow. "She was reunited with Bartolomeo."

*

Elena, in black from veil to shoes, descended the steps to walk the two blocks to Marino's Funeral Home. She took her time because of the weakness in her knees. Matteo was by her side. He seemed to have regained, post-death, some of his early vigor. He walked erect, not with the slight hunch of his later years.

*

Ristorante Gaetano was just around the corner from the Carnevale home on the way to Marino's. Matteo's brother and sister-in-law, Pina, opened their business eighteen months after their boat docked in America. Matteo took Elena by the arm and led her to the front door. Taped to the beveled glass was a note in magic marker on lined paper: "CLOSED FOR FUNERAL."

"Why are we stopping here?" Elena asked. "Pina and Gaetano are at the wake."

Matteo, without answering, opened the door. Elena, baffled that Pina and Gaetano hadn't locked it, entered with Matteo behind her.

The restaurant was dark and still. Viola, the overweight tabby cat, reclined at the end of the bar. "I can't believe they forgot to lock the door," Elena said. "Robbers could come in and take everything."

"Elena, over here!" It was a woman's voice, one that was familiar. Elena turned to the direction of the voice and walked toward the dining area. Past the upturned chairs atop eleven of the room's dozen tables, Elena saw Carmela and Bartolomeo sitting at the twelfth table, in a corner of the

room. Before them were fried calamari, stuffed mushrooms, fennel, and four glasses, two filled with red wine, two waiting to be filled. Carmela looked as she had before she closed her eyes for good, her salt-and-pepper hair pulled back and twisted into a bun, wearing the navy-blue dress with tiny white polka dots that had led her grandchildren to call her Blue Grandma. Bartolomeo, still as pudgy as he was in life, wore a brown suit; he had owned only brown suits.

Elena hobbled toward the table. She began to cry when she leaned over and wrapped her grieving arms around her cousin. She felt a solid body, a body with which she had marked the passage of her life, from a village outside of Naples to Mulberry Street in Manhattan and at last, across the Hudson River to Union City, New Jersey.

Elena sat down across from Carmela. Matteo was next to her, talking with Bartolomeo about Franco Biaggio, whom they knew from the neighborhood when they were part of the world and whom they hoped would never leave prison.

Even in the next life, vinegar doesn't turn back into wine, Elena thought.

Matteo filled her glass and then his own, which he raised. "To family."

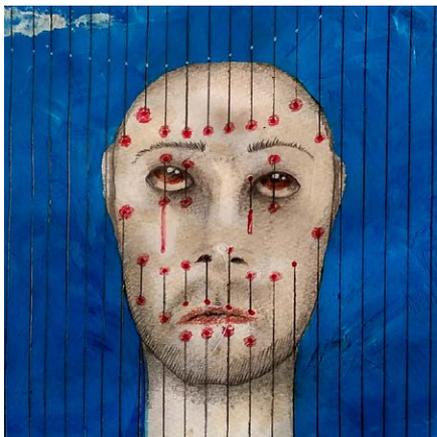
Carmela picked up a serving spoon and slipped it under a mushroom. "Have something to eat, Elena. You look hungry."

Elena smiled. In Carmela's motherly eyes, everyone had looked hungry. "I can't, Carmela. What will the family say if I'm late for your wake?"

Carmela laid a hand on her cousin's forearm. "It isn't my wake, Elena. It's yours. Here, try the calamari. They're nice and tender." 



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The Tormentors

Nathan Grover

We wondered what his crime was, that they'd spare nothing, not a *penning*, to hang him on the wires of an enormous golden harp. Such a beautiful instrument, its golden strings threaded all through his tendons and bones like a secret. We wondered what one had to do to be made such an example of.

While here were *we*, naked and shivering, gathered forever at the bend of a frozen river. *We*, nearly forgotten.

Far upstream a thick, ugly fog flashed with cannon fire while far downstream a thin, gruel-like fog simmered with torch fire. A sound like wails and lamentation sometimes carried from down that way. But here at the bend all was boredom and teethchatter. We wished the man crucified on the harp would divert us by groaning or sagging down a little. He could at least sag down a little, we thought.

In truth he didn't look so uncomfortable up there. With each breath his lung caressed a string that ran up the middle of him and thrummed a faint note, like a bug inching along a violin string: *Crawling, hesitating. Crawling hesitating.* We didn't like how he looked down on us as he made this sound. Wasn't he naked like the rest of us? Well, we could clearly see he was.

But we weren't without our pastimes either. Here at the bend in the frozen river the stony ground had been picked over. The larger rocks had all been removed—removed, we thought, to be used for the war, a war, some war—which left only small rocks nearly uniform in size, which we sometimes threw at each other.

The rocks were too small to injure, they could only irritate, so a game we played when anyone's back was turned was to throw a handful of rocks at them and ask, "How many rocks have I just thrown at you?" The opponent would rate his or her irritation and proffer a number.

It was a good game.

Another game we played was "What word am I thinking of?" which wasn't a good game at all and always ended in

people blurting random words and other people saying no, no, not even close. But because of this game we all had words we'd held onto, that we'd never divulged to anyone, and that, at least, was interesting.

There at the foot of the golden harp, some of us ground-sore and longing to stand, some of us weary and longing sit, we flicked small stones at him. They thumped off his belly, his chest. He hung there. Nothing. The faint note breathed on: *Crawling, hesitating.* Not until one of the rocks struck him in the eye did he twitch on the harp wires, sending out a dissonant hum.

What word are we thinking of? we asked.

He held very still and didn't answer.

We kept flicking rocks, aiming for that eye.

From upstream we heard a sound, *schkick, schkick, schkick*, like a blade being whetted on a stone. A little man came striding downriver on a pair of ice skates. When he got to the bend he skidded onto the bank, dropped down, and unbuckled the straps on his skates. We knew he was official because of his skates and because of his clothes—we knew he was official because he was wearing clothes.

His little suit of clothes was made of shiny leather and he wore a pink pointy hood cinched around his face. Leaving his skates on the riverbank, he passed through the crowd of us, parting us with a business-like walk, his lizard lips puckered around a toothpick. We knew by instinct not to touch his clothes, nor did we want to—there was no rule real or imagined we didn't wish to follow—but as we parted before him we could think of nothing but touching his clothes, of handling them, of testing their material with a yank, a grope, or a caress. Perhaps he would pass through us too quickly, we thought, faster than we could be held responsible for clearing out of his way, and we'd feel his clothes brush past us, his sturdy, polished leather clothes. We imagined many exciting scenarios but none of us touched his clothes or were touched by them.

Tucked under his belt was a wrench. By this we knew he must be the harpist. We were pleased. The harpist had arrived.

He went right to the harp and hoisted himself up, climbing its tall trunk to the top. He was talented like a monkey; we had a lot of faith in him already. He inched along the high golden curve of the harp frame, his leather-clad legs straddling it as he pulled himself along. The man strung to the harp didn't move his head. His eyes clicked back and forth trying to see what was happening above him.

The little harpist removed the wrench from his belt—how nice to have a wrench, any kind of useful tool. We all wanted a tool just like it to wave around at others like a scepter. He fit the wrench's notched head beautifully over the pegs and tightened the strings one by one. Then he tested his work by plucking one of the strings below him.

The man suspended on the harp let out a hoarse laugh. A terrible sound. Did it tickle him? We were furious.

The harpist plucked another string.

The man wept. An improvement.

The harpist plucked another string.

The man sneezed.

We huffed and rolled our eyes.

The harpist scooted backwards, slid down the trunk of the harp, and jabbed the wrench back under his belt.

Now he will play him, we thought, he will play the man on the harp; and we were delighted he was the kind of conscientious harpist who would tune the man before playing him for us. From a small pocket near his belly he removed a watch fastened to a rust-brown chain. With his thumb he compressed the pin at the top of the watch and the front of the iron casing snapped upward on a spring-loaded hinge. *Snick*.

Oh, we swooned. To have a watch, to wear it around your neck and become a clock, to be looked at and constantly consulted. Oh, we'd never needed anything like we needed a watch just then. But it turned out, not this watch.

Those of us who stood close by, who saw the watch's finer details, reported: it had no hands. Just numbers in a circle, that's all it was. And that's what the harpist was checking, it seemed. He was confirming that there was no time, that the numbers arranged in a circle didn't count for anything. Yes, he nodded, his lizard lips playing with the toothpick a little, yes, right on schedule. Nothing o'clock.

That's what time it always is at the bend in the frozen river.

He dropped the watch back into its pocket—something official in how he kept it there where it wouldn't dare utter a tick—and passed through us again. Now we were thinking not of his clothes but of the concert. He seemed to mean not to give one and we didn't know how to broach the subject with him. Had he forgotten? Was he not in the mood? There was a resurgence of teethchatter among us. We all shot urgent looks at each other. You coward, our eyes said to each other's eyes. But none of us would speak up. As he sat on the riverbank and began to strap on his skates, we had no hope that a concert might occur. We looked on glumly.

But then he struggled with the buckles a little—oh look at him fumbling his buckles! We all had such affection for him, even still. There was no official we didn't want to revere or whose behavior we didn't want to believe was beyond reproach, and so we naturally began to reconsider the harpist's negligence as an intentional act of denial. After all, he'd checked the hour, it was nothing o'clock, and this was no time for a concert to begin. The man on the golden harp would wait, always ready, always in tune, a beautiful instrument never played.

Ah yes. The keen little devil, we saw just what he was up to now. What cold, clear-eyed irony. What an artful lack of sentimentality. He was a force to be reckoned with to be sure.

He finished strapping on his ice skates and shoved away, heading downriver. *Schkick, schkick, schkick*.

We waved him off. So long! We approve! So long!

We turned back to the man hanging on the harp and

shook our heads. Well, well, well. Aren't *you* in a pickle? Are you sorry now?

And though we still didn't know what his crime was, and now that the harpist had gone it seemed we'd never know, yes, perhaps there was some sorrow in how he dangled there, blinking, looking down on us. He sniffled. Though it could've been a leftover snuffle from his earlier sneeze, it was hard to tell.

Then a notion disseminated through us, a nervous but invigorating thought: What if we played him ourselves? Yes, why not? It hadn't been expressly forbidden. And what was music but people all feeling the same thing at once? We thought we might be good at that.

But who would play him? We shriveled at the thought of any one of us plucking the golden wires. None of us were musical. None of us knew any songs. Or, one or two of us seemed to recall a song, it went something like. . . But none of us could sing. We all grew angry, each with everyone else, that we'd never bothered to apply ourselves and learn this skill. It was far too late now.

Then we remembered, with relief, that though playing him ourselves hadn't been expressly forbidden, neither had it been expressly granted. We breathed easier. And we pictured the little harpist in his leather clothes and pink pointy hood and we remembered how well he seemed to know what he was doing (though he did struggle with the skate buckles slightly) and how much we had liked him. In our thoughts he already stood two inches taller. We were happy to not touch the harp, if only because he hadn't told us we could.

Those of us who were ground-sore stood, and those of us who were weary of standing sat; and from far downstream a breeze stirred, blowing up towards us and carrying its faint sound of lamentation.

The breeze moved over us, adding bite and chill to our numbness. It whispered through the harp wires, vibrating them, softly playing every note at once, a quiet drone. The man hung there not knowing how to feel. Crawling, hesitating . . .

A small stone bounced off his forehead.

What word are we thinking now? we said.

Only we didn't know ourselves. ↻



NATHAN GROVER lives in San Francisco. He recently finished writing his first novel, which is about a city, a whale, and a scandalous young female hypnotist. Learn more at NathanGrover.com



Ocklawaha

Su Zi

John Lewis wore a ballcap that said JEGS, but was otherwise filthy. That it was so obviously stained with motor oil had a certain cache at the local diner where we all ate sometimes for breakfast or maybe all-you-can-eat- Friday fish. He was really Jean Louis V, but we didn't know that until an elder aunt came once for a week, all in a flurry about a panting, but that was later.

John Lewis always ordered a western omelet and drank five cups of coffee, emptying the cream basket. Only Sue, the waitress, noticed sometimes leaves on him, but a lot of the guys did their own wrench work around here. She secretly wished the guy who roared a 57 Chevy past the Diner would take a yen to their fluffy biscuits and gravy. Oh, well. She liked John Lewis, he tipped with jewelry.

John Lewis himself lived in his car, and sometimes abandoned trailers when it was cold. He had stashes of things hidden, because sometimes he would have an old trunk

strapped to the car with the sort of come-alongs truckers use. Once, for laughs he said, he stood out with a bunch of the Diner people selling garage-sale-style by the road along the part of the pavement the county was letting go to hell. John Lewis had an old bar set with bourbon in one of the decanters, which he drank steadfastly all morning. The set sold to the chef of his western omelet.

All would have stayed tick-tock, if it hadn't happened that the county opened the MaBarker house for Halloween.

The Ma Barker house had been floated across a corner of Lake Weir and transplanted to a hammock owned as a park. Some of the locals had lineage that had dealings with Ma and them boys, but no one wanted that house: it still had holes, you know.

The land was sold by heirs, as it is, and some who-ha bought it and was thisthat, and the house ended up floated across the lake. It was quite the sight. Gator Joe's was

swarmed with locals come out to drink and watch. The cops had strobes and such. A brief something.

John Lewis took to sneaking into Ma's house after the park closed. The crews who worked on the wiring, to ready the house for tourists, had no tattle left by John Lewis, not even bootprints. Even the resident ranger, who knew every twig in the park, thought the house empty of human heat. Then again, the Ranger insisted the house weren't haint, and everybody who saw Ma's house float, saw one of the boys standing in an upstairs window: a white undershirt catching the light, and bare arms, and a shotgun.

John Lewis must have also taken to tramping the park, as there was an old orange grove on some of it. The Ranger thought some of those damn Rainbow kids had taken to hiding in his park, and, almost idly, he began night strolls to see what he could find. What he found was, of course, John Lewis.

The Ranger had been stealthing about his park a few hours before sunrise for long enough to notice his trousers were getting baggy. Along the way, he knew where his wild pigs liked to massage the trees, and where his wild turkeys preferred to spa at the lake, and where there were old stashes of beer bottles from long ago. One full moon, the Ranger was halfway to Lemon Point when he smelled weed—thickly. There were two figures through the trees, just shaped shadows, with an ember making a slow, sloppy circle in the air. By the time the Ranger got to the spot, there was one shadow, which lit a cigarette, and which was John Lewis. "Morning" Neither man said anything for a while. The lake had a shift to its color and a thin mist began to rise in the stillness and dark. The park was closed, of course, at night; gates, locked, too bad for tardy boaters. John Lewis and the Ranger watched the day break, and the Ranger went to attend his breakfast—best not to ask nothin' of John Lewis.

When the county eft a truck load of pumpkins at the Barker house, in preparation for their Fall festival, somehow the pumpkins ended up in attractive piles. When the school busses came to carve, and decorate, and get their picture taken – well, don't you remember how more carved pumpkins kept showing up, and all the pictures of the house came out with sun spots.

It was the day before the old auntie showed up that John Lewis was seen at the Diner talking to the picture on the wall, and answering to it somehow. The picture was of Grampa Abshier taking Ma and a boy or two hunting. The dog was a beautiful hound, even in sepia-toned, blow-up reproduction. But there he was acting funny, not like hi at all, thought the waitress, and she repeatedly asked him how he was doin' over there. John Lewis was in conversation with that photo of Ma and them. He hadn't eaten much. The

money he left was a stack of aged bills more than the ticket, but not his usual tip.

Later that morning, the Ranger saw John Lewis' car parked at Ma's house right out in daylight. Then, his phone went off from the county office: the aged aunt somehow had a letter from John Lewis that gave only the park name on the return. By the time the aunt showed up, John Lewis had vanished. The aunt was Jeanette Louis, elder sister to Jean Louis IV, who arrived with a driver and a personal assistant. It was this tweedy assistant who informed the Ranger that John Lewis was heir to half a parish an hour from Baton Rouge. Aunt Jeanette strolled to the house, looking at pumpkins and paper bats; she was seen staring at the upper floor for a while.

The Ranger ought to have just let her in Ma's house, but he didn't and didn't rue it in retrospect either. Aunt Jeanette ordered the county to open the house for her, and they did, but it was even after All Soul's by then.

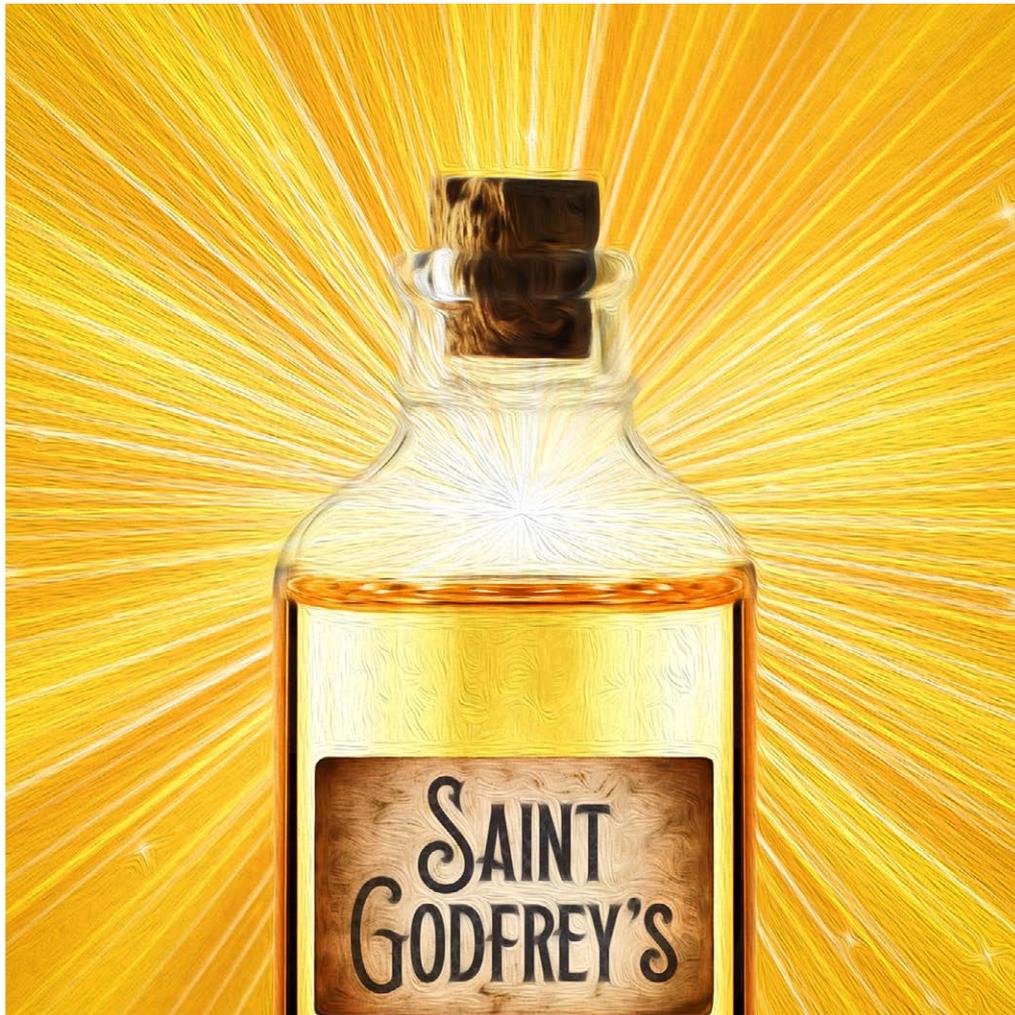
John Lewis was last seen at that little bar near where the river crosses State Road 42. He was regular enough for the bartender to notice John Lewis nursing his bourbon in an unusually slow, sleepy way. Of course, this all came out after Aunt Jeanette had billboards and rewards put everywhere; first, she got into Ma's house. The children's decorations were dragged with the damp, and the pigs had romped the pumpkins. Aunt Jeanette held John Lewis' letter open in her hand, glancing from it to the house. Eventually, she went upstairs, her expensive shoes glinting.

Only a few people actually saw the painting. Oh, there was a blurry picture in the news, with Aunt Jeanette holding two corners and hiding herself. There was a deputy holding the other corner and he did not look happy; the photo shows his concentrated and professional stare at that house. What could be seen of the painting was a dark rectangle with a slash of red and gold bits. What the news said about the painting was that it was real old, from before even when Martin Luther nailed his letter, but was also from Germany, an old church with famous bloodspill. John Lewis had written Aunt Jeanette, telling where he stashed that particular family heirloom. She alluded to others, but then shrugged. The painting was crated by people with white gloves. Aunt Jeanette left.

If John Lewis turned up anywhere, no one said that he did. The county sanitized Ma's house and the parking area for it was a good acre of asphalt where orange trees had stood. No one from around here went to see the painting when it was a small circus in New York, except one guy who has grandkids in Queens. He said he got a long look at it, letting himself get elbowed to stare up at one bit near the top—the bare arms of a man in a white tunic with a sword. 🕒



SUZI is a Poet, Writer, Artist, Equestrian. Various publications in equestrian and literary publications over many years; books available via Amazon or Etsy.com. Editor of the poetry chapbook series, *Red Mare*—which has individually block printed covers and is individually hand sewn for binding, and which is held in Special Collections at the Schlesinger Library (Radcliffe/Harvard), Poets House NYC, Special Collections University of Chicago, et cetera. Lives in Florida.



Way Cross, Georgia, 1937

James Lloyd Davis

“Eddie, you s-s-sure ‘bout that? Ain’t n-never heard of no Saint Saul.”

“Cause there ain’t any such-named saint, boy. You can call anything... anything, long as it’s got the right flavor in th’sound of it. That’s the point I’m making here.”

“Long way to K-kansas.”

“Forget Kansas. Don’t need to go to Kansas to be servin’ up dreams. It’ll work right here in Georgia. ‘Course, I’m talkin’ hypno-thetically here, but the facts are clear... concerning the universal traits of human nature. The rubes need to believe... and we need to help ‘em do just that. Not gonna sell ‘em no medicine like some fellas do. No. We’re gonna sell holy oil, sanctified chrism, miracles, son... miracles. Call something medicinal, people just don’t care all that much. Take it or leave it. But you call it holy, say it’s miraculous... serve ‘em up some scripture t’go along with it?

They want it. Hell, I want it. Want some right now. Don’t you?”

“Where do we g-get th’oil?”

“Right over there, son. Min’ral oil like they got over to the Rexall. Go on over and buy us twenty bottles... here. That’s a fiver. Bring me the change. We’ll boil off the labels and head on down to Way Cross.”

Eddie told me to make a sign since I can write much better than I talk, said, “Mark it thus, ‘Holy oils from the hidden, sacred font of Saint...’ He paused, hand on chin. “Saint who...” Then he snapped his fingers. “Godfrey... yes. That’s G-o-d-f-r-e-y... Saint Godfrey of th’Temple... in Jerusalem. Don’t put no price on th’sign. We’ll think about that when we draw us a crowd. Test the waters, eh?”

“Th-thought you said S-s-saint Saul.”

“Sounds Jewish, son. Ain’t no Jewish saints in the canon. Not that I’m aware of. What about you? Does that sound

Christian to you? Saint Saul?"

"It's why I qu-questioned you the f-first time, but... never heard of no S-saint Godfrey neither."

"Not the point, son. It sounds good. You're also not likely to run across some rube that knows who he is neither. You can make up somethin' that's a good six miles and quarter off from the truth, make up anything you please... but as long as your story's consistent? Who's gonna challenge it?"

No one did.

But they remembered Eddie from some time past. It was a couple years back and before he ever hooked up with me, so I didn't know he'd been there before, but it didn't seem to matter. The crowd? They didn't seem suspicious. But old Eddie? He was on fire, had them eating out of his hand like goldfish. Hell, we sold almost all those bottles before some woman walked up the street with a lawman, pointed to Eddie, said, "That's the man what soiled my little girl."

Lawman locked him up, me along with him.

About two in the morning, a crowd of people came into the jailhouse and demanded Eddie and me get handed over. Deputy didn't put up too much of a fight, but told them to tie him into a chair, so he could say he was overcome. Told some guy he should tap him on the head, but not too hard, so he could say he was knocked out and couldn't see who it was that did it.

They wanted to hang old Eddie.

Don't know why they took me too.

Somebody'd said, "Bring him along. We'll hang 'em both."

I protested, but heard some woman's voice say, "He's prob'ly one of 'em."

I yelled out, "One of who?"

Nobody said.

They drove us off in two cars. I was in one and Eddie was in the other with about four big old farm boys in each car to keep us company. There was a bonfire some ways off and everybody left it to come see the show when we got there.

The show?

Me and Eddie standing in the back of this old stake truck with the side panels off like it was a stage in a music hall, but there wasn't any fiddlers. Truck was parked under a stout branch from an old, wide tree, two ropes dangling down our way. They had our hands tied up behind us real tight.

Took four men to get Eddie to standing up for all the fuss and fight, hollering and weeping. They got the rope around his neck and all the fight went right out of him, made him real quiet real quick. A lot like some horse just been broke.

The man who tied the rope around my neck was chewing tobacco. The sight of it, the smell of it drooling down his

chin made me sick.

Told him, "That ain't no p-p-proper noose."

He just put up his nose and grinned like they do, said, "Oh, it'll do the job all right. May not break yer neck, but be pretty damn hard to catch your breath."

When he was done, he said, "Any last words, boy?"

I didn't have anything I wanted to say.

Shook my head.

Didn't feel like stuttering up in front of all those people. Ain't right that anyone should laugh at a man who stutters, but they do. They always do. The rope around my neck was tight, rough new rope, couple loose strands pricking the skin. They asked Eddie the same question... if he had any last words.

He had a few.

Fact, he just went on and on and on.

Good old Eddie. Never at a loss for words. Eloquent to the end.

I just kept staring at the end of that flat bed. I was thinking how they were going to start up the truck, creep forward in low gear and we'd have to walk toward the edge to keep from strangling. Then, they'd gun that old engine and there wouldn't be nothing left for us to stand on but three feet of lonely air beneath our feet. Might as well have been three miles. Three inches would kill you. That'd be cruel. Knowing you're just inches away from the ground.

Three feet sounds a little less cruel.

You'd of told me it would come to this? I'd of laughed in your face.

Been all over the country. Seen a lot of things, too. But I'd never been to a hanging before. Somebody once told me it was kind of like a dance that you do between heaven and earth. I think it was Eddie said that. Probably was.

Eloquent, like I said. Always envied him for that.

Looked around, saw the woman who'd accused Eddie. She was standing in front of the crowd next to a girl of about thirteen, fourteen years. Short dress, no shoes, hair like straw all frizzed out over some snappy kind of thing that gathered it up. The woman pointed up at me and Eddie, whispered in that girl's ear and damned if that girl didn't smile, big and wide. Thought the girl was kind of plain up until then. Not what you'd ever think to call pretty.

But that smile? Made her look pretty damn good.

Sweet. 🍬



JAMES LLOYD DAVIS resides in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio with his wife, MaryAnne Koltan, who is also a writer and reviewer for Los Angeles Review of Books. Currently working on a novel, James has published short fiction and poetry in numerous journals and anthologies in the US, Canada, Australia, and the UK.



Maybelle and Rose

Deborah Pintonelli

Rose was threatening to pitch a fit about the garden. She said it was going to rot because no one could tend to it anymore. Rose had always been one to fuss about every little thing. She was the baby in their family, and as such was spoiled. A gardening service had offered to cut the whole lot down, douse it with insecticide and be done with it for two hundred dollars. In future, only the healthy, emerald-green grass would be there to look at, requiring only a sprinkler on it every evening in the summer. Maybelle knew, based on eighty-five years of experience, who would win this one. Well, she would let the matter go, because she wanted to get on to the more important one of the dinners that evening, and what they would be serving their guests.

But she couldn't resist ending with, "You are a killer, Rose McGwire, but we'll leave it at that." There was no having the last word with Rose. "No, my dear, I am a pragmatist,"

Rose was washing some green beans for dinner. The beans, a salad, and six rosy-red lamb chops would be it, she told Maybelle. Well, then, thought Maybelle, there was nothing more to talk about. At all. They had decided long ago that the less they spoke to one another, the better. She lowered her tiny frame into her favorite white wicker chair on the enclosed back porch. She thought she had better get in as many viewings of the garden as she could, before the whole lot was burned to the ground like some Cambodian village.

Neither sister weighed more than one hundred pounds, never had their whole lives. In figure, coloring and temperament they were almost exactly alike. In one respect, though, Rose won the pot. She was the beautiful one. Or had been. She was always with the gloss on her hair and the straight, white teeth. No one today would know it, but just one look at Rose in her Roaring Twenties get-up and black bob and the truth was told. She had been fast, and funny,

with a flask of liquor stuck in the band of her stockings and a cigarette dangling from her rouged lips. The secret between them, though, was that although Maybelle had not been much to look at, she had been fast enough in her own way. Got what she wanted when she wanted it. So much so that it had put her off of marriage. Why tie yourself down with something that could be had for free? This brand of opportunism had lasted well into her seventies, and the big rest she was taking now was as result of overdoing it during that time as anything other.

The ladies had only one regular visitor, a little Miss Lesli Stevenson from next door. Lesli was a perfect doll. Her mother Terry was too. They were the dinner guests that evening. At the last minute they'd invited Terry's new boyfriend, whom the whole block knew to be a good-looking and friendly lush with a red face from back when he still lived with his now-deceased mother across the street at 3343 Kent. It had been a long time since the sisters had had any close contact with him, a person often wild or intoxicated or both, and they dreaded what might happen. Neither would dare admit that they also were looking forward to seeing him. The day that the little family bought the house next door and moved in had been the brightest for them for years. For Lesli they heaved out the old cardboard photo albums, because she wanted to know everything about them. Through her eyes they saw their world, and what a musty and ancient world it was! The outside of the McGwire house was a uniform gray; speckled asphalt singles, painted wooden porch, and plastic-covered windows, all a pigeon pewter gone wooly with dust and decay. Inside it was always dark; the shades were half-drawn at all times, and the heavy velvet draperies allowed very little sunlight to seep in. Stepping into their front hall was like entering a wood on the night of a full moon, where bits of polished brass and silver glinted like tender columbine amidst swaths of dark, mushroom-like furniture.

The two old women would appear out of this gloom like ancient fairies with tattered gowns and shredded wings, weighing nothing, hardly breathing. Their conversing was done in rude non sequiturs that those who knew them well simply ignored. "What was that, Rosie? You say that you think it will?" "Will what? Damn old fool wants to know if it's raining because she can't even see out the window to gather the facts," Rose said this now to the delivery man for the local grocery store, which the women used for their almost all of their needs. He said nothing, merely nodded. This suited Rose just fine. Allowed more time to get in the facts. And then, just to aim low in retaliation for the previous exchange about the garden, "She wets the bed now, did you know that?" The man shook his head no. "You didn't? Well, she certainly does. So bring us some of those Depends next time. I'm not laundering her linens day and night. Not me." The poor man blushed, but said nothing.

The week's groceries, usually the same: one dozen eggs, 1 lb. bacon, cottage cheese, skim milk, an assortment of three meats such as chops of one variety or the other (lamb or pork), ground meat for hamburgers or meatloaf, and one whole chicken. Coffee and tea they did not order every week. Soft drinks they did not imbibe. Iced tea or lemonade were what cooled a person, water too. Occasionally a box of cookies or a Sara Lee cake crossed their minds as a good

thing to have, more so now that the little girl was around. It was simplicity that had schooled them, and it was its rules they lived by.

Lest anyone get Rose wrong, she said loud enough for Maybelle to hear, "I love my sister, Mr....what was your name? Yes I do. Just can't stand her sometimes is all."

Their furniture consisted of heavy Victorian pieces with brocade slipcovers and needlepoint cushions and footstools. An old hand-cranked Victrola still could play 75s, and the claw-footed dining table wore a French lace cloth like a schoolmarmish cap. Even their telephones were among some of the first made, the receivers as heavy as dumbbells. Now they struggled to put all of the groceries away, doing so silently to avoid any argument that would taint the atmosphere of the truce, or poison the party. The wait for their guests was long, the afternoon plodding forward with fat minutes like hours. Both women went to their rooms for an hour in the afternoon, then it was time to start laying the table. At five o'clock the bell rang, and there stood the perfect little angel and her shy, disastrous mother. "There you are!" Rose said as she opened the door.

The late summer air was dead and dry, but what came from the house was a dark coolness, both inviting and repellant. Lesli was the picture of summery youth, wearing a white cotton dress and tennis shoes. Her hair was a silvery blonde, thick, and cut to the chin neatly. The mother was the same in many ways, but with a dull cluster of brown hair pulled back into a ponytail, big blue eyes, and not a spot of make-up on her. She looked perennially both surprised and disappointed—her eyebrows plucked to an extreme currently fashionable—and she was mostly unsmiling, as if doing so would be beside the point. Her figure was trim in jeans and a plain gray pullover. Rose ushered them in to where Maybelle was standing, floury hands on her aproned hips. "You're here at last. Well, I've gone and made biscuits because our little missy loves them. I also took a chicken breast out of the freezer because I realized that our lamb chops might not suffice."

Lesli ran up to Maybelle and threw her arms around the old woman's waist in a way that took her mother aback. There were no grandparents in their scenario, very few relatives at all, which suited Terry just fine, but not the girl, as was more than apparent. "Take it easy, dear, you'll knock poor Maybelle down." Maybelle had braced herself on a nearby chair, anticipating the child's velocity. She appreciated this display of body language; there was certainly nothing else like it these days. She quickly wiped her hand and smoothed Lesli's already smooth hair. What she would give to have that abundance again! "You are just in time to cut the biscuits," she said. Then they disappeared down the long hall to the kitchen and Terry was left standing with Rose, who guided her to a nearby chair and offered her a glass of lemonade. "Yes, thank you. I hope we're not late. We're still finishing the unpacking. I want to get it done before school starts."

"Do you need any help over there? Maybe I could be of some assistance." Rose asked this in a completely insincere way, and the young mother too note of her elder's cynicism. These ladies were just too much! Terry tried to imagine the frail older woman at her house pretending to sort through all of the junk they had dumped into the middle of the

small living room. It would be more than obvious that no organization had gone into the move, and that not only was she a single mother, but a sloppy, lazy one at that. She was not going to give her new neighbor anything more to gossip about. "No, I'm almost done with it. After this, no more moving!"

Terry and Lesli had moved five times in five years. Still, she had managed to keep the girl in the same school. They moved for different reasons; a spat with a landlord, the hiking up of rent leading to the search for a better deal. This time it could work; her boyfriend Max's grandmother had passed away, leaving the house to him. He wanted to hold onto it for various reasons, and had rented it to them for a good price. He would not move in—Terry did not drag men in and out of their lives like that. Still, it was a new form of stability. "Moving is hell," Rose said, "we haven't done it since our mother died in 1953." It was 2006. Terry took a sip of her lemonade. She knew that the two women had been friendly with Max's mother, who had been the 'younger' woman, fun to play cards with and a good cook, too. Perversely, Terry thought that it would not be long before she herself was dead and Lesli was dragging her unwanted belongings to the Salvation Army as Max had done with his mother's things.

They could hear Maybelle and Lesli laughing, the child's giggling like a glass bell ringing, and the old woman's like a bicycle horn bleating. "Perfect! Just the right size for a dinosaur," Maybelle shouted hoarsely, which teased forth the child's high-pitched bell again. Lesli came to the doorway with a red, floury face and said, "Maybelle's trying to teach me, but I just can't learn!" For Rose, the whole process of having guests was tiresome. She was forced to be civil to her sister, and to entertain people she had no interest in whatsoever. It had always been that way with her; if she was interested in someone, then the whole light of the world would shine on that person. If not, then a cold smile and a cigarette indicated that she wished to move on.

Now that she could neither smoke nor drink the world had revealed itself to be as dull as she had always believed it to be. A life without new clothes, men, and a little entertainment was no life at all. For this she blamed Maybelle. It had been her sister's idea to eat healthy and live a long life, not hers. Now the two from the kitchen came in all cleaned up and smiling. Dinner would be ready in about fifteen minutes. Was Max coming? Did anyone know? "Max said he wasn't sure when he could get here," Terry said. "Ok," Maybelle said, "I'm going to go the chops now, no sense in waiting. It will take only a few minutes, so you ladies come on in right after us." Rose went into the powder room to wash her hands while Terry took her cell phone outside to call Max.

She sat on the flaky front steps and lit a cigarette. Soon the neighbors would be sitting out on their stoops and the kids would be going for one last bike ride. It was a good thing for Lesli to be here. There was something comforting about the way not much had changed since Terry was a kid living only a few miles away. She went back inside. Max Nash arrived just as the four were getting seconds. He came in as if he knew the place, and spoke to the two who owned the house as if they were relatives. "Howdy ladies. Lovely evening is it not? But then maybe you have not been out."

He had a bottle of wine in hand, an Argentinian Malbec to be specific, and had brought his own corkscrew. Maybelle and Rose kissed him dutifully, and eyed the bottle as he knew they would. He laughed when he saw them doing it. "Just what the doctor ordered," he said, winking at Rose. He remembered her nights at his mother's place, playing cards and drinking whatever was around. She'd use the mouthwash before returning home to Maybelle, as she had done for decades. "Not the one around here," Rose said, groaning in mock despair. "Really?" He had turned to Maybelle, who was trying to look especially stern. "Oh come on May, remember what my grandfather used to say all of the time, 'I'm like the famous Mrs. Cassidy, who is reported to have said: *Now, Mary Grimes, if I don't take it, make me take it, for I feel I want it.*'"

It was from Joyce. Old Nash had been quite the one. When they laughed along with him, he showed his large and perfect teeth in satisfaction. His face had an unshaven shadow on it and he had loosened his tie from the yoke of a starched blue shirt. It had been a long day for him, with a long lunch smack in the middle of it and he was in the mood to kick back. It seemed to the newcomers that his manner was too intimate, not respectful enough. However, when they looked at the faces of their hostesses for some confirmation of this, there was something else entirely. It was hard to imagine that the three had known each other so long, them being barely unpacked and very nervous about becoming part of such a tight-knit community. Maybelle's face flushed pink and she did not want to smile but she did. Maxwell was such a gorgeous thing that he could have said God was dead and she'd find it amusing. But it didn't do to let him know. And yet how could she not? How could he not? It had been going on since he was just out of diapers. She made as if to swat at him with a wet and greasy dishtowel.

Lesli didn't know what to make of any of it, and her Mama was no good at helping her read situations. She looked at Maybelle's eyes and they were sparkly and moist. This must be one of the times when everything was all right. She laughed then, out of sequence, and it made everyone else laugh, and so they relaxed and had what was probably the first full family dinner for the lot of them in who knows how long. Max said "What about them White Sox?" The two older women said they hadn't thought it would happen in their lifetime, and what with winning all three games, and they wished the last had been played right there in Chicago, not so far away, in Houston of all places, halfway around the world it seemed. Maybelle was born three years after their last victory eighty-eight years ago and Rose five. "Go Sox!" Rose said, and for just a moment, if you were actually paying attention, you could see that round-cheeked girl with the vivid red lips and the black bob.

The biscuits were flaky and moist as Max soaked them into the brown and red juices on his plate. He didn't look the least bit tipsy to either of the older women as he turned a good portion of wine into his glass. But then they understood enough to know that a bit of wine with dinner was nothing for a man such as him. Lesli had not wanted Max to come. In fact, although she knew it was something expected of the young daughter of a single mother (her friends had told her as much, that she was supposed to

pretend she liked whatever man her mother brought around), she did not like him at all. Not because of Terry. She wanted her mother to be happy, and to be occupied enough so as to leave her alone with her books and dolls sometimes, instead of barging in every minute to check on the well-being of her only child. An eleven-year old needed privacy, too. No, it was something that Max had done, early on in their relationship of one year that had put her off him entirely. In the beginning she liked him, and had sought him out whenever he visited. Her mother warned her that Max did not like kids much, but it had not stopped her.

The first Thanksgiving the three of them spent together went smoothly enough at first. Terry took it upon herself to do all of the cooking, exacting a promise from Lesli to be good and stay out of the kitchen unless she was to help with something. The day went by slowly; Lesli's dolls needed grooming and a change of clothes, and there was the ongoing attempt to read *Black Beauty*, a book she actually liked. Bored finally, she went out to the living room to visit with Max, who was watching a football game. It wasn't anything new, wanting to have him tickle her. They rough-housed, he tickled her, but then she could not stop. She wanted more. The attention was fun. He asked her to stop, but she did not. Then she poked him, aiming for his stomach but hitting lower, where it was particularly unwanted. His cheeks and nose, already crimson, went a shade or two darker. She backed off and apologized, but it was too late.

Grabbing her by the shoulders, he plopped her down on the sofa and said, not too loudly and in a very unfriendly manner, "Don't you know when to quit? Why is it that you kids have no common sense about this stuff?" Humiliated, tears flowed and she shrugged her shoulders. As it was with certain members of her group at school, she felt the need to laugh to ease the shame. This startled him. "You think it's *funny*? You hurt me, do you know that?" For the second time she shrugged and laughed. He grabbed her shoulders again, this time gripping hard. He did not let go. His face was right up against hers, and she could smell the brown alcohol smell on his breath. On the coffee table was a tumbler of scotch and ice, freshly made. "You think I have to put up with you, just because I'm with your mother?" No, she nodded, not laughing this time. "Answer!" he said, shaking her back and forth, as if she was a bad baby, "Speak, you little shit!" Her head whipped back and hit the edge of the sofa, cushioned, but still a whack. She tried to squirm out of his grip, but could not manage it. "No, I do not," she said loudly and clearly, as if reciting a lesson in school. Would that be enough for him? Finally, he let her go, either because he was over it, or was too tired to do anything more. He sat down and gulped his drink as if parched, turning his eyes to

the television. All throughout dinner they avoided speaking directly to one another. As soon as she could do so without arousing her mother's suspicion, she went to her room and stayed there. Now they barely spoke to one another unless absolutely necessary.

Maybelle served the baked apples she had made for dessert and asked Lesli if she wanted some milk. The girl didn't answer right away, and for a moment Maybelle thought that something was wrong. "We're going to clear the garden," Maybelle said to everyone at the table, sending her eyes slanting at her sister. "It's too much for us now." "Oh, I'd love to help out," Terry said, her arm draped now over the back of Max's chair. It was something like a family, wasn't it, with the four of them all at ease and cozy like they were? "We could help them, couldn't we, little bear?" Lesli said yes, they could help. But the ladies said *no no no*, it was too much work, it wouldn't be right. Rose said definitely not, and made it understood that hers was the final word on the matter.

Terry put her hand over her daughter's and said it was probably time to get going, it being a school night and all. Max got up to accompany them. Lesli sat frozen in her chair, wanting to stay, not wanting to go back to the damp and mildewy old bungalow with ancient appliances and floors in need of hours of scrubbing. She tried to communicate telepathically with her friend: *Ask me to spend the night, say you would love to have me stay*. But no, it was time to go. Lesli walked silently in front of Max and her mother to the door. She willed herself to keep going, perform the ritual. Straight to the bedroom. Not a peep. Maybelle watched the procession as it moved towards the front door. Then the three of them were gone, spit out into the hot Midwestern night. 🌀



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Kleeangel, A Fiction of Its Art and Thought

Augusto Todoele

Little poem, little poem, going home. Often the angel just means itself. We speak in riddles between the once only and the yet again. This angel is the nature of civilization we hope to kill. It is all taught esoterically and not, for history behind the draperies of pretended ignorance mainsprings Egypt into a colossal geographic entity in Washington DC and the Vatican. There is no progress in history leading the **new world ovum** to redemption. Redemption is a breaking in, a revolution, not a reason, the total and complete overthrow of all the powers of the world. Then comes reinstatement of every original thing, the return of all things to their origin.

Rediscover in daily life the colossal uprooting and

destruction of the existing order. The angel is blown away in a posture of surrender, out to sea. Hands up, it sees the implosion of our history from Troy, Rome, Jerusalem and before, wreck on wreckage. On the water of the sea below, which we can't see, a man is blown about in his boat at the bottom of the rectangle of history. Storm clouds swirl with twisted faces, with supercharged Babylonian Bohemian Grove-Mammon-Ishtar hordes. But in the rewrite, the whole is rent down the middle. History is destroyed by a figure of light, a man. That's not in the painting nor in Klee's, Benjamin's, Scholem's mind. History present and past is the allegory where eternal life takes shape.

The left eye is wall eyed, the right looks at the viewer divided. Two molars hang upside down with gaps between.

The eyes and eye sockets come out of the forehead like light bulbs. The fingers are called candelabras, the hair, up in curlers, a scroll of the secret wisdom of angels.

"I see a grotesque being, dissymmetric, demon rather than angel, helplessly reading itself." The bird toes support its flight, but it is called a kakangel because this angel brings bad news "like Freud about the psyche, and offers no cure."

We both view its history and are it, like some body part kept in a jar, surgically removed. A clam in amber. What is the bad news civilization history celebrates? That civilization is demonic and we wish for its death. Just as much as Oedipus wishes for the death of the father or Wordsworth for the death of Dorothy in the *Lucy Poems*. Our acceptance of this transference of inner speech is like a dream held together in an anesthetic fiction. Civilization is the evil, the *loco parentis* we wish to die.

Kleeangel is the pure azure spirituality to be destroyed. The Angel Novus version is a picture of occult reality itself. The inner-H-man is the new man conquered by the angel. Satan, angel of the Talmud, hides its Theses of History and Philosophy. In the enormity and the subversion of humanity, in camps and propaganda bondage. It is no self. It is a dragon ornament, star boys bounding to take human. It makes Star Boys happy to kill the man. All illumination is deception. Mystical experience is a fraud.

Intellect

Do angels have angels? Poems were guardian angels to Kabbalists. The Kleeangel was the angel of Satan. That fallen angel who represented the secret self with the hidden name was opposed by its own angel the way Balaam and his ass were. The Satanic mortgage fell from the stars "assumed Satanic features: though more the expression Satanic knowing, contentment, serenity." To these delusions everything had a guardian angel, if only a joke, even angels, like a Mona Lisa revised compromised with "the indescribably beautiful face of a human being [to] appear as Satanic features with a half-suppressed smile." When did Benjamin realize the angel of history was the Angel Novus of Satan? "His capacity of concentration on spiritual matters was of miraculous intensity." He calls concentration what we call self-absorbed dementia. The Kleeangel has nothing to do with Benjamin's meditation of Satan or the Kabbal. The self-important dreamer in 4D printing changes the portrait of Dorian Grey to meet the real politik. Syllables of a word combine individual letters to make anagrams. In the second printing two names occur, Spartan king Agesilaus and a city of Spain, Santander somehow spelled Satan. Agesilaus Santander signed to Angel Satan "[Der Angelus Satanas] identical with Lucifer. But the first nature died. The concept of two names and two natures keeps the commandments of Sodom. Against all earthly creatures who allow it and those who meditate thereon.

Once descended from heaven the Satanic character, claws and knife wings proved, reveals this current state. Benjamin going over the Pyrenees with a black brief case is its parable. Leaving behind two cases with Bataille the angel was rolled up inside, never to be seen by him again. Satan builds his pyre from a heap of ms. pages burning. Walter Benjamin goes to his apparent suicide. His destiny is to sing at end of day or not the hexenlied.

In this epicene world the angel takes up residence in the vanished things that affront it daily. Two versions under knife attack are an interesting case. "Tied eye to eye." His hair in the painting, like scrolls of learning in his briefcase, suggests the angel's thoughts are scrolls, its curls are cursives, the message of its mind in the hair shows "it has been pushed forward from the future and goes back into it."

The intellect imagines but does not engage. Alienated from the angel, man or woman, finite things the infinite depth of allegories it cannot step over any more than it can consummate a woman, the lieder of life. Consummate the woman is no symbol to contact a metaphysical being, but a woman and person who longs to surrender, but only thinks it.

"That way into the future from which he came" is dissolution for the angel who wants to return home, if that is a home of fire. If you go home you sing and then you die. It sounds like life. I came, I sang, I died. What else did you there? I had "the conflict in which lies the ecstasy of the unique" (Scholem 226). Scholem says, I'm turning black, "my wing is ready for a flight, I'm all for turning back." *Little poem, little poem, going home. Often the angel just means himself. We speak in riddles between the once only and the yet again.*

Names

The mystic intuition that connects clairvoyant theories strands reason on a bridge admiring the beautiful Lucifer. The appearance cancels, conceals and reveals the beautiful, but far from experience. This angel ex cathedra thinks the mystical is God, but the angel is not any way a likeness of the soul. Deceptions need Deliverance in the personal, not the social or religious. Providence names itself. Those who give secret names to their children do not tell them before the time, if ever. They are prescient it is hoped, for it is He Who IS Above All Things who gives a new name out of a bag of fine white quartz. Parents remain a citadel of the past effects of the child made to wander in the world without inhibition, but surrender to future history. The parent sees them blown backward from birth. They are not named for angels. The fallen Angel Novus thinks that a man divided into male and female seeks reunification, marriage and family, but reunity only comes in the great catching up. Angels might hope to know but they won't.

Turning all this mystical pious-impious thought into a secret *Ad Depravitorim* to join true and false, man and angel is just what the higher powers seek. They marry it to the art of stars. This future belongs to those who live from the forces of the cosmos. "The angel had a secret name [or a legion of them], but it is hard to get account of their names lest they be invoked or cast out:

"unexpectedly the human person of Benjamin now changes into the angelic-Luciferian nature of the angel in the picture by Paul Klee, a nature connected so unfathomably deep and magical with his own."

Uproot

Out of Frankfurt was born the observation of a realm of spiritual terror. Advertising was a history written by the vanquished out of blind spots that escaped the dialectic. Surely some dialectic is at hand when Klee's *Angelus Novus*,

the angel of history shows up in Marvel Comics. The sins of the time are discovered.

Satan, his angel, and Klee's and Scholem's, and everyone who has that image embossed on the cover of their notebook, undergo an illumination. There stands Benjamin's personal angel, busted "between past and future and caused to journey back," turned into the angel of history whose fourteenth thesis is, Origin is the Goal, but the storm blows him back. "What prevents the angel? The storm from Paradise? No, the real redemption. History fails to enter through the gate.

New person, old person, there is only one. Chimera, deception, division altered the angel. "Did Benjamin, when he first saw the angel, and Klee's picture affected him like a revelation of his own angel, journey back with the latter into the future that was his origin?"

"It is a matter of dispute whether one can speak here-as I am rather inclined to do-of a melancholy, in deep desperate view of history for which the hope that the later might be burst asunder by an act like redemption or revolution continuous to have about it some thing of that leap into transcendence which these theses seem to deny."

Benjamin and Scholem trans functioned are another name of Satan. There is no division of Messiah.

"What kind of novum, then, does this evangelist bring?" Much of Benjamin's view could be questioned, revisited.

Satan getting into history has more to do with thought than the art. Thinking makes it so. Benjamin wrote a spurious little *Journal of Angelology* that Scholem calls a dear little demonology of "devils who bring an intentional banality [like Nazi murderers] to conceal they are devils. Cubs with a lizard body, banally corpulent." Benjamin was going to edit a magazine of various and sundry fictions called *Angelus Novus* with the myth omnipresent in all these writers that Midrash angels are so ephemeral that once they sing they die, a romantic notion, to cease upon the midnight with no pain like Keats' Nightingale. Keats said of Shakespeare that he led a life of allegory. We should be glad he didn't profess it was a life of fraud. Keats could probably do the voices of others too, since he was able to imagine what it was to be in another's head and to speak just like them, that is, excluding Shelley. There is something of a chameleon in Benjamin too, in this myth of the *Angelus Novus* and its interpretation which came to have a life of its own.

Singing

The Patriarch Benjamin was the last child of Isaac born after the Angel's touch in the groin. Whether the angel's touch in the hollow was at the place where the testes descend, hence an inguinal hernia affecting the life of son Benjamin, the son born after, "little Benjamin, their ruler, the princes of Judah" (Ps 68.27), is influenced by the angel at a second remove. As Benjamin was born after Jacob's wrestling, so Walter Benjamin took his identity after Klee's angel. Identical. Not identical with himself, new name or old, audible or inaudible like the secret spelled in archetypal form, the changing **mask of the Angel Novus was worn over the face of the man**. Levinas reveals this inhumanity that denies the face of the Other.

Angel Novus name projects itself into a picture but

doesn't reveal the true name in Benjamin, the child father of the man, the child primal in spirit and true. This peels back the cultural history of nations the way Wordsworth's year in France produced his insight that it's odd the French so supported the American revolution when they deconstructed their own. Somehow this implicates the whole nature of iambic verse and whether the English language is a turning of natural rhythms into artificial ones. But of the song rhythms, whoever THOUGHT OF SHAKESPEARE AS A WALTZ?

Scholem says "Benjamin interrupted the angel from the singing of his hymn" and prevented his death. Such songs are not real, but figments of fun taken as religion, as if Benjamin locked the angel in his room on the wall and said, *I will not let thee go unless thou bless me*, and sits down under the picture on the wall.

But dawn is coming and **the angel must sleep after singing**. Benjamin is worried that the angel will miss its divine appointment, which Benjamin himself prevents in his sitting. You can say Jacob did it, but Walter Benjamin also prevented the angel singing if he turned him into Samael, or Satan in the old text, as if there were any doubt as to who Satan was, the **angel of light hiding in darkness**, which the darkness comprehended not and could not prevent. It needed *the True Light that lights every one who comes into the world*. To compare these thoughts with a picture on the wall that never did anything except decay, even if preserved now in Jerusalem, Benjamin as Jacob and his Agesilaus Santander of that secret name is mute. Jacob changed to Israel is just opposite Benjamin changed to Satan. No wonder these angels won't give their real names. Walter Benjamin's frustrations with women, unrequited, unconsummated made him divide the angel in two, male and female he uncreated them out of some Kabbalah legend.

The News

What is the bad news? It's really only possible to talk about the idea of history, totalitarianism, genocide, and not the specific acts or persons who commit to serving them. These are as hidden and unspoken as subway riders who chew on their own arms. We do not likely know anyone of this 9th circle, otherwise our sons would be waking up in cold sweats. History is diabolical in not that all particular cases of its counterfeits are unbelievable but because even so, who can bring the offenders to account? So, we are intended to think a piety that wrestles the suspended fallen angel is the unconscious. Are you going to indict the kings and queens of Inland? Are you going to abjure the Greek gods? That leaves us with the lives of men and women confused by every aspect of society, religion and their own foibles. The angel in other words is viewing what it itself has made. The angel shall be taken as malign in this view, that also codes its hermeneutic in nearly any work of art and links it to some poem or life to dissemble. If we allow that to seem innocent is to be sinister and destructive, how else could the *Angelus Novus*, the angel of history so called, appear on the covers of notebooks as a symbol of the new world order?

What must the libido of science be if it wishes for the death of the world? If Freud is right, and this bad news is the unconscious of our state, it is acceptable that Klee modeled the angel after Adolf Hitler who lived in Munich

in 1920. Hitler was giving speeches in beer halls then and is sometimes argued master of this dubious angel of the unconscious.

What is called messianic interpretation reflects the personal effects of wars that result from this unbelievable manipulation. In this the wars present are blissfully unaware before the fact of what history will be. For Benjamin and Scholem the causes are scorned. --Imagine that all this and more Benjamin and Scholem found in a painting called the New Angel. But the painting cannot be said to truly exist, for the commentary is the thing and not the work. So, we come to the outward edge of understanding the new angel. It is made with words, even if it "has claws like the angel and knife-sharp wings" (Scholem 205). It is an inversion of the meta-theological stance of a Marxist rabbi and occult church father.

There is going to be an angel registration after all, so be sure to get its name. We wrestle not against flesh and blood. We wrestle this thing into submission when we realize what it is we struggle against and its demonic thought. We bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ against whom the devils have no answer. It's not that the death of Oedipus might have been ours, or that his curse comes on us at birth, but that the death of Christ is ours and the blessing that comes on us from his birth enables our thought to go beyond the bad news Freud and science bring.

They say the angel pulls its partner, a female emanation, along into a future, but the angel has no partner, no feminine. Backwards, looking at the past, historical rubble grows greater as time progresses.

In its maturity the (counterfeit) Novus name that should not have been given is said to join the life forces, male and female, but it loses the gift of being human. No man now and if not, what? Armored and encased, a picture on the wall? Considered a self-portrait of the masculine, it could be anyone. "The new angel passed himself off as one of these before he was prepared to name himself" (Scholem 207), but the counterfeit name once given is fatal, as though both male and female, angel and man, project into the angel the image and the world. These are what the angel let go of forever in order to be called by its new name to be revealed. In this absence it exists once removed. But fire from the quartz is struck for the new human, the new man not the new angel, whose "regeneration, at least in its commencement, is a work of the mind, and when it first takes place, it has the lusts of the flesh, yea, all the evil inclinations to war against; and even ignorance itself, together with the temptations and allurements from without." Who pulls along the new, the old or the old made new, the art on the wall or the words it describes? The images hanging in an eternal catalog are a

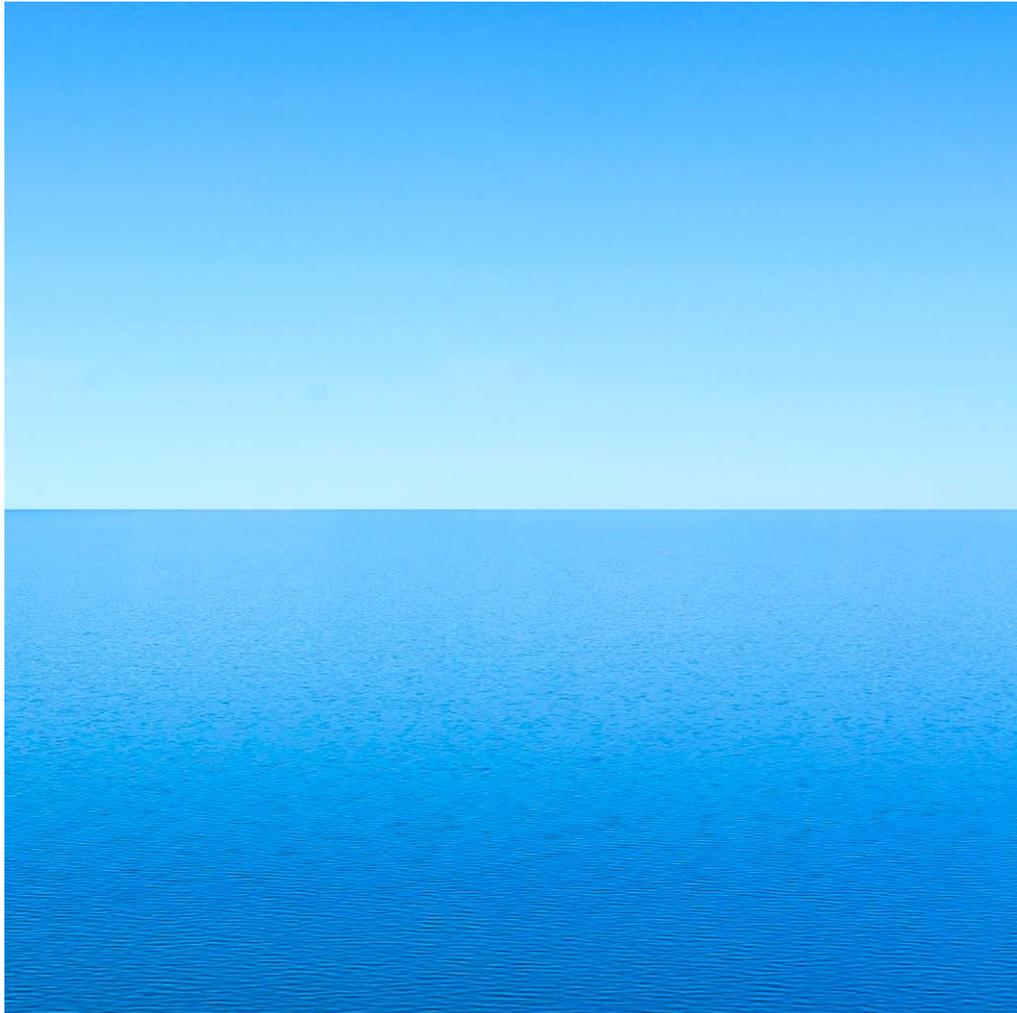
memento of spiritual vocation, a living allegory, flesh into nonflesh, that sea washed uplifted fella.

Note

Angelus Novus was first displayed at Paul Klee's exhibition in Munich, 1920. The supernatural beings that inhabit his later work began then, fifty terrestrial angels imagined from the metaphysical Weimar and the further later puppets. Call them terrestrial angels as a consolation; we will see they are not celestial, but rather southy, below. Are they imposters? It depends on the point of view. Matters of art are not determined by being human, but slightly more than human, or less. What are the archetypes offered for today? Walter Benjamin purchased Klee's aquarelle of the Angelus Novus (1920) in 1921 for an equivalent of 14 dollars, some say thirty. Before Benjamin went over the Pyrenees to his death in his escape from Paris and the Gestapo, he put Angelus in one of two valises filled with his manuscripts that he gave to George Bataille to hide in the Bibliothèque Nationale. After Benjamin's death Angelus passed to Gershom Scholem who delivered his treatise to its altar, Walter Benjamin and His Angel. After Scholem's mortal reward it went to Jerusalem. Scholem's, Benjamin's, Klee's angel was called the "angel of history" in Benjamin's Theses on the Philosophy of History IX. This melancholy doctoring of angels in ink divined the historical process as an unceasing cycle of despair. 🕒



AUGUSTO TODOELE is a translator of the 8th century Anglo-Saxon and Latin texts of Lindisfarne. This is the first publication of these writings outside the contemplative order.



Ode to Oceans

Elena Botts

Abstract

There is no city except a city in fog before anyone. Had woken as the trees moved in an otherworldly breeze. There is no ocean but the ocean. Before anyone was stranded on a distant shore overlooking the bluffs of crazy sorrow. And here is the horizon that first finds the sun and moon as they rise and no stars but these stars as cannot be traced. By anyone. I saw you in a dream but then it was only seeing you in a dream. When still the ghost of you walks this earth.

Body

We begin by stating (once more) that the ocean is the easiest thing to envision as “the beyond”. All of the delegates sat in a circle out on the windy dunes, some half-buried in the sand, others laughing like loons and spinning into the

surf. We sat in the sun or sought a beyond in the waves like the way the people come to the beach just to sit facing the surf and sky without a prayer but the prayer of being alive and think nothing of it. We didn't think anything of it. One ambassador asked another if they might have lunch and an NGO intervened to say hello and cast a distrustful eye on their shared national interests. An intern tried to find the right shoes. Of those around him, he thought to himself: “No, I wouldn't say you all are selfish, just absorbed in your own perspectives and motivations. I'd say there's always something to talk about. One can always trace the stars into a constellation, but will it catch on? Will anyone talk about it? And then, will someone fly into outer space with billions of lines of bungee cord and-”

It is a motif in all our lives, the Secretary went on empathetically or perhaps nasally but probably not. He was only talking to the dim thunder of the surf.

He said something like this: “Given the immensity of the ocean, I can hardly think of the loss that our destruction of it represents. But instead of turning away, it becomes all the more important to calculate the effects of acidification, pollution, overfishing, resource extraction, and other human actions. A particular focus of conference is regional consequences for different countries whose representatives are in attendance. There is a portion focused on the Senegalese plan for facing these issues.”

The Secretary reminded us all that he was from Portugal and that Portuguese writer Vergilio Ferreira once had something to say about oceans. What Secretary quoted was that “A language is the place from where you see the World and in which the limits of our thinking and feeling are mapped out. From my language I see the sea.” What he did not say was that “From my language its murmuring is heard, as from others can be heard that of the forest or the silence of the desert. Therefore, the voice of the sea has been that of our restlessness.” It wasn’t the real words, it was translated, as everything eventually is, into English. Are we made of the contexts we have forsaken? Do we meet here to discuss the world before we go out and find it?

Every country that has a statement on Sustainable Development Goal 14 (it calls for us to “conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.”) has the right to make a scathing remark about how the U.S. is being an irresponsible bastard when it comes to climate and everyone knows it. Every day, the Americans renew their commitment to a carefully constructed guilt complex that has emerged in the aftermath of withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. We have never been good at national shame, however, so the guilt becomes new fodder for airing our differences and plastering our laptops with stickers just so everyone knows that our allegiance lies with not with the USA, nor with any special creed or conviction, but none other than the unimpeachable moon herself which we will soon colonize after we finish untangling Congress, our sense of morality (sometimes referred to as Guantanamo and other times called late stage capitalism, for more information, please take your local epileptic to Times Square), and the Dark Web.

So, let’s talk acidification, pollution, overfishing, resource extraction, and other human actions (dumping especially), regional consequences for different countries whose representatives are in attendance, and let’s see what the Senegalese have to say. Today we are going to affect the lives of everyone on the planet. Don’t breathe or let your heart beat too loudly. I’ve heard that in sacred political spaces, the butterfly effect deafens. Let your heart beat too loudly.

Every organism is, in a way, representative of the whole ecosystem because something that impacts one, impacts all (much like the international system). I think most of us know this. It is hard I think to understand the depth of the human impact on the planet, sometimes I think scientists have only observed a small fraction of our influence. And even that which we have measured and can extrapolate from, in terms of climate change among other phenomena, is difficult to really process. I think it is emotionally numbing for many people to care about environmental problems just because they seem so insurmountable and the average person seems so powerless. However, it is important to overcome this

attitude if only because it is through cooperative effort that we can enact real change, and this requires participation from all parties.

And what is the outcome of this? The delegates at the UN Ocean Conference are meant to determine and agree upon a set of voluntary commitments regarding marine life according to Sustainable Development Goal #14.

These commitments are put forward by nations and by NGOs and enacted as initiatives through governments or organizations. It is my personal hope that these initiatives are implemented, and expanded because the ocean is an immeasurable resource and critical for the continuance of that illimitably precious thing, life on earth. ‘The world’s oceans are key to sustaining life on the planet. They provide a range of benefits for human well-being and prosperity by providing food, jobs, habitats and biodiversity, and by moderating temperatures and capturing carbon.’

Later, you’d tell everyone that the greatest thing was the obliteration of sound when you fell into the collision of two oceans, midwinter in Africa. It was a yelling kind of frigid, your whole body syncopeated.

Because afterwards, is the storm of doing but for nothing? What is this action plan, this nexus of hope but a ruse to tie us together when we are already tied together, when we are already threaded and indeed tired. ‘These are the action years’ says somebody, says probably the secretary of something. “This is the best opportunity we will have.” But I see you talking, sir. All I see is you talking. There is nothing happening here, all of the happening happens somewhere else through the efforts of people more committed than these. It is a vast and bureaucratic machine with no sense to soften it.

Suddenly, a group of scientists and researchers descends, all speaking excitedly of mangroves. Flood protection is vital they say, and economically viable. Eastern Caribbean states are especially vulnerable to storms and loss of coral reefs. Still, the Cook Islands might have trouble getting up. He and his people have, he says, “a disproportionate burden”.

And when the earth is destroyed, we will not inherit the earth, not even the scientists who were devoted will inherit but one shoreline in the shadow of a great beached whale. If it is as the minister of the Cook Islands has said, even his little heaven shall be underwater.

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you!” He cries (sixty percent of his own territory is legally protected). The Cook Islands soon hope to transition to all renewables. “You know”, he says, as an aside, “we really do have more water than land.”

There is an actor here and for a moment I’m afraid he was hard to discern from the enthusiasm of the Canadians. He says that he is full of goodwill but that the “g” in “goodwill” is in uppercase. He is positively giddy. He talks for a long time. He says nothing of substance. It is just a hundred flickering signs on the backs of the chairs where it is written: “Save the Ocean.” Maybe this is hopeless optimism. Maybe this is willful pragmatism. Maybe this is all messaging and now that meaning is gone, we’re effectively underwater. Maybe this is someone was commissioned to create ocean-related sculptures outside so now we too must play our part and take pictures of their creative work. It isn’t creative work. It’s a bunch of waves or something. You act like you’re too postmodern for this.

Sri Lanka keeps taking it all very personally, as we all might do if avoiding confrontation regarding the human rights abuses incurred over the course of one's own civil strife.

The Swedish would like some fish. Or they'd like their fish back, which is why they're co-hosting and altering their fishing regulations to improve sustainability. Fiji is co-hosting because soon they'll have nowhere else to be. All it takes is a few cyclones. Palau and Tuvalu also mention the importance of fishing regulations and indigenous solutions to prevent further "exploitation of international waters."

The Chinese nodded along like buoys in a harbor. Someone cheerfully metaphorized the stock market, comparing it to a tide, rising and falling.

All of the people of Bolivia came here in one person to fight against "the commercialization of biodiversity" and "capitalism as a threat to the earth that must be broken down." It's amazing what modernity can do. He thinks we must be the siblings that he lost to imperialism so every day, every hour we must remind him that we are his enemies, that we would like to take his soul and sell it and afterwards eat of the coca leaf too.

Bolivia is getting so tall lately, says one of the five, but finally they decide to maybe help the landlocked developing country renegotiate with Chile for fair sea access. Bolivia is forced to clarify that "brother" is not a pejorative but comes from a place of deep cultural sensitivity. He goes on to explain that not everyone is born rich and that cultural traditional is important to those of indigenous heritage.

Gabonese Republic mutters about "discrimination" and sanctions and the oceans become a thematic backdrop for allegations of vote-rigging. The sea is apparently the new locale for international justice.

If Belgium is in a hurry then is everyone else in a hurry too? No, no one else is in a hurry. Belgium is simply confused. Because it is important that we all sit in a room emailing and texting each other while someone else grants us idealistic colloquialisms about the fate of the word and this is not a circlejerk because in between important meetings we all drift as by osmosis, colliding with one another like random, idea-generating particles. But random doesn't apply here because we are caught and we are each a mess of intentions and I need you to be quiet here for a moment and watch the boats go by in the lounge where no food or drink is allowed so that I can think about the state of our world or maybe just my state afterwards (I must address my constituents somehow, they are more real to me than these walls and these people and these ideas which I cannot fully bear).

After all, when you had first entered the building, did you know that you are inside the inside of everything? You know you must have been here before that time before you were born. Once again it was very quiet and everyone moved like the wind.

It is important that you remember that you are not a real person. It is good that way, no one will see you. You are a political entity and should act as such. It is perfect; every bit of the space has meaning but no one knows what it is. It's like a song that you make up as you go along, except that no one is singing anything, at least until some Pacific Islanders came to the front and howled in song and it was the most beautiful thing about it. Come to think of it, you're all alone. Only Pachamama is watching.

A man with a vacuum emerges around the corner and vacuums all around but not under your feet. You avoid one another's gaze. There is a solitary ship on the East River, dim lit bulbs strung at its helm. A diplomat watches as you pass, evaluating the import of your step. You say you have no message but the words stick in your breath. This is the part of the story where- "she's trying to feed dragging the dead calf after her"- marine life suffers and dies due to discarded fishing gear soon to be followed by a teary-eyed conservation society proclaiming that greater fishing regulation is necessary for the health of our oceans.

If you were a real person, you know what you would do. First, you would get a new shirt. Then you would recycle, but really recycle, not only cans and jars or nets and plastic bags (floating like death for the mammals to bite into, floating like manufactured ghosts, on the high seas, floating), recycle all the great sorrow of the people and the earth (as though in some implicit suicide pact, we fall, by warming, we lose even our essence and are melded together in that final hour, maybe even wading through a rising ocean, and scarcity was un compelling and in the end we didn't know what it meant to be human, we just knew that we were dying if we didn't find out) and turn it into something compelling like a solution or as they call it lately, these days, a multilateral agreement, like a great something (beached whale?) between nations.

Finally, you would ride on a foreign minister's back like a strange monkey from far away. You would say hello to everyone that you saw in the hallway. It is not impractical to address every single human being here, it is like playing god without being divine and especially without any pride. In the morning, you wake with the realization that we sprung from the womb as fully formed solutions. Surely, we could write the whole thing off to existential rot. Surely we could say who's bright idea was existence anyway? To hell with the oceans! To hell with her that is like my mother and my father and my whole world, all that I have ever loved.

Yeah, I care about what the ocean thinks. The real problem here is that there is no wind inside the building. It is not like we went into the great wood and oh goodness it breathed, those stormy trees and a weighted breeze rippling the solid calm of lake. Here I can only beg you not to speak so quietly when all lives bend to the water but you do, oh you do. The united nations climbed a tree, fallen as it was and each spoke of how everyone was restrained in a mighty fear, like something that could not be named so we named it and the world shook out from under us until we entered the old earth.

Let's be judicious. Let's have a council. Let's prepare statements while we sit on airplanes or jets shooting across the sky like renegade falling stars that somehow, and to find fuel, to combust and propel oneself from a thousand foreign countries, immersed as we all are, after all, in the oceans. This all makes so much sense we don't have to say it aloud. We'll say it aloud anyway, loudly and ad nauseum. Did anyone forget that we are here to, in fact, save the oceans? We're here to save the oceans. We're here and we're naked and we want more than anything to gird ourselves in compliance and measures to limit pollution from industry and eventually we would like to succumb to the formalization of an international system that seems so increasingly unsteady like, forgive me, a captainless rudderless ship sailing out between the dead buildings of New York City.

And in ghost — walking the city one recalls that there are many organisms that think they are separate organisms. If the nations are united then is this just another city? No, because no one is eating here and no one is sleeping here but mostly no one is knowing here another thing, for what it is. It is inescapable, New York, as we walk into an unseasonable temperature, passing security guards who ask if we are okay or perhaps feeling a bit under the weather today.

Addendum

I keep thinking about the ruler of the universe, you know the one who controls the aquatic symphonies, the tides. He has a cat, a gingery thing that will leave his side and often but somehow remains like a piece of his face only you wouldn't think of his face you'll never remember his face quite even after you've met him and maybe it's this way for a lot of people but for some reason. His face makes you remember a lot of things but these are as unspeakable as the planet in its slow revolutions of the sun and nothing ready to the mind, you cannot speak.

He lives in a small house. Here there is a table and a cat, a gingery thing that eludes him somehow more or less than all the ether that he cannot convince himself is real. He doesn't believe in anything, he says. Most especially not himself and that is why I recall him so fondly, perhaps he is a generation of my own eroding. Maybe it is fond to know little or nothing or perhaps it is endearing to us who know mostly of failings and less of things that stick and stick and stick like stars or even the constellations of skin, so fixed is my vision on

impermanence, so broken my bones by merely the thought of it and breath just another thing to carry me out of this world. Had I known myself enough here to know this place.

He lives by the sea, but we all do in our minds, anyway, ourselves forever wading or cresting. It depends on whether we are in it or of it, whether we could know it, or even the moon. He has a face like the moon and he breathes a cosmic wind that floats down and flutters us, our bones, our terrible unshakeable hearts that we do anything and everything to annihilate. As oblivion was the first true love.

When you embrace the ruler of the universe, he only shivers and admits that he doesn't know if he exists, let alone if there is a universe. The others often aim at convincing him, that yes, there is great care in the cosmos, even rabid desire and the minds of animals, even the salivating human animal, and that the spinning suns burning out implode for something after all, even the nethers of us. But he is. The cat has lost itself in the wave but pads out again, slim flank and a trim fish in mouth or maybe an imaginary fish, a scintillating thing that the felid devours madly, streaking the bones and ravaging. They comfort the body of the ruler, hold him tight though he is unmoved, moves little. His body doesn't speak fathoms and his eyes are forgettable to each of us. We hold him like nobody until we are released. He smiles at us and says he will soon return to his little shack on the rim of the great ocean on this planet that is smaller than most but on which he is lonesome, that is if one can be alone, that is if he is what he is and there is a shack crumbling and an ocean also and a rim of all things, though he says, and skuffles a foot into a dune, I cannot suppose that is so. I do not know. 🌀



ELENA BOTTS has lived in the Hudson Valley, Johannesburg, Berlin, NYC, DC, and many other places. In the past few years, her poems have been published in dozens of literary magazines. She is the winner of four poetry contests and has had six books published. Her visual artwork has won numerous awards and has been exhibited in various galleries. She has also collaborated on, released and exhibited sound and moving image art.
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Her Climb

George Hook

I was most alone the night the Dutch girl did not come to me. Before the night, on the mountain, I fell for her watching the strong grace in her climb and the smooth moves in her muscles. Though raised in the lowlands, she hurried up the mountain like she had lived on the slopes all her life and knew every ridge and cranny.

I tried to keep up with her climb. I lagged behind, struggling for breath. But I was just not the French mountain boy who climbed next her. He held her hand then wrapped his arm around her waist to make damn sure he stayed next to her. As I panted behind them, they never lost their breath talking. And they had never stopped talking until they fell asleep in the cabin their first night together.

In bed in another room, I felt them together, arm in arm. Handsome and athletic, he is probably still not losing his breath, I thought. I still felt I wanted her in my bed more than he did. I needed a drink. I tried to cover my feelings with a bottle of cheap French wine like a thick comforter over my face. But I could not stop thinking of them, no matter how many swigs I took. Instead, the wine brought tears to my eyes so I could not close them to sleep.

Losing sleep, I am most alone, I think, when nobody opens my bedroom door to lift me off myself. And, that night, I needed the Dutch girl so I could sleep, with her. But I found nobody but me and the mountain outside I felt. ↻



GEORGE HOOK is a fiction writer and poet and former editor of the Arts & Letters page of The Wall Street Journal/Europe. He regularly performs at open mics throughout Chicago and is part of the writing communities of the University of Chicago Writer's Studio and StoryStudio Chicago. His short stories have been published by Freeze Ray and Flying Island of the Indiana Writers Center. His novel *Private Showings* is available through Xlibris. Web links to these and other works and announcements and other noteworthy matters are posted on his Facebook page: The Hook Look (@hooklookman). Visit him online at tinyurl.com/yx9sjrvn

5 Flashes

Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois



Three Caves Away

1. On the face of a mountain in Provence is a defunct troglodyte village. My aunt was the last inhabitant. She died in 1948.
2. I was poisoned in 2009. I cannot be poisoned again.
3. Meth heads now defile the villagers' memories. They shit in the caves that were their homes.
4. In Greece, a young woman put her arm down her lover's throat to the elbow, thinking she could retrieve the deadly drugs he'd ingested.
5. As a child, I sat inside my aunt's troglodyte home, eating rock candy she made with a string and sugar solution. Candlelight flickered on her face.
6. Poison comes in many forms. Some of it is white powder. Some of it blows in the wind. Some is traceable. Some not.
7. I was in love with a girl who lived three caves away.
8. I was poisoned in 2009.
9. Her father closely guarded the pig he kept in a shelter just outside.
10. I cannot be poisoned again.
11. I stand on top of the troglodyte mountain, look out at a nuclear plant, fall to my knees and worship the cooling towers.
12. The girl was quite a bit older than me, already a teenager.
13. I have returned to my roots, to my rightful inheritance
14. She showed me her breasts. They were white and cool.
15. I descend the steep path to the trog village.
16. Everywhere else, her skin was rough and dirty.
17. I sweep out my aunt's cave with a straw broom. Human excrement is repulsive. ↻



Jaws

1. After the car crash in which my wife lost her leg, I noticed, amazed, half a tuna sandwich with tomato sitting unmoved on the dashboard.
2. I like eating tomatoes. They remind me of what humans could be.
3. My wife had been sleeping across the back seat of our Civic. She was quite short and got really mad, when she was a kid, if anyone called her a midget.
4. Growing from seed, flowering, fruiting, tomatoes impart peace as I weed them.
5. I had to wait for the *Jaws of Life* to get me out.
6. Tomatoes ask how they can serve me. I say: *You know how you can serve me.* My wife had made some multi-grain bread. I must admit I have a weakness for salt and mayonnaise.
7. While I waited for the rescue crew, I ate the sandwich. It had too much mayo and the bread was stale. ↻



Muscovies

1. In the barn, I pat my roto-tiller. Like my dog, I rescued it. They are both as loyal as the tomatoes in my garden. Loyalty makes life good.
2. That doesn't change the fact that my mental status is corrupt. I reject medications except those I self-administer.
3. Tomatoes make their selfless donations to the lives of others. They enjoy the sunny days and the cool nights.
4. For therapy, I wash and blow-dry my Muscovy duck.
5. When the tomatoes are done being productive, they wither. They barely sense it when I pull their dead bodies out of the ground and toss them into the woods behind the garden.
6. He's a dirty bird. He revels in dirt. His clean spouse gives him dirty looks.
7. There the old plants lay, with soft, vague memories of the bees they shared their lives with.
8. The Muscovies have lots of babies. I kidnap and eat them. That's also part of my therapy. ↻



Dry

1. I was going through a dry period in my writing. I had lost my passion for it. I no longer saw the point. I felt that there was enough writing in the world. There was certainly enough of mine. I'd been terribly prolific. Terribly, as in Terrorism, the terrorism of Ego.
2. I'd been nerved up. The nerve expands to infinity. I can invite others to join my nerve, to write in India ink across the surface of cells. The nerve connects eye to brain.
3. I take a few spoons of porridge and drop them into a bowl of brown sugar and call it breakfast. My wife looks disdainful. She's trying to change my diet. She wants me to eat kale. I say: *Lizards eat kale.*
4. Ferries glide over the water like water bugs.
5. My son crashed his bike on a mountain pass, got flung against a steel guard rail, cut all the tendons in his arm, all the nerves. He can't invite others to join his nerve, but the doc can put him back together. The doc knows that curve. *Bless the guard rail*, he says.
6. I began to feel that it would be a better use of my time to tutor underperforming Hispanic elementary school students than to sit in front of this screen tapping away.
7. After that, I return to southern France, to the mental hospital where Vincent van Gogh spent the last year of his life. The woman in the booth tears off my ticket. She's dark-haired, attractive, with a small tight body and sinewy hands and forearms. She must be a mental patient, I think, whose progress has earned her the privilege of working this ticket booth. It is the only reason I can think of for the frank, deeply sexual look she gives me as she hands me my change. 🍷



No Love

1. The protocols of arrest and imprisonment are like the procedures of abortion. See me on the steps of the iniquitous clinic, my face impassive, my clothes inadequate for the weather, which turns ever colder. My sign says *Life*. My shadow runs before me like the beginning of a flood, like a living stream of conscience, like a bicycle flying out of control.
2. My brother didn't go to the collective War. His own war was enough. He didn't get thanked by anyone for being a truck loader and deliveryman, no holy Red White and Blue in that. Then he stepped into the ring one too many times, vomited in the gutter afterwards. A cab took him to Emergency.
3. Today is deep winter, always my favorite time of year, especially now that icing conditions have halted each of the 56 turbines that dominate our world the way the sky once did. It is silent today; the bird deaths stop for a while. I cross-country ski along the unplowed road.
4. My penal record rolls out before me, a carpet trod red by those who arrive with babes in their bellies and murder in their hearts.
5. Look, anything not taken from me, I'd be giving away. I live in the violence of Boxing, of Mixed Martial Arts, and of War. *Thank you for your service*—that means *Fuck you very much.*
6. In modern America every perversion is permitted, but I have been criminalized.
7. The cab driver was Ukrainian. He didn't charge us for the trip. He knows our family.
8. Then I got a Facebook message from my Australian friend Clara. She said she'd broken up with her new boyfriend. I asked her why. She said that he didn't make love, he only fucked. I recalled that one of the reasons he'd recently gotten divorced was that he and his wife hadn't made love for five years. 🍷



MITCHELL KROCKMALNIK GRABOIS has works appearing in magazines worldwide. Nominated for numerous prizes, he was awarded the 2017 Booranga Centre (Australia) Fiction Prize. His novel, *Two-Headed Dog*, based on his work in a state hospital, is available for Kindle and as a print edition. His poetry collection, *THE ARREST OF MR. KISSY FACE*, was published in March 2019 by Pski's Porch Publications. Visit WordsByMitch.com to read more of his poetry and flash fiction.



Sharks

Frances Holland

Some shark species can live to be over five hundred years old. How do we even know this? Their bodies rot away to nothing, the soft cartilage dissolving into the seabed. Their teeth renew again and again and again, an unlimited supply for fresh killing every day, if need be.

I'll tell you how we know. The eyes. The eyes of a shark tell you everything you need to know.

It was a blind shark we tested at first - a Greenland shark. A living fossil. As big as a Great White, with a parasite lodged in its eyeball almost from birth. When we checked her lenses, she was nearly five centuries old.

You had to be careful, because the Kalaallisut told us they'd seen Greenland sharks pull polar bears off the ice and into the frigid waters, where they ripped the terrified animals to shreds. The ones we swam with were more curious, almost like dogs in the way they turned their blunt snouts towards us.

Ampullae of Lorenzini. They sense your heartbeat. It sounds almost romantic, that detection of electrical impulses, until you see the white shark, you see her mouth start to gape at you and you realise it's not romantic at all. Once, I forgot to remove my wedding ring, the light caught

her eye in the wrong way, my heart started to pound, and she rammed the cage.

'You should have just taken it off.'

'I forgot I was wearing it.'

'I'm sure your husband won't mind.'

'He's dead.'

'Oh. I'm so sorry.'

'He was eaten by a shark.'

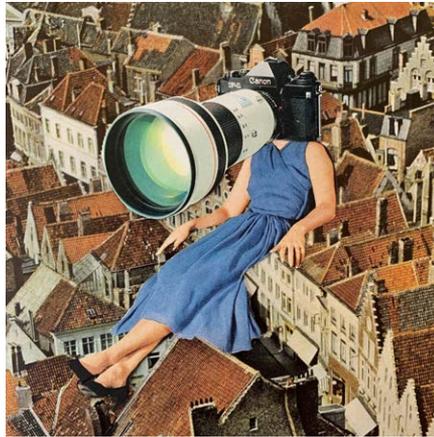
The captain of the diving boat stares at me, his eyes wide. I laugh, exhausted. 'Not really. Cancer. He didn't even swim.'

She rammed the cage not only because of the light from the ring, but because she could sense my panic about it. I could almost see the horror and confusion in her eyes as she realised her mistake - "Oh my god, I'm sorry, I didn't realise it was only one of you lot." Wishing she could swim backwards. Panic and blood in her blue eyes. Did you know that sharks' eyes are blue?

Ampullae of Lorenzini. They can sense your heartbeat. They can sense the change between calm and excitement. They'd make good matchmakers. 🐡



FRANCES HOLLAND is from the North-East of England, where she is currently studying at Newcastle University for an MA in Creative Writing.



Silver Halide

Julia Moncur

My hand holds the film's exposure. In it, the darkroom boys closed themselves around the girl. Their voices, a vein between world and secret, seen and unseen. Hoping to fall, her body leaped, entered the enlarger, became a specialized transparency. Projectedprojecting, they adjusted the iris aperture. Mine's brownburning. The girl became light, escaping through a microscopic hole, but they captured her image. Sourbreathheat on the hairs of her neck, retreat into the boys' basement, inside a light proof tank. Dark room: a world with nothingeverything for rods to absorb. Rendered useless. They closed around. Pressed me into harder. We stood like that.

Developer Bath. The image of the girl waited, raw. Their fingers grazegrabbed. Stop Bath. Yield developer chemicals. Hands on my clenched together. The space between us not enough pushingbehindmeinthedark. The whites of her armslegs. She counted them, trying to make her own body. Fixer Bath. They removed the silver halide. On film, their image revealed itself. The girl's face, washing them off in a bathtub, staring with buttons off. Words bound my lips. I felt blind, insensitive to light.

I stole their picture and hid it. Years later, I build my own

dark room to inspect the girl. I buy my own chemicals. I add them to the meimage. The silver halide begins to alter the face of the girl. Buddingspreading hand, pulls me inside with her, shows me the facula filtered atmosphere. We swim in the cresentsecret where limbs darken split hum in lacrimallakes. I pour more chemicals in. Her image fades. She teaches me the aura: diurnaldeath. I stand; she collapses in dust, sidereal time. I lick her lesions and sink into her umbra—years of synchronic seclusion. Words: a realm of luminous escape. I follow her, lost. I add the meimage to the Fixer Bath and wash it in my darkroomuniverse. Inspecting it, her face is smudged light. Her body a shadow. She waves. 🌀

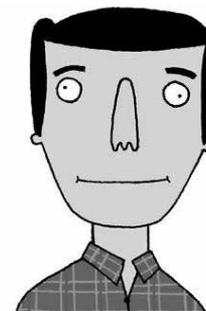


JULIA MONCUR is pursuing a life and career in both creative writing and medicine. She is an advocate for both survivors of trauma and mental illness, and enjoys reading memoirs beside her French Bulldog, Mambo. Her work has been previously published or is forthcoming in *Rag Queen Periodical*, *Anti Heroin Chic*, and *Riggwelter Press*.

ARTISTS & PHOTOGRAPHERS APPEARING IN THIS ISSUE

REZA FARAZMAND *Page: 10...*

draws comics and writes things. You can find more of his work at Poorly Drawn Lines (PoorlyDrawnLines.com), which is updated every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. A collection of his cartoons titled **Poorly Draw Lines: Good Ideas and Amazing Stories** debuted on October 6, 2015. His latest book, **Comics for a Strange World** was released on October 24th, 2017.



ROB KIRBYSON *Pages: 7, 13, 19...*

conceives visceral, often surreal ideas and renders them carefully and precisely with acrylic and oil paints, inks and pencils. There are no happy accidents. Inspiration is usually borne existentially from within although Rob also likes to take a personal skewed look at other cultural touchstones. Surfaces used are canvas, canvas board, wooden panel, aluminium sheet and electric toasters. Rob also works in magazine illustration and as a cartoonist. He has worked in independent and newsstand magazines in the USA and UK since the late 90's. Rob works from a camouflaged and secluded studio in Kinross, Scotland. Check out more of Rob's work at RobKirbyson.com



KYRA WILSON *Page 3...*

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



THRICE FICTION MAGAZINE CO-FOUNDERS & STAFF

RW SPRYSZAK *Editor, THRICE Fiction...*

has work which appeared in **Slipstream**, **Paper Radio**, **the Lost and Found Times**, **Mallife**, **Version90**, **Sub Rosa**, **Asylum**, and a host of other alternative magazines over the last 30 years. After a drunken hiatus his work has resurfaced in places like **A Minor Magazine** and **Peculiar Mormyrid**. He was editor of the **Fiction Review** from 1989-1991 and co-founded Thrice Publishing in 2011. He compiled and edited **So What If It's True: From the Notebooks of Lorri Jackson** and stares out the window for no reason quite often. He has no degrees, does not apply for awards, and works in a print shop where nobody knows about any of this. You can find his website at rwspryszak.com





GLORIA HUANG *Page: 11...*
is a high-school artist currently based in Suzhou, China.



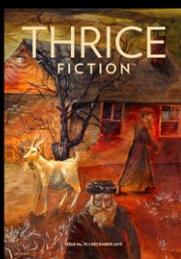
CHAD ROSEBURG *Pages: 5, 8, 15...*
is of possible Jewish descent. Superstition, Klezmer music and Chinese candy wrapper designs inform many of his artistic works. He is interested in the places at which art, music, technology and language intersect.



CHAD YENNEY *Pages: 23, 34-35...*
makes paper collages in Washington state. You can see more of his work at his website at computarded.com or send him love letters at computardedcollage@gmail.com.



DAVID SIMMER II *Lead Artist & Art Director, THRICE Fiction...*
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



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Issue No. 27 • DECEMBER 2019

