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* Indicates the product of a writing exercise performed during the workshop.

EDITORS' NOTE

“We must have humbug, we all like humbug, we couldn’t get on without humbug.” (Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol)

Spring is a season of pollen, of fast moving rainstorms, of late nights on the grass, of swimming in the river and new beginnings. This Spring marks a transition for Humbug as we instate a new editorial staff. We are still learning how to handle a budget, how to compose a chapbook, how to run meetings, and frankly, how to use the listserve. Amidst these challenges we remain undaunted by growth, and excited to create and learn from one another.

Each Thursday night we meet in the poetry room of Sanborn, ready to listen to the words of our peers, and offer critiques on their writing. Last week was the ‘16’s final meeting, and without them this club wouldn’t be possible. Humbug remains a constant – a reminder at the end of a hectic week to take time for ourselves and our writing. It gives us time to pause and listen to each other, to learn from and help one another. Humbug allows us to take time to record what we think of this world in which we live, to work out the kinks in our writing and how to better articulate our thoughts.

While last term’s chapbook marked the end of an era, this one marks the beginning of a new one. So bear with us as we learn how to manage our new roles, and how to best portray our talented peers’ writing. Though this chapbook is the last to include writing from our 16’s, we’re happy to usher in a bevy of new voices, and look forward to meeting the 20’s. Thank you ‘16s for all you’ve done for this club, for the space you’ve created, and for all of the help during workshops. We’ll take care of Humbug, and we wish you the best of luck in all that you do!

Much love,

Madeleine Waters and Isabelle Blank

Hum · bug: *noun*

- 'həm,bəg/
- 1. Deceptive or false behavior
 - 2. A coastal mountain in Oregon
 - 3. An exclamatory challenge to a statement or idea

Note About Art

All art in this issue was created by Rebecca Rowland ’16, for whom we are very grateful.

MJ

Really Hard Stuff

The dog had been sick for some time but it still came as a surprise when we discovered its body hidden beneath the neighbor's porch after it had been missing for two days. We wouldn't have found her at all if it hadn't been for Ginny who'd seen one thin leg poking out from beneath the crawl space and the tracks in the dirt as if it had dragged itself there to die. Our father pulled the dog out, checked the animal's eyes and gums, and then stood there frowning.

"I don't know," he said, sounding perplexed, and looked up at the windows of the neighbor's house. "I don't know."

After dinner, we all walked next door. Our father made us come with him because he wanted us to learn how to be kind while doing really hard stuff. He says love is only worth something if it's hard. We stood there on the porch, the three of us, and I let Ginny ring the doorbell but it was broken so I knocked instead. When Mrs. Salmey came to the door, I stood between my dad and Ginny so she couldn't see behind us.

"Where is she? Did you find her? We've been so worried."

"We did," my father said, "but—"

"Oh my god. Thank you. Thank you so much, you have no idea how much we've missed her. Where is she? We'll come get her right away."

My father's face didn't move or grimace or crumple or anything. He just stood there, and his mouth twitched a little.

"Listen, Susan, we brought her here."

"You didn't have to do that! Where is she?"

"Mrs. Salmey," Ginny piped in, "we found her underneath our porch."

"That's wonderful Ginny. Thank you for looking so hard for her."

I squeezed my eyes shut tight. Every night my father reminds us about the rules for being nice: Smile big, lift your eyebrows, and use your manners. I think it's really hard, but my father says that's okay, that when I practice doing it more, I'll start thinking it's easy.

"Mrs. Salmey—" *Smile big.*

"Yes Kate? Where's Sunny?"

"She died." *Lift your eyebrows.*

"She...died?"

"Yes Ma'am." *Use your Manners.*

"Yes Mrs. Salmey she did and I found her under our porch because I saw her paw and then I told daddy and he went to get her and then he said we'd bring her to you after dinner and then we came here."

Mrs. Salmey's lips turned a strange shade of yellow. She rested her hand on the door handle.

"But—where is she?"

My father smiled and stepped to the side, behind me. "Right here ma'am."

Mrs. Salmey looked confused. Her forehead wrinkled, and she squinted like she couldn't see anything. But then she tilted her chin down a bit and saw Sunny lying on the stair behind us. I looked too. Her fur was sticky with something and shone black like asphalt. Her paw, the one that had stuck out from under the porch, seemed too thin, and if you looked really close there were little tan worms in-between her toes. I crinkled my nose. Mrs. Salmey got down on her knees and reached a hand out to touch Sunny's ear, but my father stopped her.

"It's okay Susan, you shouldn't be this close to her. We don't know how she died. It could have been bacteria or something. I'll take care of it."

My father takes care of lots of things. He says that's part of loving people well—helping them with the gross stuff. One time Ginny got sick on the way to school and made the car smell really bad and got its floor all gooey and my dad put on some gloves and cleaned all of the throw-up out of the carpet himself.

Mrs. Salmey nodded and pulled back her hand, and my father told us to go home so he could take care of the dog. So I walked Ginny back. But I kept wondering about the sticky stuff in Sunny's fur, and I thought that maybe it would be nice for Mrs. Salmey if Sunny was clean so she could touch her. I got a towel to wipe her off with, and I had my father's gloves, too, so I wasn't scared of bacteria.

I walked back over to the porch to help my father, but he wasn't there. Sunny wasn't either, so I trudged around to the back gate to see if he had started digging already.

"Dad?"

He didn't answer, so I pushed open the gate just in time to see him walking to the Salmey's shed carrying Sunny. He opened the door and threw her body inside, and I heard it thump on the floor. He started to turn around, and I jumped behind the bush at the edge of their pool. I don't know why I hid, but I did, and I pushed aside the leaves a little bit and peeked through them.

My father grabbed the hedging shears from the hook on the outside wall and walked back inside. He left the door open though, and I could just see through a tiny bit. I could see Mrs. Salmey inside the house too, crying and talking on her phone.

"Okay Sunny," my father said. "Let's get started."

He opened the shears really wide, and I thought he was going to give Sunny a haircut to get all of the gunky fur off. But he put the shears around her leg and started to press them together. I couldn't watch. I heard a loud crack, and when I opened my eyes again, her leg was just laying there.

"That's right," I heard him say, "let's do the really hard stuff first."

Crack, crack, crack went the shears and the legs were all lying there on the floor. My father picked one of them up and pressed his face against it. I didn't believe it was him at first, holding Sunny's leg. It didn't seem nice or kind, and I was worried that Mrs. Salmey would come out and see the legs and be even more sad.

I looked at the house again and saw her hang up the phone and press her face into the jacket hanging from the front door. Her shoulders shook for a while and then she shrugged them once, wiped her face, and walked upstairs.

When I turned back to the shed, my father had his thumbs on Sunny's eyes. It looked like he was pressing on them, hard. I squeezed my eyes shut, and I kept imagining what it would feel like to have someone press on them, so I tried it. Things just looked black at first, so I pressed harder and I could see yellow static—like when the TV signal goes out but in gold. It started to hurt, so I stopped and opened them again. Mrs. Salmey was walking to the back door.

"Dad!" I yelled and ran out from behind the bush. He didn't even jump, just pulled his thumbs out and turned around calmly.

"Kate, I need you to go back home with mom and Ginny."

"But Dad, she's coming. She's coming to see Sunny and you cut her," I hissed.

He busied himself wrapping the body in trashbags, laying its legs next to the head to save space.

"Kate, I said to go home."

I was halfway across the lawn when Mrs. Salmey reached the shed.

"Thank you so much, Dan, for helping us so much with Sunny. Finding her and bringing her over here and burying her. Really I can't thank you enough."

"It's no problem ma'am," I heard him answer. I couldn't see it, but I knew that he was smiling.

*** the italicized portion of this piece was a prompt provided by Professor Thomas O'Malley for his English 80 class this term***



Lily Anderson

Double Yellow Line

It's the dead of night in the dripping hot, melted suburbs. The night is feverish and languid – there's an unsettling loudness in the silent dark. The oppressive air makes one feel as though bobbing in and out of sleep while the TV is blaring or listening to voices come through the static on the radio. Vivid noises: cicadas sawing and creaking, lamenting their nearing demise. Nothing made all the folly more apparent than the matching yellowed grass outside each house, crayons left to melt and drip into the tabletops inside, lavish colors sweating in the oppressive nights.

I wanted to run that summer, wanted to do something that would help me escape, build me up and break me down. I never had before, and I wanted to do it in secret. I didn't think I could bear the simple happy expressions on my parent's faces if I told them my plans. It had to be real for me, and anyone else knowing would take some teeth from it. Thus, there I stood at midnight. Dirty shoes from gym class. My misplaced optimism next to me, walking out the door. The fact that I actually made it there, sitting in the garage tying my shoes, felt like something, but the gasoline and dust smells of my childhood, made me doubt myself – drew me to the past.

I can't stop looking behind me, freezing up to listen when I hear little noises.

Just what you'd expect, isn't she? Young and slim and a little aggressive in her stride, out onto the driveway now, all cracked but power washed just last weekend. She looks like she gets it.

I quickly throw my eyes to the left and right, just making sure no one is watching. But then I pretend for myself that I didn't, because I have to be confident. My chin rolls back and forth across my chest, I curve my ribs to the left and right. I throw my knees up in a frenzied run, bouncing down the street. My thoughts are just uncomfortable enough, making me tense and squirm.

I roll my eyes. I crouch. Tucking my legs under my body the way I've seen it done, I balance myself in front with my hands and thumbs. Take off sprinting, temporarily forgetting how I look. Step step step step step step before the steps are too fast to count and I feel the numbers in my legs instead of counting them in my head. I fly down the empty road, before I taper off into a slow jog and walk, pulling in the dirty humid air. I annoy myself with my slow jog back into my house, taking off my shoes before I go inside, running up the stairs and right into bed where I can pretend it never happened.

My room is lit by the dirty bright sky, absorbing all the light from the city and throwing it around in the clouds and through my window.

I glance at myself in my bedroom mirror before I get in bed.

*Sometimes all I can see is the softness, the rounded edges,
But sometimes I appear to myself as a skeleton*

Autumn brought chilliness and layers pulled over her head as she crept out the door. Autumn meant countless steps and improvement and less self-loathing.

In the winter as she ran her bones cracked before they shattered, her blood froze, her lips turned blue and her skin dark grey. *I can't go out there, I have to go out there.* Telling herself this is what she

wanted, yet only the feathered winter sky looked back all day. At night the lonely stars tried to flicker through the blanket of dark air pollution and streamed into and back out of her eyes in cold tears. Her breath came out in white around her face, her lungs screamed.

By spring the trees shed little pink and white flowers into the street, where they became grey and the rain made the world wet and cold and trembling at night. The spring rain dragged her down with a great and terrible power- hobbling and sliding, big dirty raindrops that shoved her into the gutter and down the storm grate away from the dogs who take medications and into the world where big ugly fish look each other in the eye. Rags and dirt and newspapers and honesty in the wet world under the streets. She fought them all off, the creatures below who were waiting to cut her hair and fill her mouth with salt and make her formless like them. Life was colorless and drained, but somehow meant more with less. By the time summer came back she was ready to run again, and wiped all the grime away and cleared her eyes and climbed back up to the street level.

She streaked down the street towards the empty moon and the open sky, just mildly wild and weaving herself with the double yellow line.



Tommy Hart

Limerick

Warmer weather is the pits –
Or at least the smell of it.
For with more sun,
comes less fun,
As I sweat odors explicit

Robbie Herbst

Falling Game

The Lewis girls had a game.

Behind the Twerski's place was one of those sledding hills. It was the only one steep enough for the girl's game, and it's where they spent their summers, starting in mid April when the grass was mostly snowless and ending in mid-November, when the grass was mostly snowless. They played it on those days when their parents' words toward each other grew deadly quiet. If you were to watch the girls from afar, they were like the nibs of pens, scrawling over the yellow-parchment ground in curlicues. Even when they were that young, they dressed in dark colors, so their parents wouldn't see the lengths to which they went.

Andie was the younger by a year and ten months. That meant that Madeleine had only endured her sister's non-existence for a little more than a year of her life. It's not implausible that even in that window of time, she had developed that fixed, pondering expression on her face, like she was working out the cruel purpose of the world. Simply the knowledge of a life without her sister marked her face.

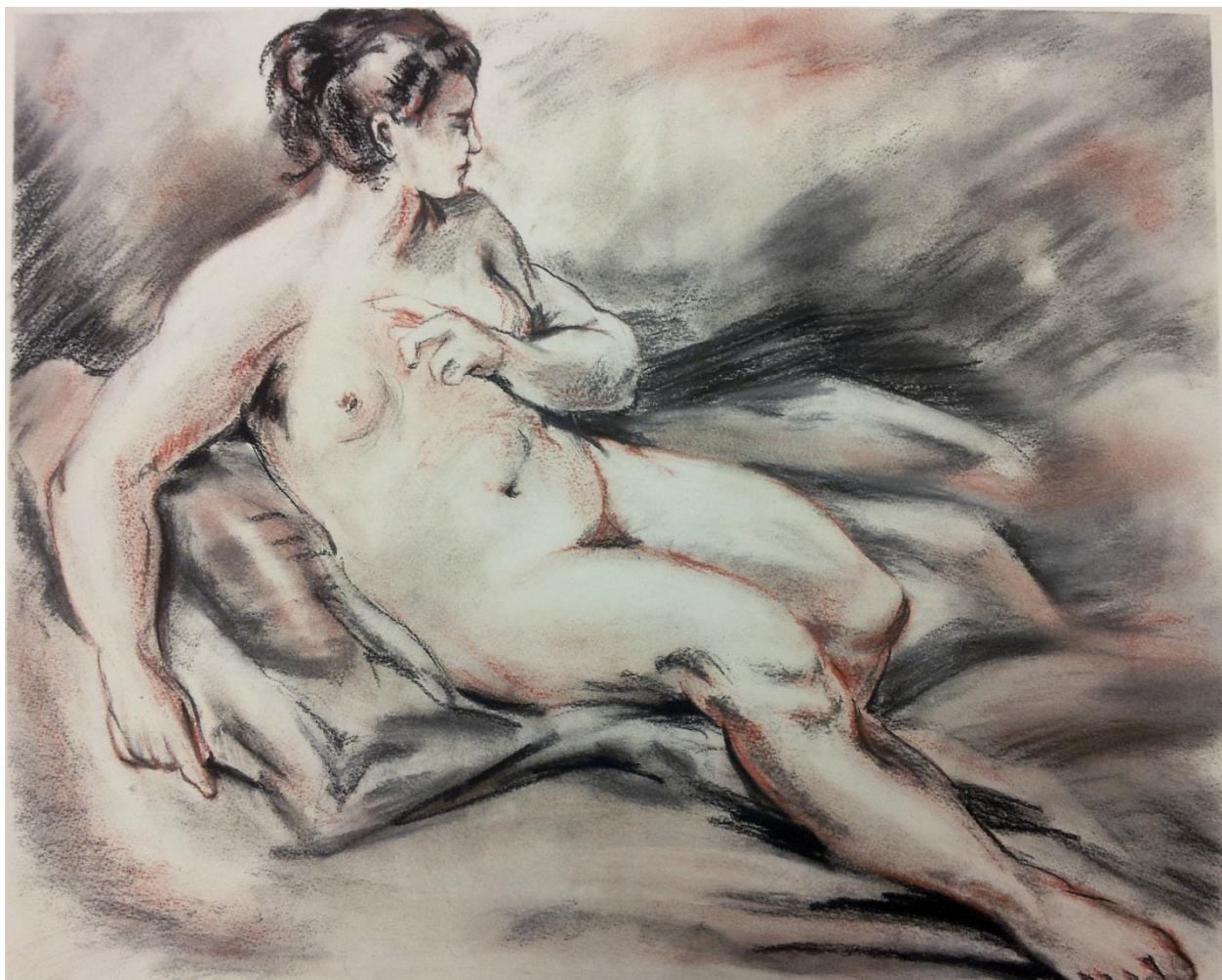
It was remarkable how the two could bare so much similarity, yet only one could be beautiful. But it was precisely that similarity which caused the difference. Everything that made Andie lovely - the thick dark hair, the pale skin, the subtle twitching at the edges of her lips - all those traits only made Madeleine more ugly.

In those summer months, they would race up the sledding hill in a chant of giggles, pushing and shoving the whole way. The hill was too steep to take it in one go, and they would detour left and right and even back down, stitching up the dirt with their footprints. Toward the top of the hill, it grew suddenly steeper. This was the feature that made it so excellent for sledding – the bolder children could go tremendously fast if they stomped all the way up hill, even in the most rink-a-dink toboggan. This is where the girls raced toward, the small almost-ledge, offset slightly to the left of the hill. A scrubby kind of weed grew there, and the girls would sometimes grab at it to help their sprint, in lieu of going on all fours.

This is what would happen up at the top of the hill: Andie and Madeleine would converge upon instinct, as if the dark colors of their clothing were conspiring to rejoin. For a brief instant it would seem like they were a single inky stain upon the land. Then, with a ripping motion, one would fling the other off, sending them flying backwards down the hill. While the pusher would bobble to keep her own balance, the faller would collide with the ground and tumble down the hill. It was important that the grown-ups never saw this, for in this fall the girls couldn't help but look like ragdolls, limbs flailing dumbly in all directions. When the faller had finally righted herself somewhere below, she was rarely more than a little bruised. The girls were very sturdy after all.

The faller – she was the winner of the game. The only pride to be had was in successfully out-waiting the other, daring them to push first. But eventually, it became the norm that Madeleine was the one who pushed, and Andie the one who fell. This was not because of any agreement, nor was it because of any physical or athletic quality in either girl. It was because, when they found themselves up on that almost-ledge, Madeleine was seized with an immense curiosity to watch her hands grab onto her sister and throw her to the ground. Andie, for her part, only had eyes for the rocks and tangles on the ground below. In that moment, when the girls were ripped apart, she had the overwhelming, delightful sense that the land was waiting for her, like a blindfolded person might wait for an expectant touch.

And so it happened that Madeleine loved to push, and Andie to fall. Under their dark clothes, the girls hid sandy blood and plum-stain bruises. Only once did a bone snap - Andie's ulna just below the wrist. It looked so strange, they both thought, her arm swelling like an odd fruit in springtime.



Madeleine Waters

The Failed Dragon

What can you do with a princess no one else wants?

Bargtn hadn't known there were princesses that no one was interested in questing for or paying a ransom to rescue. Just his luck, to get stuck with the seventh daughter of a penniless king. How was he supposed to show off his valor and success now? His mother had always been careful about reminding him how a dragon's hoard reflected his character—treasure from placating bribes and gifts are testaments to a dragon's fearsomeness. A few singed coats of armor hung in an entrance hall will always look impressive to visitors.

Princesses are a different matter. They're annoying and hard to feed, and in and of themselves, have very little redeeming value.

"You can't even hunt for yourself," he grumbled at his captive after the third week without any sign she would be leaving his company. He still couldn't believe humans actually had to eat every day.

"If I could, I'd certainly pick prey that was more edible than *this*."

Bargtn wasn't sure if he should be thankful that at least she wasn't boring or peeved that her responses were so bratty. He huffed in frustration, allowing small spurts of flame to rise in his nostrils. The girl didn't even flinch as she had when he'd first taken her; she just picked at a gash in the sleeve of her gown and stared disdainfully at the charred ox he'd brought for her dinner. *I am a failure.*

He flopped down on the cave floor; the princess's disgruntlement was audible as she jumped to avoid his tail.

"You're pathetic," she said.

"What would you expect of a dragon who can't even properly ransom a princess?" He did not bury his face in his paws soon enough to miss her eyes roll.

"You could try to actually solve your problem instead of simply whining about it."

"How do you mean 'try to solve it'? It's not *my* fault no one wants you."

The princess did flinch a little at that, becoming somehow smaller. Were he not trapped in throes of self-pity, the dragon would have been intrigued by the effect; the princess had always seemed large by human standards.

Her voice remained as sharp as ever. "It's your fault you clearly haven't the faintest idea what you're doing."

"Well—it's not as if there's some grand master protocol written down somewhere for me to follow." When this excellent point provoked no reaction, Bargtn demanded, "How would you do it then?"

"An obvious place to start is good location. This cave is inconspicuous and hard to find—you want some nice abandoned castle or a tower in the woods. Burn down some trees in the area or something to let the locals know you're there and you mean business. Would be rescuers are much more likely to take on quests with clear destinations."

Bargtn blinked. He hadn't expected her to have any sort of answer prepared, and condescension aside, well. He was beginning to see exactly why she kept besting him at riddles.

"I like solving problems," she said.

"Well—go on," Bargtn prompted when she failed to say anything more. In the moment before she complied her eyes flicked to his; Bargtn had the sense she was sizing him up.

“Your hospitality needs a lot of work. Knights are out to rescue *beautiful* princesses, not—she faltered “—ugly ones, unwashed without makeup or brushed hair.”

“What’s the point?” Surely the princesses could just be washed after they were rescued.

“The point is *comfort*.” The princess gestured with increasing enthusiasm, splitting the seam of her dress sleeve even further. “That means proper food, a comfortable place to sleep, a stream or tub to wash in—“

“Garments to replace any that I rip?”

“Yes, exactly!” The princess pulled up the corners of her mouth to bare her teeth; Bargtn nearly snarled at her before he remembered this was how humans exhibited pleasure. “It probably wouldn’t go amiss to have some books or things as well.”

“Why?”

“Courtesy, I suppose. A princess who’s obviously been cared for nicely is far less likely to be justification for a dragon hunting party.”

Bargtn swished his tail uncomfortably. A large enough group was perfectly capable of taking down a dragon with arrows; their wings weren’t armored. Far better to get would-be champions who would fight one on one.

“Speaking of which,” the princess forged ahead, “your manners leave quite a bit to be desired.”

Bargnt couldn’t help his snort. “I’m a *dragon*.”

“Well, and you’re a very rude one. You’ve never even asked my name.” She put her hands on her hips, and curls bounced over her shoulders. Bargtn sighed—no one should be able to be that openly insolent to a dragon. He decided not to flame her though—her ideas really hadn’t been bad.

“What’s your name, then?”

“Alyssa. And yours?”

“Bartn.”

“Nice to meet you, Brarck.”

“It’s Bargtn,” he corrected her. Clumsy human tongues couldn’t pronounce anything right.

“I don’t think that’s a sound I’m actually capable of making. I’ll just call you Bar.”

Bargnt glowered at this indignity, but his pride had grown wings and flown quite away at least a week ago, so he said nothing.

“Now let’s practice,” Alyssa continued. “Bar, I’m hungry. Could you please fetch some food? *Human* food?”

“Alright,” he agreed. “I’ll go and get us dinner. You stay here and work on a plan.”

“A plan for what?”

Bargtn cocked his head—she may have been annoying, but he’d never thought her stupid.

“A plan to capture a princess and successfully ransom her off,” he said slowly, as though speaking to a hatchling. Humans, honestly. They’d only been discussing the matter for the last twenty minutes.

“Now wait, I never said I would *help* you.”

Bargtn wondered at his evaluation of her intelligence. Then again, perhaps she was just acting; humans were famous for refusing to do something if they got nothing in return. She was probably trying to strike a bargain.

Well, he could offer her an excellent deal. “Help me kidnap another princess and *successfully* collect a ransom for her, and I’ll take you back home.”

Alyssa inhaled sharply. As Bargtn watched, her teeth started to worry at her bottom lip, but his gaze soon wandered away to determine the most appropriate corner of the cave in which to store his hoard.

"You have to promise not to kill anyone in the process and not to hurt me or the other princess in any way."

Bargtn looked back and waved a claw dismissively. "Done."

"In that case, get some parchment and a quill while you're out. I like to write my ideas down."



Logan Collins

All the Data that Ever Existed

Sometimes I think about all the data that ever existed and ever will exist. I think about it etched onto the cosmic emptiness to form a vast crystalline array of story-stuff, glistening in the great darkness like droplets of water on a spiderweb set against the stars.

Sometimes on my way home at night, as I walk by the multicolored incandescent bulbs that flash on the sign in front of the cinema, I think that the dark spaces between the galaxies are talking to me. I hear them whispering something, telling me their plan.

They say to me that my future, though lonely, will be white hot supernova-brilliant. They tell me to hold onto my memories of light and love, because they will be my only companions in this solitary yet vivaciously vibrant adventure. They know the secrets of eternity because they have been watching the story-stuff since the beginning of time. They know how it began and how it will end.

All the data that ever existed and ever will exist; somewhere in that story-stuff my life is visible. It's a symmetrical landscape of frozen fireworks imprinted in the infinite night sky, a burst of intense blue-white quintessence, a single node in a grand network of nodes that stretches off forever in all dimensions.



Kassandros Elchin the Antique Dealer

Some weeks club members have more creativity than they do time. In this case, meeting times are used for writing exercises, such as this one. The prompt was to create a profile of the character Kassandros; below are two responses.

Robbie Herbst

Kassandros Elchin took his lunch break at around 1:20PM, but decided to make a quick stop at the bank first. It had been a slow morning; the only real activity in the antique store was a self-styled “Orientalist,” a paunchy man with a tucked in polo. Kassandros had unloaded a small set of scimitars on him at a rather high asking price. He billed it as a special bargain.

Kassandros was what economists might call price discriminating. It wasn’t so much that he tried to cheat his customers, only that he preferred to leave the trinkets in his antique stores unpriced until the very last second. It gave him a special thrill to size up the customer, weighing their small talk and their clothes and the way they might hold a small globe in their hands. Each person retained a certain fluidity, right up until the moment when he had to ring them up. When he named the price, the words would ring in the air like a verdict, and the customer would become solid, categorized. Kassandros, for his part, got a little sweaty playing the role of god. He would push his thick, black hair into a pony tail and mop at his brow.

The bank was on the way to his favorite Turkish deli. Kassandros wasn’t Turkish, but he could pass for any variety of races. That was another game of his. When he got to the restaurant, he would listen intently to the nuances of the owner’s manner. He would adjust his posture, his accent, making himself ambiguous. If he was successful, he would win a discount of his own, or perhaps an extra kabob on his plate. To Kassandros, nothing was quite as lovely, quite as mysterious as the power of a dollar.

The cavernous building loomed at the end of the block. Kassandros was beginning to get nervous. Banks were places of strange interactions, where tellers peered into the most fundamental details of their customers. Each smiling, red suited bank employee took turns learning the customer in their ultimate quantified state. This was a subtler power; omniscience without omnipotence. It seemed dizzying, untoward.

He waited in line for sometime, studying the bunker-gray stone walls and the high, sturdy arches. There was that particular air of afternoon lethargy about in the air, an almost electric calm. Like something had been forcibly subdued. Kassandros felt the drip drip of flop sweat along his brow, and palmed his cash nervously. He hated the smell of used bills.

Madeleine Waters

There are some things about first grade that are very hard for a boy named Kassandros Elchin. Writing his name is an obvious burden, but hurdles are also found in the class sing-alongs, recess baseball games, and sitting still for longer than forty-five seconds.

Luckily as an entrepreneur all one really needs is math and charisma—and Kassandros Elchin is very much an entrepreneur.

There is a corner of the blacktop reserved for his collection of rock shaped fossils, fossil shaped rocks, and occasionally—if his customers are lucky—a fork of indeterminate age he found behind the radiator.

His charming smile lures them in, and his confident gaze keeps them there long enough

to hear exactly how much they want whatever items he's selling that day. Stories of George Washington dropping pennies are mixed in with promises of genies, and sometimes all that's needed is the assertion that this brick was from the old abandoned Riecher house on 4th St. Kassandros almost died getting it. He makes a killing in candy bars and crayons.

Not everyone trusts the plump little cherub, but some make the opposite mistake of underestimating him. Kassandros feels no need to prove the lofty claims of his wares; disbelief is the customer's problem. But he never forgets a dismissive customer. Good luck trying to do business with him again. It's not a risk most people are willing to take. He might be lying about this button being the one King Arthur wore when he defeated Merlin, but then again, maybe he's not.

