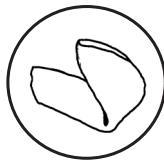


# HALF-BAKE

Volume One :

Don't Ignore  
the Signs





*A cathartic yawp into the darkening world.*

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Thanks to our contributors, and thanks to *you*.

Yeah, even you.

We love you.





GO TO  
HELL  
CAROLINA

## PAPER BAG

Why'd you go  
And put that Paper Bag  
Over your face?  
Don't you know  
That I love the way you look  
Without that Paper Bag  
Covering your face?

## I'M GLAD

Good, I'm glad  
that you didn't see me when  
I waved to you at the market.

I hope you enjoyed  
your beets - though, they looked  
spoiled to me.



# Treetop Story

*by Tommy Aiken*

Will you hold on for just a minute? Please?"

"What's up?"

"I'm just scared is all."

"Come on Rudy, let's do this. Look, the tree isn't far at all. And not even that high. Remember? Let's be adventurous. Come on. Up and at-em. Let's go."

He sighed, stood up, and they burst through the door together, Rudy followed just behind Lena and they b-lined for the great big oak tree in the front yard.

The game of Capture the Flag was in full swing, but that didn't interest them a bit. Just five minutes earlier it had been light out, and now, darkness had fallen and the other kids carrying glow sticks bearing their allegiance to their respective teams darted across the lawn, back and forth, and Lena and Rudy only narrowly avoided the streams of light painting the night with their kaleidoscopic brush strokes.

The tree was even taller than Rudy had remembered. And how many times had he fallen out? Rudy admired the way Lena careened halfway up the side of the tree seemingly without any effort whatsoever. Rudy was still on a bottom branch, trying to find a foothold, struggling and pawing around with his foot at the armpit of the familiar tree branch where he'd put his foot many times before.

A hand presented itself in front of his face and it pulled. It was her hand.

Before he knew it, Rudy was climbing up the side of the tree dodging stray branches and pushing leaves out of the way and his hand would reach out for Lena's hand every so often when he needed a boost. The red, yellow, blue, orange,

and green lights flashing back and forth shone down on the street as they ascended one foot after the other, him trailing behind her.

The last glimmer of the sun dropped behind the houses below them and the glow sticks dancing in the night became all they could see in the front yard and down on the street, the lights were bouncing back and forth like a pinball machine. When they reached the top, Rudy thought to himself that this had to be the top of the world, that being eleven years old at the top of the tree with Lena was as good as it could possibly get.

She squeezed his hand and their elbows brushed the green branches and everything felt alright.



## YELLOW ROSE

Help, there is something  
Terribly wrong  
With this rose.



## POETRY IS FOR PEOPLE

Poems are for people  
are for eating, are  
for shitting out and flushing  
red faced—

Shame is for sharing or else  
it's drama without staging:  
the audience laughs  
at the wrong line, what  
is so funny about that,  
anyways?

## STAR SHY

Who is it  
that Orion is always rattling at with his  
brilliant buckler and ancient bludgeon?

Not me,  
I hope.



## TINY MOTH

My therapist  
Doesn't believe—  
She doesn't believe me  
When I say that there  
Is a tiny moth  
Who visits me  
In my sleep  
Every night.  
Why won't she believe me?





## ALLIGATOR

This Is A Public Safety Announcement For All Travelers  
On The Red 3 Line:

Forget that the alligator  
is at the center of the platform.

Do not stare  
into the reptilian gaze  
that commands the flow of traffic.

You may  
scrape your shoes  
across the shallow path of blood  
streaked along the subway floor  
and remark upon the oppressive heat wave  
smothering the tunnel atmosphere  
or photograph murals  
and buskers  
and birds  
or pontificate on why  
everyone here seems to know  
everyone here except (save) for you  
but do not  
observe  
the alligator.



## *About Face : A Double Take*

Review by Luan Joubert originally published in *Luminaries Anonymous Magazine's* Spring edition, March 15th, 2018

*Author's Note: Some view David Foster Wallace's unpublished second novel "About Face" as a precursor-playful practice, perhaps taken too far—for his actual second novel, "Infinite Jest." Others consider Wallace's time writing the novel as a series of experiments in chemical-cocktails as well as a fleeting, yet intense fascination with Aldous Huxley's famous drug-addled final moments brought to the brink. This essay will, for the most part, only deal peripherally with Wallace's personal life in relation to this work. For more information or grapevine gossip surrounding his life during this time, please refer to the shameless bastard Arnold Fitzkin's work on the matter.*

The manuscript for About Face was found beneath Wallace's bed, wrapped in four alternating layers of tin foil and saran wrap, each layer revealing a page of text with a footnote corresponding to a particular sentence from the note on the preceding layer. The contents of these notes can all generally be summarized by a single sentence on the note found in layer two: "Please, God: do not publish this." It is

uncertain if these sentiments belonged to Wallace or his editor. Neither is anyone quite sure of the significance of the stylistic oscillation between foil and wrap. This supra-narrative material structure further cements his genius, beguiling critics from coast to coast.

Wallace's magnum opus, *Infinite Jest*, was famously structured after a Sierpinski gasket, a type of fractal. A single glance at his hair and you would be forgiven in assuming he didn't care a lick about structure. But, as always, you would be wrong. *About Face*, similarly, is very concerned with structure, but more along the lines of how Al Qaeda was concerned with the structure of the Twin Towers. See, for example, the opening page:

"Allan is 5'7, blond, balding. He has a scar below his left butt cheek from a near-sexual encounter gone awry, neither the epidermal disfigurement nor the sexual episode is remembered despite the imprint he carries around." Five-pages follow delineating the moments leading up to the wounding from the perspective of a parasitic tick on his almost-lover's head. This almost-lover, who then receives an additional twenty-page examination, is then revealed to have later died of syphilis—along with the insect, yet not of the same affliction—after a misguided girls' trip to visit the forests of Sierra Leone. This death and scar reverberates throughout the rest of the novel unbeknownst to the main character, like a dog whistle only the audience can hear, driving the reader mad as this hopeless oaf of a character traverses throughout his day, week, month, and year, leading the reader in a circle. Wallace decided to end his novel on the same day, one year onward from the opening scene.

The New York Times said: "Hilarious! Like if Plato, Hemingway, and Jeffrey Dahmer all ran into one another at an orgy." The New Yorker nearly parroted this sentiment but instead posited the inverse. Either way, I couldn't agree more. Picture this: a David Foster Wallace, high and drunk on any

number of chemical cocktails—in his element, as you say—contented in his natural habitat. Yet, it is a habitat that is alien to the rest of us. Sincerity, when ad-libbed, is nonsense. An unstructured gush of the heart. At one point we are treated to a love letter from Wallace to a high school sweetheart. Beyond this, it is speculated within the text itself that the novel started as a shopping list into which other thoughts intruded. Rumor has it that before writing the manuscript he turned on a recording of *On the Road*, somehow managing to rig it so that the novel would play on repeat. It was the perfect storm of marijuana, booze, and Jack Kerouac.

In a letter to a friend, Wallace claimed that he awoke after three forgotten days with a completed first draft of the novel. In the endnote of this letter, he expressed regret with the work. Yet a struggling writer is a struggling writer. Not quite shameless, a tail between the legs never impeded the momentum of the impoverished. He sent the draft to his editor. His editor sent it back with a question mark. Wallace replied with a second draft to boot, appended with his own question mark. His editor asked if he was all right. Wallace replied that this was beside the point. The editor replied back with an isolated scene indicative of the style of most of the novel:

The unnamed protagonist is in bed, snoring while awake. He worries that his breathing may wake his wife. Though, considering the aforementioned spouse is never acknowledged previously or thereafter—the “action” here taking place on page 153—we may also wonder if this wife is merely a metaphor for the rest of humanity, a blank slate onto which he

projects his worries—which here mainly consist of wondering if his breathing is affecting the relationship between himself and his (potential) wife. This noodle of a thought spirals free of the bounds of logic, eventually considering his raucous breathing as the protagoinst, an exclamation point

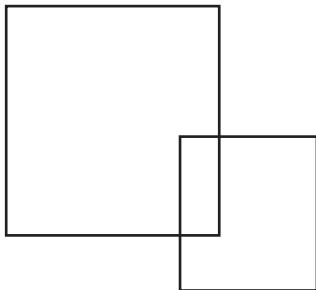
announcing himself across all sorts of situations and walks of life. A creative exegesis of the term “mouth breather,” perhaps?

The main idea it seems to be getting across is, do we ever know if we have a wife or not? What is a wife? Who is a wife? Is the aforementioned syphilis-cum-tick lover the key? We are never sure about our protagonist's relationship to anyone and so we readers begin second-guessing our own relationship to reality.

It is a novel to be read near fire escapes, under EXIT signs, outside hospital waiting areas. This novel makes the case for a reconstruction. By the final pages you yearn for some sort of systematic reality. The scene ends when the character decides to consider—still in bed, wheezing, presumably—whether or not he may or may not need to take a shit. Wallace replied to his editor's final inquiry regarding the selected sample scene two weeks late—as though blameless in the writing of the passage—with a single retort: "What of it?"

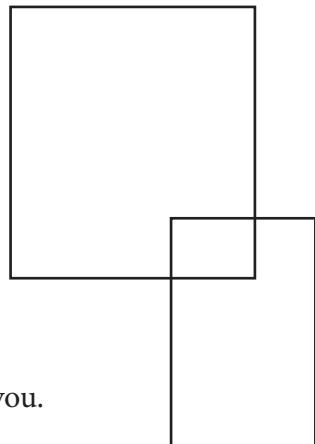






## STRATEGICALLY PLACED FLAGS #2

You & me & a table  
Set for three  
& strategically placed  
American flags  
On the TV screen  
While the lady with  
The strong shoulders  
Discusses how she plans  
To take over the world  
Step by step, but in secret.  
She utters the word “justice”  
And that never quite sat right with you.  
“Who would say such a thing  
So flippantly?”  
“I’m not sure,” I say.



## TREES

Trees can't sleep  
But oh they want to

Framed in my bed room view  
Hostage, pinned  
Under in-ter-ro-gation  
Burdened by the weight  
Of avian silhouettes  
And haunted 'round  
By ThankYou bags  
    ThankYou  
    ThankYou

“Fluorescents disrupt photosynthesis  
And cause a floral psychosis”

And I,

“Psychosis? Bullshit.”  
As oak leaves shine  
In artificial beams



## THE DOG

I am curled up  
At the foot of your bed  
It's true,  
I am the dog here.  
Call the news outlets.  
And the men with microphones.  
And the writers  
With their pens & whatnot,  
Please,  
Call them all,  
And tell them that  
I am not a guy,  
I am the dog  
At the foot of your bed  
Smacking its lips  
And yawning mouth open wide  
—you know how dogs yawn sometimes—  
While you get ready,  
Breezing by,  
Putting on your clothes,  
Spraying perfumes  
And applying sacred creams  
And powders  
From far away lands.



I catch your eye in the mirror  
And you cross out of frame.  
You're getting ready for  
Your miraculous day.  
And I am the dog  
At the foot of your bed  
And I sure hope  
That you hope  
To find me still here  
When you return.

## RON JEREMY'S GUNFIGHTER TWIN

It's father's day. Happy  
Father's Day! I have here  
a card on this day  
that I want to show  
you:

it's a white card of nice card stock, it  
has a beige trim on the outer edge  
and it says "happy father's  
day" in a serif font i've  
never seen before  
and when it opens

it has a picture of a man inside  
that i've seen before, on a target  
in a gun range near fort benning  
a pudgy white man in candid medium shot  
with a gun leveled at you  
he has a wavy, unkempt, greasy head  
of brown locks and a mustache,  
a porno kind, a ron jeremy sort  
of mustache  
and he's frowning as he brandishes  
the revolver  
                    up the range

but his eyes are not frowning, they look  
as confused as i am, to be here pointing a weapon

at this young boy and his father  
from the other side of a card stock portal  
and to see them pointing back  
from the firing line  
while the three of us deliberate who  
is to shoot first and ask questions, if at all,  
on father's day, of course, and

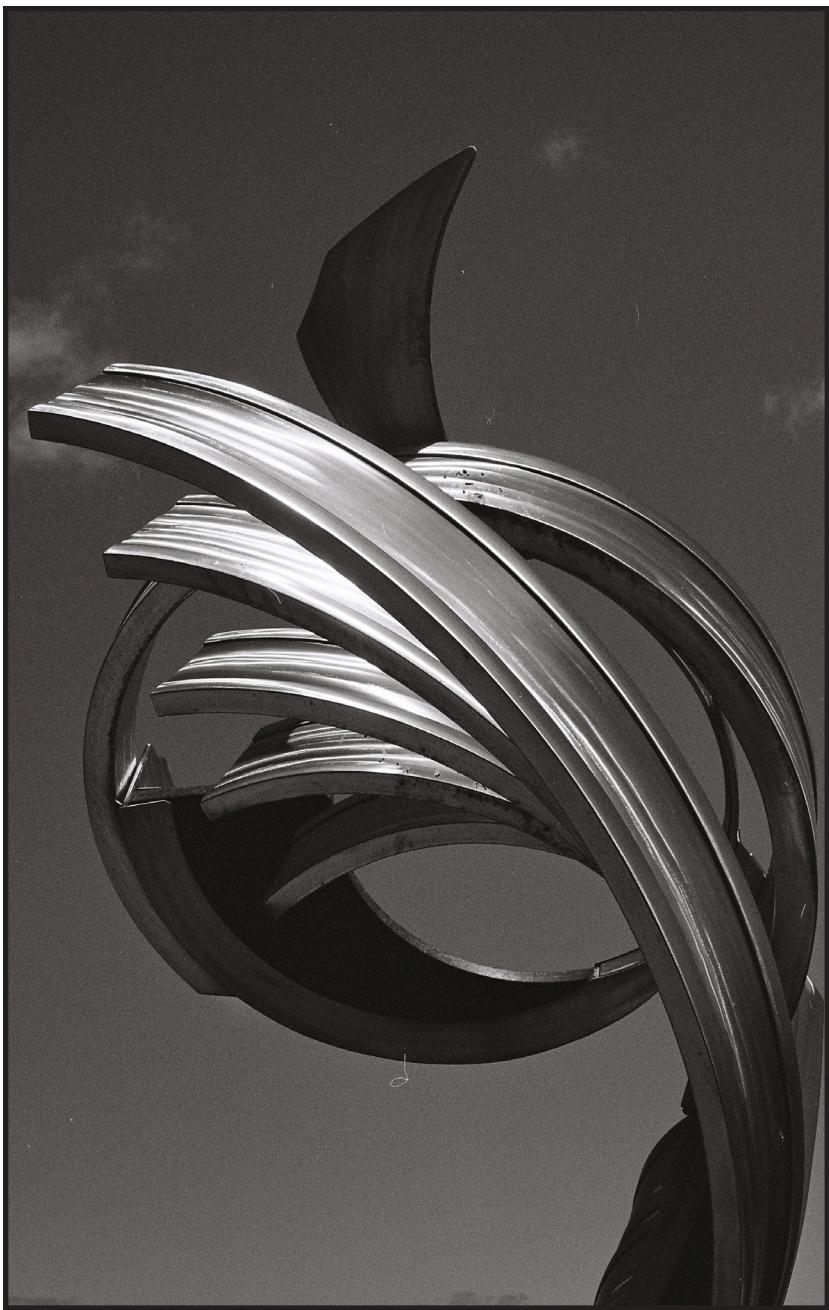
—*KWHAP!*—

we flinch  
at the ear-slapping  
concussive balloon that answers the questions  
and signals the start of some race  
with ill-defined rules that we've all been running ever since

at least, i have—it was some time before i noticed  
we forked off each other's paths, but  
sometimes i hear your footfalls like cannon shots  
and so i know you and i are still in it. i hope  
Ron Jeremy's Gunfighter Twin  
is still making tracks, and is glad  
to be running, like i am. i hope  
that when you read this note scrawled in the margins  
of your father's day card, you'll be glad, too,  
knowing that the race is still on,  
knowing that chances are our paths  
must converge, knowing that  
I am catching up.







# Mercy Killings

*by Alex True*

“It’s cheaper if we stay here, this is where the mercy killings take place,” Sam said jokingly, gesturing to the soiled cots and grimy walls.

“Mercy killings? This place is a hellhole.” I pulled back the curtains, a muddy creek and a few dead trees spotted the yard. “I feel like we’re staying in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, you can practically see the radiation emanating off of everything.”

I walked back to the cot closest to the window and sat down, waving my hand through the dust particles in front of my face; it was like moving it through a silt filled lake, the motes leaving spirals in the air. Sam stood in front of the window, light playing off of his long-brown hair, a notion of scraggly beard appearing around his chin. He was beginning to look like his father.

“If you want to talk about it, we can.”

“I’d rather not.”

“Well, if you need to, I’m here.”

The town never extended beyond the main street. A supermarket, a shuttered glass factory. The locals spoke in a language and dialect that was foreign to even our traveled ears. Exhaust smoke trailing in the cold, a white Datsun puttered its way down the street, the driver a unidentifiable older man. It wasn’t a place that would leave you starstruck, but for Sam and I, it felt like a moment of safety—a temporary reprieve from the hustle and bustle. Watching his distant stare as we walked, I didn’t realize how wrong we were.

“You know my dad used to take me on drives in a car just like that,” Sam said, gesturing as it passed.

I bristled at this mention of his dad.

“What was he like?”

“Oh, he had a temper, but he was an enthralling cre-

ative. The kind of person who everyone loved to be around, you had no idea what his next move was.”

“So, he was spontaneous then, just like you.”

We passed the supermarket, bags of oranges past their ripeness hanging in the window. The man working the front was peddling bruised apples from a dirty bin.

“I suppose so, I remember one time he forgot it was my birthday. I was turning 11 and he had promised me weeks earlier that he was going to make special plans. When he came home my mom was standing by the table waiting for him to come in the door. She pulled him into their room and they had a brief shouting match. ‘You promised!’ ‘I was busy at work!’ That kind of thing. Eventually they calmed down and my father emerged wearing his hunting cloak, a camouflaged coat that he wore like a poncho. He put it on whenever he was hunting Partridges in the woods beyond our house. I always thought he looked like Aragorn did sitting at the table in the Prancing Pony with his hood up, you had no idea who he was or what he was capable of.

“Get your jacket son! We’re going monster hunting!” It was a running joke that there was a monster living on the hills behind our house. A supposed great, beastly thing of many fangs and claws. It helped that if at night you listened you would often hear the cries of foxes and other creatures. Terrifying shrill screams that ran through the forest. My expectation leaving the house that night is that we would find a body face-down in the woods, partially eaten and with attack marks down their back. I grabbed my jacket and my camping lantern and waited at the door, thrilled to be the sole focus of my father’s attention.

“A few minutes later while I shuffled uneasily, listening to the tapping of branches being blown against the windows, my dad burst through the door. His cloak was dirty and his face looked like it was covered in grainy blood. He had probably rolled around in the mud and smeared red

clay on his cheek, but I couldn't tell. It was all real to me. His single-shot shotgun was in his hands and he was stuffing a shell into it. If my mom hadn't shut herself in their room after their fight, she would have put a stop to all of it right then and there.

"Now, whatever you see out there! Tell nobody!" He theatrically kicked the door back open and shuffled out at a brief pace leaving enormous muddy footprints in his wake. I trotted out after him, pushing the door closed and brightening my lantern to illuminate the darkness surrounding us. 'You lead the way Sam. Tonight you get your stripes.' 'Yessir.' I pulled ahead and began rustling through the woods, pushing bits of brush out of the way as he rambled thunderously behind me.

"When you see it Sam, just be real quiet! Don't make any sudden moves! Be like those kids in that Triassic Park movie." 'Jurassic Park, dad, and they weren't quiet, the T-rex sees them moving and goes for them first.' My dad stopped, propped his right foot onto a small rock, held the shotgun with one hand and leaned the barrel upwards against his shoulder. He looked at me as fierce as he could, then snorted and hawked an enormous loogie. I stood in awe as slimy chunks made their way down the tree that he hit. 'Well, Sam, you'll just have to be better than those kids. Though if the monster does see us, I need you to run. I need you to run as fast as you can back to the house, and if you hear me scream, don't come back for me.' 'Because your screams are the monster baiting me.' 'You got it.'

"At this point we were maybe halfway up the mountain; my dad was muttering oaths under his breath and I began to wonder if he had actually planned anything or if this was just going to be a late-night hike. 'There. There!' He pointed over his shotgun at a tree with an orange hunters band wrapped around it about 5 feet up. I lifted my lantern and then nearly dropped it. Across the trunk were scratches

from four enormous claws, deep and vicious. I stood there for a moment, my heart pounding in my chest. My dad's voice came from behind me, 'They must be out hunt—', a shriek echoed throughout the woods, something guttural and inhuman.

"I turned to my dad for support and saw that he was dumbstruck. He dropped his fantasy hunter impression and said, 'Let's hurry back Sam, I don't like the sound of that.' We started to tumble and push back through the woods, our house looking like a distant star. Another loud shriek echoed from one side in the woods, much closer and more aggressive sounding, and we both turned and looked in its direction. We could barely see anything in the night, beyond the light of my lantern there was just darkness. My dad was aiming his shotgun at a shape we couldn't clearly make out. The shape moved, and for a moment we saw it—it looked like it had the body of a bear and the head of a man. It was crawling on all fours to us and you could see that its face was twisted and misshapen. It stood up on its two feet about fifteen feet away from us, breathing out enormous puffs of cold winter air. Its arms were long and muscular, the hair covering its body was matted and dirty. It began to lean back to roar at us and then my dad fired. A blast of sound and light blew through the woods, but no pellets came from his gun. He had loaded it with a blank.

"SAM!" he grabbed me by my shirt and bodily threw me forward. 'FUCKING RUN!' We tore down the hill, working to close the half-mile distance back to safety. A bloodcurdling racket echoed behind us; we could feel the weight of the creature's footsteps shaking the ground as we ran. As we neared the house my mom threw the door open wide, nearly blinding us with the light. We tumbled into the threshold, falling over each other. I busted my lip hitting the wall with my chin, and bit down on my tongue. 'Mom thut the doow! Thut the doow mom! Monhter!'

“My mom turned toward to my dad, furious: ‘Mike you could have gotten him killed! You could have deafened him with that shotgun! What will the neighbors think with you out shooting guns and making all kinds of racket scaring animals!’ My dad lay sprawled on his back on the floor, covering his face with one mud-stained hand. He was making some kind of noise and just rocking, I thought he must have been as scared as me. The door was still sitting wide open and, in the outline of the door frame, no more than ten-feet away it stood. Its shoulders a dark hairy tangle that rocked heavily from side to side as it stalked toward us. A shrill scream came from its chest, identical to the one we heard earlier.

“By now my mom had turned toward what we were looking at and was staring, mouth agape. ‘WHAT THE HELL IS THAT THING, MIKE!’ she screeched. The monster muffled something in response, raised its festering arms, and started to remove its head. A light chuckle began to build from where my father lay and it soon built into a boisterous, roaring laugh. ‘Relax Mary-Ann, it’s Jess! From next door!’ My mom began kicking my dad. ‘This was Sam’s surprise! Mary-Ann stop kicking me, he loved it!’ My fear had turned into joy, relief really, as I saw our kindly neighbor’s bearded face appear from underneath the monster’s mask. As soon as he had it off, he grumbled, ‘Wish you had warned me you were going to shoot at me Mike. I would have worn my earplugs.’ We watched in awe as he disassembled the suit and pulled out the wiring for the speaker inside.

“It took my mom weeks to calm down after that night. I spent hours upon hours in bed having nightmares of the chase that had ensued, how real it had all felt, how scared I had been. The whole experience left a lasting impression on me, a creative influence that I know you’ve seen in my work. An influence that extends into the relationship I have with you. It provided an urge for meshing the real and unreal into

forms that would help expand those who experienced it. But then I..."

The story and the path had come to an end. We stood before the town's old abandoned glass factory, a place of transparency and reflection.

"Then you stopped," I said.

"Yeah..."

"You stopped being creative, you stopped talking to people. You pulled into yourself?"

"I never meant to be like this, at the moment, I'm just not sure what to do."

"What happened with your dad?"

Sam sat down on the gravel in front of the factory and pulled the tail end of his pants toward himself. Tiny shards of glass lay scattered around him.

"You know how the gun my dad used the night of my birthday was filled with a blank. Well, when my mom died, he went up the hill into the woods, sat down in front of the tree he had scarred for me 20 years earlier, and he shot himself."

Sam was shaking, I sat down next to him and let him rest his head against my shoulder.

"Sam it's not your fault."

Sam grabbed a handful of the gravel and glass and squeezed it, hard. I forced him to release it as he sobbed, deep indentations and small cuts had appeared in his palm and along his fingers. I held his hand and squeezed lightly back.

On our way back to the hostel Sam began to lighten up, his steps became bouncy and energetic. He bought a few apples from the peddler at the supermarket and juggled them the whole way back, leaving them outside when after biting into one, he found that a small part of the core was slightly rotten.





## EASTER

There are two snapping turtles in the pond.  
Not one—  
two, at least.

I saw them breach the shorefront  
seizing scraps of sandwich bread:  
two patinated-bronze heads bobbing at the rocks  
silent as the lapping water on the bank, their shells  
wide as the screaming child's torso.  
It was a feast.

I dream of finding painted eggs  
clustered in the reeds. Pink and teal and webbed in pond algae,  
the lucid bands of colors  
devouring sunlight. The clouds are cracking open.

A hundred painted turtles hatch  
and flee their little mud caves  
and every mystery under heaven goes with them into the water.  
In summer, we tally together the survivors:  
There are two, at least.

## MY KINGDOM FOR A LADDER

Yes, I knew it at once—

when I saw him dangle from the tree  
a basket of blossoms,  
and expensive rye  
and a pink petal bound  
book of every guilty,  
shameful thing  
I knew, a book of matches  
was not enough in April, the broadshield  
magnolia leaves too damp  
and the saw rusting over in the dirt  
an army of weeds  
springing from the leaves of that little book  
left untrimmed  
pawing at my soles  
like  
jaundiced teeth goring through  
my pleather, lugged boots — we were all  
so hungry  
for change  
in those days

—I would give it all, I would drown it all,  
all this kingdom, for a ladder.





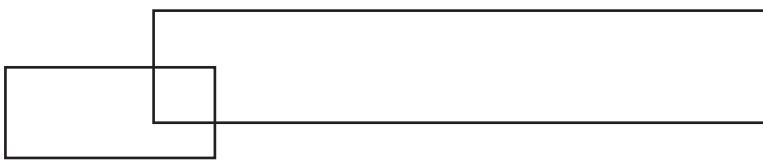
## TANDEM LOVE HAIKU

First,

Songbirds brought to me  
melodies from your window.  
Such screeching wounds me.

Then,

I could have loved you  
like nobody could love you—  
like a hyena.



## STRATEGICALLY PLACED FLAGS #1

The two of us,  
Holding hands  
Like that Beatles song  
About John and Paul  
In Liverpool  
“The two of us wearing raincoats...”  
And so on.  
I’m not sure John and Paul  
Were holding hands  
but we,  
We are wearing sunglasses,  
Not raincoats  
And we are holding hands  
And we are  
Taking in the  
Kazakhstan fire pits.  
“What’s your favorite part?”  
I ask.  
“The fire,”  
You say, without hesitation.  
“And all that it represents.”



DON'T IGNORE  
THE SIGNS



## WHERE CREDIT IS DUE :

This document's existence is owed to a great many people, places and particular happenings. Let us give thanks to those hands that planted, watered and pruned it, even at its most thorny and temperamental moments. There would be no yellow rose in the garden without you:

Thank you to Alex, Magda and Luan for lending your artistry to the cause. Such fruits do not arrive without labor, this I know.

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Finally, thank you to the Reader, the lovely Reader, who has given curiosity a chance. We hope that some part of you was found reflected in these pages like a face on the water, and that it smiled at you and you smiled back.

If you want to contribute to the next volume or lavish us with praise, you can reach us at [halfbakezine@gmail.com](mailto:halfbakezine@gmail.com). We also accept hate mail and harsh critique, albeit with less enthusiasm. You can also find us at [halfbakezine.com](http://halfbakezine.com).



*See y'all next time.*

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