

USED GRAVITRONS

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USED GRAVITRONS QUARTERLY

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EDITORIAL

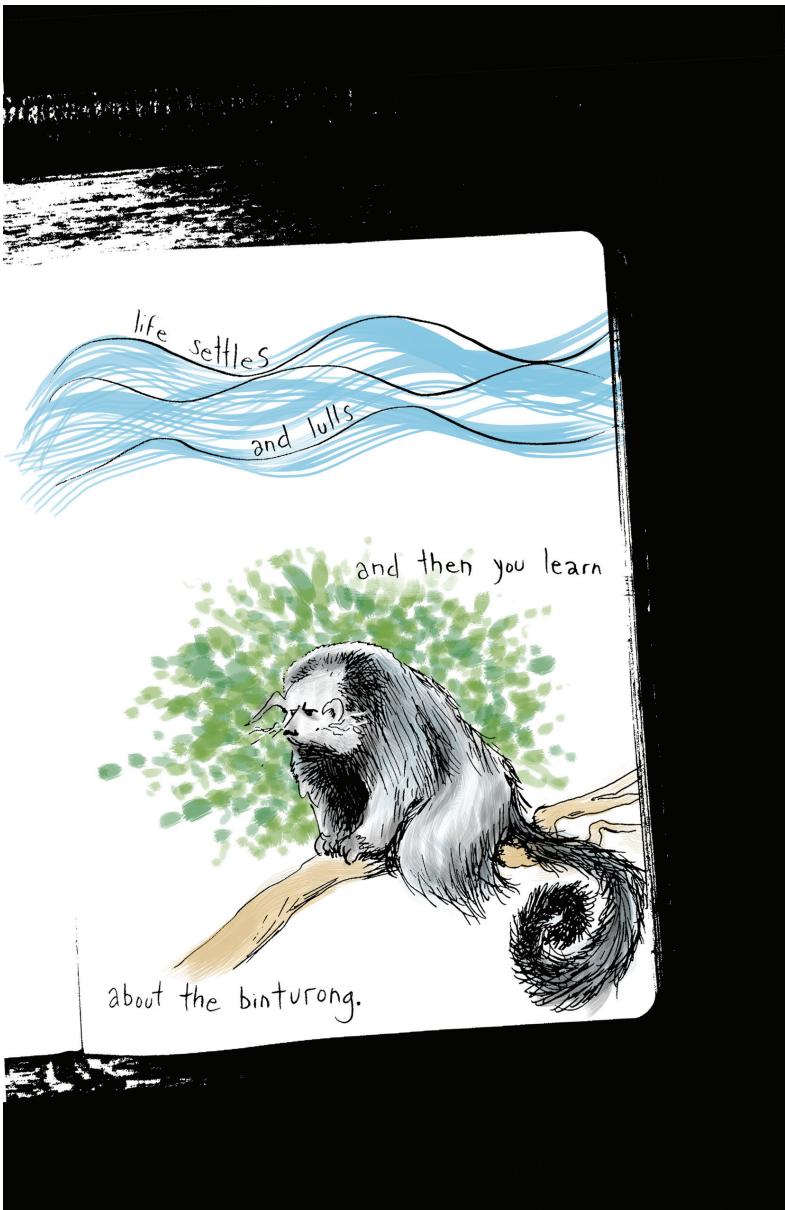
As much as I might have wanted it, I didn't have a crazy uncle that walked around family gatherings with a beer in his hand slurring misplaced epigrams of wisdom at us. I didn't get to hear things like "Many hands make light work," or "When the sun shineth, make hay," even if it was an entirely inappropriate situation in which to say those things. I had to learn all that shit for myself. Maybe you did too.

However, if you haven't figured any of that out for yourself, you're not going to learn it in here. Sarena Ulibarri is not going to teach you about the birds and the bees. Bruce Harris is not going to remind you that Rome wasn't built in a day. But they might throw you a few curveballs.

My life hasn't exactly settled or lulled, but Alex Rothman sure taught me about a strange and wonderful thing that most sage-drunk uncles wouldn't know about. Check out his work on the next page. It's right over there --->

I've actually learned a lot of strange and wonderful things from this issue's contributors. I hope you will too. But despite the efforts of these amazing and creative people, there is one thing that just may never be clear: I will probably never know on which side my bread is buttered. So screw you John Heywood.

Mike



The Tower

by Serene Ulibarri

It's not the end of the road, but it may as well be. The tower is the only thing I can see. It's made from stone, and seems to rise right out of the earth like some grotesque phallus jabbing up out of Hades. It blocks the moon. It makes the stars insignificant. It stains my vision. I even see it when my eyes are closed. The tower stretches into the cloud-compressed sky, so tall I'm not sure where it ends and the sky begins. I'm not sure it ever ends. It is the sky.

I'd like to say I was lost, or someone sent me down the wrong road, but I got here on my own terms. The damnable road has always been on the edge of town, taunting me with a broken gate and a rusty No Trespassing sign. Why did I do it, finally? If I knew that, maybe I wouldn't be standing here at the base of the tower.

A woman looks down from a high window. I can see her long brown hair whip across her face, her dress clinging too tightly to her torso. I wave, but the woman does not wave back. I throw a rock at the window, but I can't hit the tower. The rock falls to its base and lies next to an uninviting doorway.

Thunder shakes me, though there had been no sign of a storm when I left home. I think I could go back on the road that brought me here, warn others to turn back while they can. Tear down the useless gate, replace it with a wall.

Flames surround the woman in the tower, licking the edges of the window. She climbs onto the window ledge. I want to tell her not to jump, but it's jump or be burned alive. She stands on the ledge. Her hair billows around her. Smoke pours from the window. She jumps.

She falls for far too long, as if the tower has its own gravity that threatens to pull her back in. I close my eyes before she reaches the ground.

When I open them, I am inside the tower. The heat of the fire strokes my flesh. I see a woman on the road below me. She

thinks she can leave. She thinks she can turn around and take the road back the way she came and leave the tower behind in distant memory. But no one leaves the tower.

The tower shudders with thunder. From this high window, I should be able to see for miles, maybe even see home. But all I see are electrical streaks that scar the sky and the long empty road that will wash away into nothing when the rain finally falls.

The woman on the road waves her arms, telling me not to jump.

I step onto the ledge.

The Longest Game

by Bruce Harris

The stadium lights illuminated the already sun-drenched field. Everyone, players, umpires, coaches, fans, the hot dog hawkers, the beer guys, everyone, wore sunglasses. It was that or squint and damage your eyes. Sunglass vendors appeared out of nowhere and sold out of product long before the scheduled first pitch. I noticed lots of people without sunglasses turned away at the turnstiles. Everyone who wore white shirts was asked to remove them, because during warm-ups the players were complaining that they could not see the baseball against the white backgrounds. The shirt vendors quickly sold out of black shirts. The stadium engineers tried to turn off the lights, but they couldn't figure out what had caused them to illuminate in the first place. A group of them gathered in front of the pitcher's mound along with the umpires and grounds crew, but they had no answers or solutions. Only sunglasses.

At game time, there was talk they were going to play the game with a black baseball because white was too difficult to see in the bright light. Then, someone suggested painting the bases and home plate black as well. The umpiring crew decided to stick with white all around because they couldn't find anything in the official rules book about playing with a black baseball. The game began late. The pitchers were enjoying themselves, fattening up their personal statistics. No one could get a hit through 6 innings. Then, the visiting team's Perkins hit a sharp drive between the left and center fielders. It was a hard hit ball and it rolled to the base of the outfield wall. Perkins raced around second base and headed to third. Like the back of his baseball card said, "Perkins could hit .350 with his eyes closed." He made it safely to third, took his lead, and the PA announcer shouted, "Here's Olson." Olson struck out. "Here's Solis." The announcer pronounced his name, "Soleeeeessss." Solis, too, struck out. The last hope was Starbaker. Perkins, dancing off third base, clapped his hands and pumped his fists in the air, offering encouragement. "Here's Stubarker," chimed Mr. PA. I noticed

Starbaker stare up into space, searching for the voice, shake his head, and then dig back in, only to make the final out of the inning.

It was not an easy game in which to keep score. My pencil tip broke. I had no point. My scorecard was filled with erasures and cross outs and insertions. None of the players on the visiting team had numbers on their uniforms, so there were times I had to guess who was who. Except for Perkins, of course, because he is so tall and lanky, and he is so good, no one could mistake him. The players on the home team, my team, changed uniforms after each inning. And each time, they wore different numbers. It was a very hot afternoon, and they soaked through a jersey an inning. Good thing I know most of the home team players by sight, but some of the newer rookies caused problems for my scorecard.

There was only one hit the entire afternoon - the Perkins hit - until the very last inning, when our man Darby smacked a hard line drive down the right field line. It hit the foul pole. A fair ball. Home run and game over, or so I and everyone else thought, everyone that is except the men in blue. Confusion reigned. Darby and his teammates began celebrating, but the home plate umpire waived the players back to the field. He called it a foul ball, nothing more than a long strike. The third base umpire disagreed, originally signaling for a home run. The first base umpire shrugged his shoulders and admitted he hadn't seen the ball because he had an eyelash issue and had removed his sunglasses for a moment to deal with the wayward lash. The second base umpire claimed that one of the infielders had called, "time" before the pitch was thrown. No one could say who it was, but the umpire insisted "time" was called, and that the hit was neither a home run nor a strike. The whole thing didn't count, and so the two teams played on. I turned to my wife, but she was gone. I felt like a hotdog (I told him keep the bun and the change) and headed for the exits. Outside gate #4, I gave my sunglasses to Olson, one of the players from the other team, the same Olson who struck out earlier with Perkins at third base. He was benched after striking out, and now sat shirtless and sweaty and alone, drinking beer, making clicking noises with his spikes against the cement, listening to the play-by-play on the radio. He tipped his cap.

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During the month leading up to April 19 - National Haiku Day - we asked our readers to submit original haikus inspired by the following photos. We picked the highlights to share with you...



The darkness it speaks
Lo a soft light is heard
Whispering, follow my path

by sue kuntz



'Bad owner' they said
'Meats back on the menu boys!'
I growled into space

by Ben Turner



No I'm fine with beans.

by Tim Brown



Hammer this room up,
When mom and dad come home soon,
Hammer them up too.

by Kyle Bowling

Untitled

by Marc Carver

I lay on this bed
thoughts come into my head
I have no desire to rhym
i don't have the time
but rhym they do
and only only for you.
So let me tell you something else
if life is real
then so is death.
I want to be alone and with people too
so i don't know what to do.
Sit and create and see where
the life waits.
And one day in bloom
it will come soon.
I will be taken away
and without much dismay.
i will feel
no need for the rhym
because i
will have runout
of time.

The Director's Rewrite

By Elle Pryor

This novel you are reading, ‘The Kama Sutra of Addiction’ is being made into a film. Perhaps this was inevitable, after it was voted the best, cult classic of the last decade by ‘The New Yorker’ and sold one million copies worldwide. Last week, hundreds of green, paper arrows fell from the sky and landed on words, full stops and commas after the screenplay was submitted to the director. Already Auberon is protesting, he doesn’t want strangers here, interfering with our lives. He is ignoring the rumor that he is being written out of the story and replaced with a woman in order to satiate the trend hungry, marketing team. Audiences currently prefer female doctors. Outside his luxurious, five bedroom house he marches, holding a placard which reads, ‘Save Our Souls’. He makes a forlorn, slightly ridiculous figure standing there all by himself.

The arrows are creating a new culture, interrupting the flow of our existence, and at the moment we are like new immigrants in a country where certain conversational references and famous names mean nothing to us. Our landscape and architecture is evolving, pulled into shape by the tug of the arrows. Helygen Road mutates because now it is described in practical italics, metaphor and simile free. The block of bedsits where I live no longer, ‘a verruca on the well-heeled road, owned by a housing association for years, full of the dispossessed and needy.’ Instead, it is merely brown brick, four stories high, and surrounded by high railings, malleable enough to be molded by the creative vision of the director.

This morning, I found a needle and a bag of heroin on my bedside table, where my cocaine wraps should have been. Carys, my on/off girlfriend who lives upstairs, started to thump on my front door, when I opened it she was scratching herself and shivering. She pushed two wraps of coke into my hands; the residue on the sides of her nostrils told me that she had snorted the third. “They’ve swapped our drug addictions around, they want me to be more healthy looking,” she explained, “do you have my smack?” I squeezed the wraps, a starving man who has just been handed a piece of bread

could not have been happier. As soon as I returned her heroin, she rushed back to her bedsit but not before I noticed that her bare arms were now smooth and unblemished. When I pulled up the sleeves of the 'Suede' band sweatshirt that I always sleep in, I found track marks covering my arms, sore abscesses that wept and odd shaped lumps under my skin.

This sweatshirt is a key to my life story, a symbol of my descent into addiction, bought for me by my wife. A recreational drug user, she swapped her hobby with her day job and became a dealer, slept with our best man and had her sister beaten up because she refused to sell my wife's products to her friends. My weekend cocaine habit became daily, as I tried to forget her infidelity and the helplessness I felt when I witnessed her values disintegrating until the unthinkable became ordinary. While I remembered the first time we met, her giggle and shy smile, the sweatshirt changed color from khaki to black, then the letters on the front multiplied and wriggled around like worms, spelling out the band name, 'Nine Inch Nails'.

For the last five hours, I have been clutching Suede's 'Dog Man Star', my favorite album, as if this will be enough to protect it from the director's casual scribbles in the margins of the screenplay. I make myself a cup of tea with my free hand; the kitchen is a kettle and microwave on top of two cupboards, next to a sink and a damp patch covered with mold. Before I lie on my dirty, grey bed sheets, I brush away a few crumbs from yesterday's toast. The unremitting rain streaming down my window stops abruptly to be replaced by sunlight; it reaches the dark corners, where a cockroach darts amongst balls of dust. It is one of many and they no longer concern me, the wraps are unfolded and I chop out a line. As the drug hits my brain, like sherbet used to fizz on my tongue when I was a child, I watch the cockroach disintegrate and grow fainter so that it becomes a ghost of itself and vanishes. The naked man sprawled over a bed, in a sepia tinted room on the cover of the CD I am holding, disappears; the picture is rotated 90 degrees clockwise, the halved window slides to the left and the branches outside become unraveled lengths of barbed wire. Brown, slug like creatures burrow into the white paper and the words, 'Nine Inch Nails: The Downward Spiral' slither into

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formation. Carys loves this; it's a concept album about a man who tries to commit suicide. I actually feel like crying.

Without any warning, the whole building starts to shudder, the walls and floors convulse as if they're being shaken by an earthquake, but there were no fault lines in Wales before the author sold her first time media rights. I hear screams through the thin walls of my bedsit and add my own, plaster falls from the walls and ceiling. I bury my head into my pillow, after it stops I am in a bedroom; the sheets replaced by a crushed velvet bedspread, on the walls hang reproductions of oil paintings, portraits of Earls and Princesses clothed in silken jodhpurs, lace collars and ball gowns. On the floor is a turquoise, faux-fur rug. All the furniture is antique but faultlessly restored, the mahogany wood shines. I stand up and walk to the door, expecting to find a hallway, lounge or kitchen. Instead, beneath, above and before me is nothing but darkness. My life is turning into a horror story.

When the director has finished redesigning the rest of my new flat, I'm able to walk outside; the building has been transformed, there are large balconies on every floor, the walls are white and there are flowerbeds along the edges of a lawn. The sign bearing the housing association's name is now tiny and barely visible. I'm guessing the director will neglect to include a scene in the film, which explains how this housing association can afford to rent such an expensive building to a group of people suffering from drug, alcohol and gambling addictions. We are being manipulated by a ruthless dictator who cares nothing for authenticity and has no respect for the living but despite my contempt I secretly hope that he will airbrush away my wrinkles, rotting teeth and the sooty stains under my eyes.

The rest of Helygen Road has not altered much, except that many of the letters that surround and created it have arrows resting on top of them, I really should be following them but I'm too scared. Auberon, my nemesis, is no longer demonstrating outside his house. I ring his doorbell intending to join his protest. When I have a cocaine induced stroke in Chapter Seven, he calls me a dangerous parasite at the hospital. A few years ago, his son was knocked over by a hit and run driver, paralyzed from the waist down and

confined to a wheelchair. The driver was drunk and sucking speed from his finger at the time. Afterwards, Auberon turned to religion, becoming teetotal and vehemently anti-drugs. His wife left him and he brought up his son alone.

However, his door is opened instead by an extremely attractive woman. She has medium-length, black hair and a pair of beautiful, dark brown eyes. When I last slept with Carys, the film Gridlock'd was on Channel Four and this woman looks exactly like the lead actress. Carys always watches the TV over my shoulder when we have sex, it stops her from getting bored when I'm pounding away on top of her. At first I was offended but she told me that this was just her thing and not to be insulted. Carys sells her body to pay for her heroin, she laughed when I asked her to stop, she told me not to worry because technically, she only sells her breasts and vagina.

“Can I speak to Auberon please?”

The woman frowns so that a line appears in the middle of her forehead and then she blinks rapidly, “I’m sorry, you have the wrong address.”

“He was here earlier.”

The woman’s dimples move back and forth, her voice becomes firmer, “You must be mistaken, I’ve lived in this house for ten years and I’ve never heard of an Auberon,” Her eyes narrow and then she asks, “Are you from the apartment block?”

“The flats? Yes, I am, I’m your neighbor.”

“Hmm,” and she looks behind her, where a girl of about eight is sitting in a wheelchair, with a sneer, she adds, “Well, I really do have to go now,” and she closes the door in my face. Auberon has been dropped and even though we hated each other, I realize that I’m going to miss him. I can’t believe his disabled son has been written out of the story as well, the director obviously has no scruples whatsoever.

It’s odd but my desire for cocaine is waning. I’m probably having some kind of identity crisis brought on by all the changes that are happening in my life, which have been forced on me by a

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despotic lunatic. Resistance is the only option, I refuse to sit around and let them treat me like a pet cat, happy to play with any object dangled in front of my nose. I will walk into the wilderness and hide amongst the letters and punctuation; the director probably won't notice me there because it seems that unlike us, he hasn't even bothered to read this novel.

I'm sure Carys will want to join me. She emerges from her flat, accompanied by an orchestra of sniffs, "Oh hi, come in," she says quickly. Her black teeth have been replaced with shining, white ones, her sunken cheeks have filled out and the bags under her eyes are gone. The fourth track from 'Dog Man Star' is playing and there are thick lines of coke on her coffee table next to some rolled up twenty dollar notes.

The fact that she is listening to this really annoys me. "I thought you couldn't stand 'Suede'?"

"What are you on about? This is like, my favorite album of all time."

"And why do you have American money?" I add, as scathingly as possible.

"Uhh, to buy things with, I'm sure that the last time I went into a store they were more than happy to take my US dollars."

"But we live in Wales. In Chapter Eleven you overdose in a squat next to the River Taff."

"Chapter Eleven doesn't exist anymore, it is now INT. COURTRoom - DAY...." she stares at me, "and we live in LA."

"Since when?" I shake my head, hardly able to believe the director's arrogance, nobody has been consulted, they didn't even consider how their actions would affect our lives. I feel like a Tibetan monk whose land is about to be flooded by the Chinese, which is a metaphor that the author uses in Chapter Three. "Do you know what else happens to us?"

"Yeah, I do. I battle with my addiction, attend college and study law, then I successfully prosecute a hit and run driver with a crystal meth addiction. He skipped bail before he was due to be tried for crippling a doctor's daughter. I spend time with the daughter

and teach her some important life lessons and by using myself as an example I explain that there are far worse situations than being in a wheelchair. You commit suicide by jumping off a bridge.”

“But that’s not fair, how come things turn out so well for you? Plus, none of this is in the novel.”

“Yeah, the second half of the movie is all completely new material.”

“How long do I have?” I whisper.

“It happens on page sixteen of the script, exactly fifteen minutes and thirty two seconds into the movie.”

The shock of this news leaves me reeling; I stumble to my apartment. The heroin and needle have reappeared, so on a spoon I mix the powder with water and lemon juice, then heat the stainless steel with my lighter. I find a long sock, tie it around my bicep and like a seasoned pro, inject myself. My whole body tingles and then relaxes. I feel as if I am lying on top of an airbed that is rocking over an ocean of waves. The arrows suddenly appear in my thoughts, but they are larger, their color sharper, and they no longer scare me. Tomorrow, I will follow them; so there are no more unpleasant surprises. Smiling, I rehearse the jump from the bridge, in my mind I grow soft fur until I am cocooned in a warm duvet of jade feathers and I land gently on my feet. It’s going to be a real rush and I can fall as many times as I want. Even though I die, my character will always live on; I will exist forever between the pages of this novel and in the celluloid stills projected onto cinema screens.

I am ripped from this warm womb of contentment by excruciating pain that suddenly jolts through my veins. In the crease of my elbow a black hole widens, it oozes green tinted puss that smells foul. Moaning, I sit up and hold my forearm, it becomes thinner until only the bone remains. This gradually reduces in size like a tablet being dissolved in water. I’m beginning to suspect that the director is a sadist. All that’s left of my arm is a stump with a bandage wrapped around the end. I can’t take any more of this, so I leave the flat and follow the arrows; they lead to a bus stop where I catch a bus to Pasadena and after a fifteen minute walk, I reach a bridge called Colorado Street.

Dangerous Kid

by Neila Mezynski

He slid that thing in there easy as pie no thought to getting out.
Either. Spectacular. Smooth. He was like that, curly head kid. She
coulda stayed there for more but the show was over and too many,
smart not to have her head turn by a kid too easy.

Blue Shirt

by Neila Mezynski

Close together. Hold tight won't fall over if jammed up. Fell anyway
minding his own, thrashing blood and broken. Half eaten muffin
Her.

Black Tire On Lace

by Neila Mezynski

Burlap on chiffon, piled high under tire, goin for a ride. Felt in
between shock on rope. Body mind and soul. Strange bedfellow old
maid and Mac trucks. Silver hair on net. Devils on shoulder sweet
nothings in ear, pay them no mind. Taken. For to ride.

TWO BOOKS

by Marc Carver

I see a huge book
It has been cut
sliced so that a half circle shows
from the binding out and down
No words are left in it.

I see another book
it is untouched
but it lays in the wind
and all the pages go back and forth.

Three Wishes

by Marc Carver

If someone came up to me tomorrow
and said
you can have anything in the world
I would probably say
a decent French red
a chance of a nice piece of ass
and a sleep in the afternoon
and that would be about it.

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Van Gogh's Etch-a-Sketch

by Mitchell Grabois

There's new data that Van Gogh
having failed to sell any of his paintings
had a sudden entrepreneurial inspiration and
invented a primitive Etch-a-Sketch

and that he took on a partner
a businessman to whom his brother Theo
had provided a formal introduction

This businessman and Theo had done business before
With Vincent he sensed weakness and vulnerability
Theo had told him that Vincent originally wanted to
have a career as a pastor
but had failed
and only then
at age twenty-seven
had taken up painting

So Vincent was well-versed in failure
and this businessman decided that Vincent
was not only contemptible
a poor specimen of a man
but also ripe for the taking

The primitive Etch-a-Sketch
was a marvelous
device
ingenious really
and had the potential to make a man rich
one man
and that man was not Vincent

So one cool foggy day in
the woods
a rather thick patch of woods
in rural Provence
a perfect day for infamy

this partner
shot Vincent
and made it look like an accident

Crafty and cunning
he understood evidence
the primitive approach to evidence
practiced by the local gendarmes of the day

Georgia O'Keeffe Vanquishes the Universal NFL

by Mitchell Grabois

In a break from viewing
the Georgia O'Keefe exhibit
I look out across Denver's downtown
to Sports Authority Stadium
now dim
football season over
the Broncos vanquished by the
mighty arm of Raven
Joe Flacco

At the entrance to the exhibit
is the famous Steiglitz photo:
O'Keeffe
covered in Bedouin black

insulated from
the inevitable fumbles
and turnovers
life forces from us

but not
in the empty
sacred places
of the New Mexico desert

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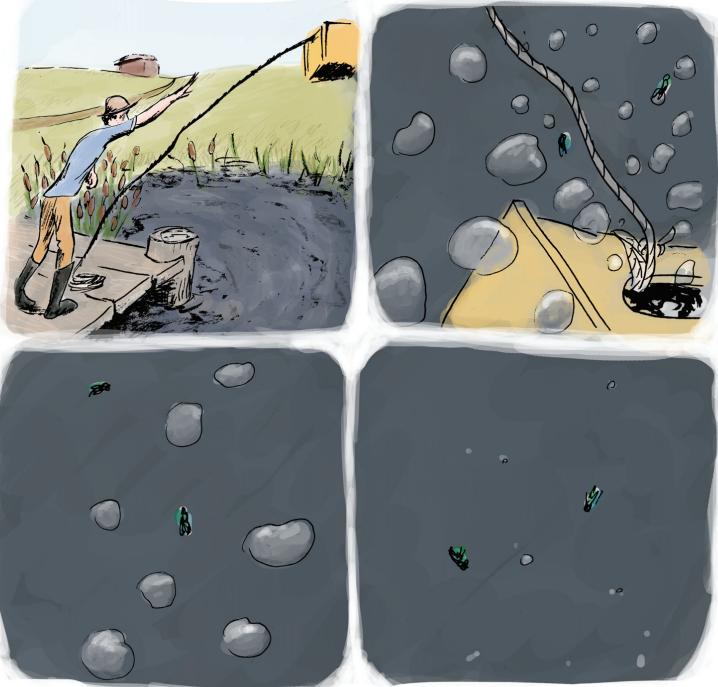
Euglossine Bees

by Alex Rothman

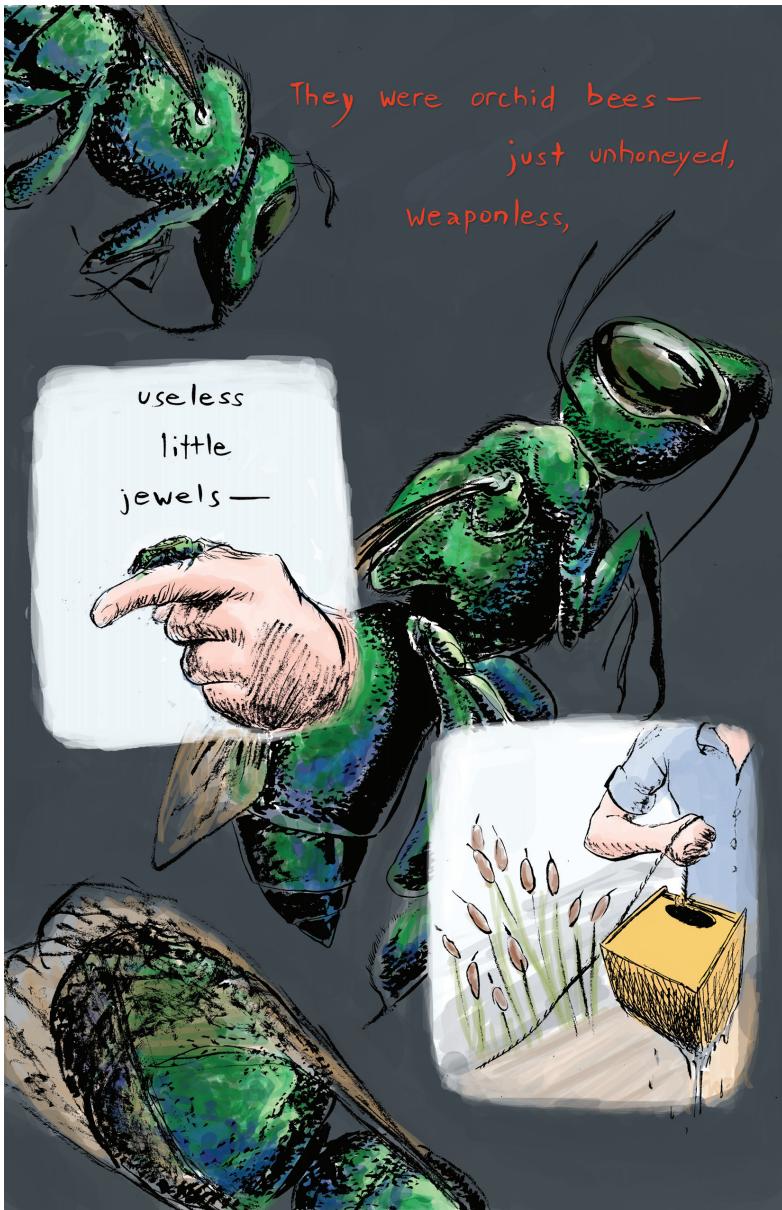
On the last day of the Great Depression,



a farmer was drowning
his bees.



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DEADLY FORCE

by Phil Temples

“...Okay, ma’am. Just put it down, now. No one has to get hurt here.”

The police officer kept constant eye contact with the elderly, white-haired woman as he spoke. She looked as though she could have been anyone’s grandmother — perhaps the subject of a Norman Rockwell painting. Except, of course, for the wicked-looking weapon she was brandishing.

The officer kept his hand on the handle of his service revolver while his partner started to move slowly to her left in an attempt to move behind the would-be assailant.

“What’s your name, ma’am?” asked the first officer.

“Get away from me,” she responded.

“Can’t do that, ma’am. We received a complaint. Neighbors saw you with that thing and called us. Now, I’m asking you politely to put it down.”

“No.”

Just then, the woman saw the other officer, much closer and to her left. She immediately turned her attention to him, shifting the menacing-looking weapon to her other hand.

“Whoa, take it easy, now. No problem, okay?”

The second officer backed off a few feet, showing both palms of his hands to assure her that he was not going to attack her.

“You just stay away, too.”

“Okay, okay. I’m moving away. See?” Number Two replied.

The first officer spoke again.

"My name's John Peterson. That's Harry Worth. What's your name, ma'am?"

"Henrietta."

"Well, Henrietta," said John. "What's going on? Did someone upset you? Maybe we can help."

"You can't," replied Henrietta.

"Well, try us. Perhaps we can."

Harry tried a different tact.

"Do you live over there, Henrietta?"

Worth nodded over his shoulder in the direction of an attractive, two-family duplex. The house sported a new coat of paint. Its lawn and hedge were meticulously trimmed.

"Yes."

"Well, Henrietta, why don't the three of us go over to your place and have a nice plate of chocolate chip cookies and milk and discuss this amicably instead of standing out here in the middle of the street, okay?"

The woman pondered this proposal. She seemed to be on the verge of consenting when, out of the blue, the next-door neighbor started shouting from his front porch at the officers in a loud, threatening tone.

"...Take her! Now! Take her out before she hurts someone!"

"Sir, that's enough!" shouted Officer Peterson. "Get back in your house now! You're not helping matters!"

He glared at them for a moment. Then he reluctantly withdrew back into his home.

In the meantime, Henrietta tightened the grip on her weapon and brought it up in her arm to rest at chest level.

"Is he the problem?" asked Worth.

"No."

"Well, what ever it is, I'm sure that we can talk about it and

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come up with some sort of solution. You seem like a reasonable person to me. Doesn't she, John?"

"...Don't patronize me!"

"Not at all, ma'am. I wouldn't dream of it."

Henrietta pondered her dilemma. She was facing two armed law enforcement officers in her nightgown and slippers. She was making a public spectacle of herself. But if Henrietta did as they requested, she would no doubt get out of this with little more than a slap on the wrists. There was the matter of the weapon, though. She wondered whether one needed a permit to own one. And brandishing it about in public was probably another matter.

"You won't hurt me?" Henrietta asked.

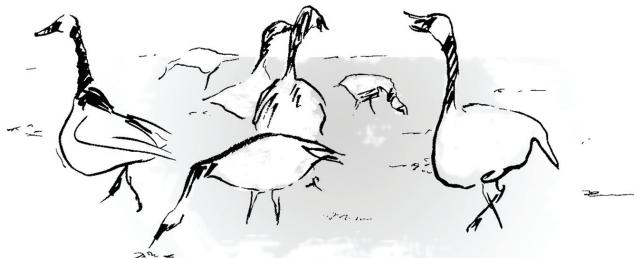
"No, ma'am, not at all. Just as long as you don't hurt us. We have an understanding, then? Drop the weapon, and we'll go inside and discuss this peacefully."

She paused a moment, again.

"Well. Okay."

Officers Peterson and Worth breathed a sigh of relief as the 71-year-old white-haired lady carefully bent over, laid down the broken milk carton and motioned to them to follow her inside.

We approach Winter and



the geese again greet us



by leaving

the stubble fields

in nothing



Whiteloods Gather at the River

by Brendon Anderson

The air smelled of rain. Newton inhaled red dust and looked around. The Central Australian desert stretched as far as the horizon, empty and uncompromising as hell. Raindrops snick-snack-snicked into the dirt. Newton licked his lips and tasted iron. Rain, in time of drought? He glanced down. An ocean of small objects swirled against his ankles: fridge magnets, bumper stickers and cell phones. By now the rain was coming down in torrents. The mud grew legs that morphed into a bridge across the river at his feet. Along its banks, drenched fridge magnets blossomed into flowers that swayed on long, wire stems. The bridge sprouted rails. Newton sloshed up to the nearest railing, and ran a finger over its surface. Under his fingers appeared words: Abandon Hope, All Ye Who Enter Here.

Not likely. Newton never abandoned anything, least of all hope. As a teenager he'd discovered a talent for finding lost objects. Later he moved into the hugely profitable field of recovering stolen artworks. A missing painting had brought him to Alice Springs, half a world away from where he lived. They could hide, but they couldn't run.

Until now. Discarded appliances jostled against him. NEW APPS OF HELL. ASHES TO ASHES. DUST TO DUST. Fridge magnets leaned towards him, their metal heads nodding like sunflowers at noon. DULL WOMEN HAVE IMMACULATE HOUSES. Newton blinked. When he was a child, a magnet exactly like that had appeared on the family fridge. Every time his mother threw it out, it had reappeared at eye level in the centre of the fridge door. Perhaps his long-dead father had come back to haunt them. Dad had never been a quitter.

They were suffocating him. Newton gasped for air and blindly swatted them away. In their place a host of fridges advanced on him, squared off and formed an aisle. At its end stood an upright piano. Seated on a rickety piano stool, her back to him, a girl in white fingered the keys. Plink plunk whirr zhunk. Newton winced. He'd dated a concert pianist once. Why not? He adored classical music. This chick should give up. Clearly, the instrument was beyond repair.

The chick turned her head and he recognized Miranda, the concert pianist he'd dumped. Miranda-with-the-watchful-eyes and now, in the centre of her chest, a heart-shaped cavity. Newton crossed himself, an automatic gesture learned in childhood. So many things, from so long ago.

Unsmiling, Miranda stood up. "Fancy running into you, Newton." Her voice had always been attractive, low-pitched and sexy, but they'd drifted away. Perhaps he spent too much time locating his missing objects, and not enough on her. It didn't matter now.

"Hi, Miranda. Just passing through? Where are we?"

"Beats me." She gave a tentative smile. "I thought it was hell, Newton, but now you've turned up, I guess I'm wrong. We had good times together, didn't we?" Without waiting for his answer, she went on. "The trouble is, everything's wrecked. There's junk everywhere, and this," she tapped a few keys, "is just awful."

Newton nodded. A broken-down piano was one thing, but a missing heart? "Uh, Miranda."

She turned back to him. "Mmm?"

"That, uh ..." He pointed. "Right there." It's missing, Miranda.

"Oh, that. But I gave you my heart." She looked quizzical. "You do remember, don't you?"

Newton frowned. He'd have to let her down gently, again.

"Look." Her eyes widened and she pointed with an unsteady finger over his shoulder. "Behind you!"

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Fridges circled round them like predators ready to pounce.

“What’s happening?” Miranda’s face puckered.

Newton forced himself to think. Fridges didn’t circle like wild animals. Work backwards, he told himself. Fridges. Why fridges? Fridges stored frozen and unfrozen food and drink. A mini-bar wriggled free of the line and swung its door open. On the centre shelf lay Miranda’s beating heart, red-raw. Not strong, but clearly not dead either.

Suddenly, every mobile phone blared the 1812 Overture. Cymbals clashed, violins sawed, trumpets blistered the air. The mini door nudged his leg. Miranda’s heart was beating stronger now. Newton picked it up, placed it in his shirt pocket and buttoned it into place. Now it lay warm and strong against his chest. The 1812 Overture morphed into a Dead March. A double bass sounded a deep, menacing note.

They turned and ran, sidestepping debris, skidding in puddles, stumbling over obstacles.

Panting, he cried out, “How did you find me?”

Damp with sweat, Miranda brushed hair from her face. “You called me. Don’t you remember?”

But he hadn’t. Back in Alice Springs, his phone had died. Gasping for air, he stopped running. By now the rain had cleared and the Red Centre stretched before them, once again hot, dry and empty.

“Don’t worry.” Miranda pulled a phone from her pocket. “I can get us out of here. I’ve got GPS. A terrific new app. See?”

Newton stared at it. “You’ve got a phone.”

Miranda rolled her eyes. “Everyone’s got a phone. Hey, there’s blood on your shirt.”

Newton touched his shirt front and found a patch of dried blood. He undid his shirt but found no cut or scratch. “Miranda.”

“Yes?”

“We weren’t going anywhere, you know.” His eyes travelled

from her face, down her neck to her top button. What little he saw of her breasts shone with perspiration. No cuts or scratches.

“Newton?”

He looked up. “Yes?”

“You didn’t call me just to check my cleavage.”

Newton grinned. “I didn’t call you, period. I told you, my phone died. I chucked it.”

Miranda giggled, a flirty, gorgeous come-on. “Call of the wild.”

“Stop it.” Somehow, this girl had washed up in his life, carried on a tide of broken objects. He touched her lightly on the cheek. “Hey. Friends?”

Miranda leaned forward and kissed him, long and hard. Not friends, then. His heart skipped a beat. Enemies? Great. They’d make out. Things would go back to normal, surely.

Somewhere, a kookaburra laughed.

PHOTOGRAPHY

by Elizabeth Clark

Take a walk with Elizabeth through the streets of Spain in early spring. These images were taken with a Hasselblad on medium format polaroid. Modified Hasselblad cameras were famously used during the Apollo missions to that holy chunk of cheese many of you refer to as the moon. Like those explorers of the sky, she too has captured some beautiful moments.





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MyMetro

by Dustin Hyman

The 5th stop means prostitutes and transvestites will be shuffling through the double doors. It's 3:30 a.m. and Cash Turner is listening to Queen on his i-Pod. He can't hear the stiletto hooves stampede into the train, but he can see the bright boas squeezing artificial flesh. After taking inventory, Cash increases volume: "*Fat bottom girls you making the rocking world go round.*"

To his left a one-legged woman approaches gracelessly. Cash breaks his own rule and makes eye contact. She smiles, revealing a row of sharp little teeth. After a flurry of hobbles and a near slip, the little woman is standing beside him.

"Money?" she asks, extending her hand.

He shakes his head 'no.'

"Watch!" she demands. The woman shuts her eyes and tilts back her matted head. A pink tongue shoots from her mouth and wiggles into a nostril. Not until the serpent has withdrawn can the woman's wheezy laugh escape the wet cave. Again, her stained glove opens toward Cash, expecting a tip for her trick. When his head shakes 'no' the woman's smile dies. She reaches out again, almost touching his tie.

"No money!" he yells, and the woman's eyes flash red.

"You're gonna fucking die!" she shouts. Cash refuses to argue and decides to change artists: "*I've got a peaceful...easy feeling.*"

The song is interrupted by an announcement: **Ladies and gentlemen, please pardon the interruption, but the following stop is temporarily closed due to a medical emergency. We at MyMetro apologize for the inconvenience and thank you for your patience.**

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Cash doesn't need to read the map above the door to know the next stop is his usual place of departure. *No problem*, he thinks, *I'll catch a train going the opposite direction.*

He rides the red line, one of three primary colors that snake beneath the city. When the platform lights pour into the train, Cash, in concert with most passengers, jostles towards the windows to witness the "medical emergency." A man lies motionless on the cement. Two boys with short hair cut open a shirt that reads: Ultimate Fighter. Each shove into the man's chest sends waves of fat down his stomach.

The train gains momentum and descends into darkness. Cash has worked hard to get his position near the door, and he's determined to remain there until the next red dot is reached: *El Salvador.*

He looks into the dark glass beyond his nose and sees a man, deformed and burning. Cash tries to avoid other faces—they are more hideous than his own reflection.

When the track stretches left, Cash and others standing beside him are forced against the door. The glass feels warm on his cheek.

They pass the next terminal without showing any indication of slowing down. Frustration gives way to confusion, then anger. *I just wanna go to fucking work, unlike these God-damn degenerates!*

An elderly woman shows signs of panic when two rough looking boys sit down to either side of her. The train's unprecedented behavior is making the routine commuters feel very uncomfortable.

"I need water," declares a delicate voice.

Cash looks down and finds a young girl lost in the forest of adult legs.

"Sorry," says Cash, "don't have any." The girl eyes his briefcase.

"It's not for me," she clarifies, but Cash continues to shuffle music: *"People are strange, when you're a stranger—faces look ugly, when you're alone."*

"Help!" somebody screams, "They took my purse!" The old woman behind Cash is on the floor, bleeding from the mouth. The shady boys are sprinting towards the back of the train. Cash considers chasing them but decides to stay by the door.

The young girl yanks the white chord and the headphones shoot from his ears. He hears the metal wheels working beneath his feet and knows the train is reaching a dangerous speed. The track bends right, throwing several passengers onto the ground. Some cars leave the track and scrape against the concrete tunnel, shattering several windows. Smoke and sparks fill the air. Three hundred yards of this chaos ensues until the bend becomes less dramatic. The train slams back down onto the rails and a woman holding a baby collapses.

People circle an old man writhing on the floor. He clutches his neck, trying to keep blood inside his body.

The train shoots through another bright terminal. Cash tries to read the sign, *La Bruja*, but they are moving too fast. He looks up and finds the name printed beside the last red dot. *Punto del Diablo* is the end of the line. Cash grabs a handrail when his feet begin sliding towards the rear of the train. A moment later his hand sends a message of pain to his brain. After wrapping a pink boa around the pole, he's able to hold on.

Some people, along with styrofoam cups and fast-food wrappers, tumble past him. For a while, all he hears is wind. When his feet lose contact with the floor, Cash vomits. They are no longer being driven—the train is falling.

Cash is determined to keep his grip on the pole. The warm air smells of sulfur. When he hears people moaning in the cars behind him, Cash closes his eyes. Smoke enters his lungs and he starts coughing. When his eyes open, he sees a baby drifting just beyond his polished shoes. Cash looks through the windows and sees they have left the tunnel—they are falling through an enormous cavern, towards a smoky-orange glow.

It's too hot and Cash tells his bleeding hands to *let go*.

"What have I done to deserve this!" he yells, bouncing

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through the train. Eventually, he collides into a wall of passengers. Bodies fill the last car like loose puzzle pieces. He sees the little girl wedged beneath a seat. She has somehow managed to find his briefcase. She opens it and removes a plastic container. The girl unscrews the top and hands it to the one legged transient.

“Thanks sweetie.” She takes a drink and passes the water to a wrinkled hand. The old woman is upside-down and still bleeding from the mouth. She takes an awkward gulp.

“Now you, dear,” says the old woman. The young girl takes a quick sip. Cash watches in disbelief as the one-legged woman begins to disappear. A moment later she is entirely gone. When he sees the old woman starting to dissolve, Cash snatches the girl by the wrist.

“Gotcha!” he shouts. “Now give me that fucking water!”

She stretches the bottle away from Cash with her free arm. He can feel his hand tighten into a fist. When the girl vanishes the container drifts away. When it touches the ceiling, the vessel bursts and the water turns to steam.

The plastic parts inside the train are melting, adding another toxic element to the already putrid air. Metal objects begin to glow red. Flames reach inside the train, trying to convert flesh into fuel.

Ladies and gentlemen, please pardon the interruption, but the following stop is temporarily closed due to a medical emergency. We at MyMetro apologize for the inconvenience and thank you for your patience. Those not dead twist their blistering necks and peer outside the window, just in time to see the brilliant light.



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The Chronicles of Tim Pt. XII - Resurrection

by Mike Wiley

Tim and Geryon have just placed a wounded James into the painted hospital scene for operation. In that fragile, sentimental moment, Geryon gives Tim an envelope and asks him to open it if anything bad should happen. This is clear and deliberate foreshadowing to indicate that something bad is going to happen. Stay tuned.

Distraught by recent events, Tim headed back upstairs to his room to process the situation. He held the manila envelope in front of him like a prayer book. A mystery laid in wait for him inside that package. Or, possibly, an answer to any one of the mysteries he had already encountered. He could have opened it then and there but decided against it. Geryon had already placed a great deal of trust in him and so he was obliged to return that trust.

Tim reached his room and opened the door. Two things immediately revealed themselves to him; the first of which he did not suspect would lead to the second.

Without much thought to it, he had left the note that Samira had given him in the window. Should have been no big deal. Walking around his room now, after having been gone for a brief period of time, it seemed that every source of theodine producer had visited in his absence, like the Sinterklaas of illicit substances. From the windowsill to the dresser tops, on the sheets and under the bed, there were hundreds of unmarked, brown bottles, all humming an increasingly familiar tune to Tim's ears. They shimmered.

He hadn't asked for this much theodine and he didn't like having it around. Tim walked straight across the room to the

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window where the note prominently displayed and removed it, tore it to pieces and flushed it down the toilet. He thought of the Tim he had seen hovering over the lake earlier. Geryon had remained mum on the subject. His thoughts turned to the bloodied James, near death downstairs. These things unnerved him.

After a moment's thought, he decided to deplete the stash. Tim reached for the nearest bottle. "A paved road never took anybody to a place where no one's been," he thought.

Tim knew neither where he was going nor where he had really been but those words echoed through his head as he began to empty the first bottle of theodine. Then he emptied another. The fallen soldiers he flung through closed windows, at walls, no mirror left in one piece. Uncontrollable vomiting ensued. More drinking. There seemed to be no coming or going. The walls of his room took on the warm, campy hum and soothing pulse of millions of phosphorescent glow worms. Tim felt at once as though he were tucked away into a cardboard box the size of a dog house and simultaneously omnipresent. The ego dissolved everywhere between the sun, moon and trees down to the crawling, writhing grubs that populate the rotting, mossy tree stumps evolving again into fish, amphibians, spiders, up the chain to rodents, badgers, and finally humans, once again that crawling, polluted scum-bubbling mess of putrid intertwining limbs hell bent set to one motive: destroy each other.

He spent torpid, fleeting moments flying over the mountains and streams he had encountered only on the television. There seemed to be no end to the extravagant explorative narrative his mind had incubated, the forest of unconsciousness had warped the degrees to make them more to his liking. He came back again to the room sparing only a moments breath to make love or air with his hands, his mind freeing himself temporarily from the flux of the desert the mountains the trees back down the evolutionary chain into the spines of the orangutang, the ape the chimp or the monkey the encased carcass of the slug down the black moldy ropes into the caverns of unmemory and forget. He fell backwards, blind, not remembering making mistakes, upside down and broken.

He drank some more.

He shed skin, consciousness marking a rebirth of wonder casting knowledge into the abyss of memory and came floating down down down like rotting leaves pretending nothingness.

Then he woke up. Alive.

There was a woman standing over him, cold, shivering arms crossed, hair in her face, the spit falling from her bloody lips. She leaned over Tim, the cold sweat blanketing him, alone in the bed, not yet wet. Marked for death. He raised his arms to protect himself, found there were no arms, only more bottles of theodine, uncontrollably finding their way to his mouth to his throat to his stomach to his blood to his (what's left of) brain. What's left of brain?

She came around the foot of the bed and came at Tim from the side, dried blood caked and coating her fingernails. He winced and when he opened his eyes, she was whole, clean alive, unshaken. Pouring a drink, handing him the glass. Disappearing.

He was alone again. The full bottles finding their way in to replace the empty ones. A train of whisky-brown substance parading into his bloodstream.

“Won’t you read me a story?” she asks.

Pandora?

He opened his eyes. It wouldn’t be the first time. She had been there before. To help him. She poured the true whisky. The pure stuff.

Now under the floor.

He was crawling between the now and the soon to be now, unable to find any way to stand solid on either. Turning over like dead presidents hearing their memories invoked in the name of war or justice. Eternal hot dogs rotating over the pits of hell fire consumed for a dollar fifty free can of soda if you leave off the relish.

Wake up.

Notice she is over there at the television set. The shy one, always exercising. Making more dirty laundry.

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“Tim, come help me stretch my ham strings,” she says. The hot sweat evaporating in front of her halo eyes, stretching forth into eternal messages only Pope can translate. “How many times do I have to ask you?”

Paved roads never led a man to a place... an unknown road. A place where you've been?

What were the words? He couldn't remember. Maybe they could bring him back.

He stood on an elevated platform at a station, waiting for the commuter train. It was a veritable montage of familiar people and pasts. Their idiotic faces swelled and ballooned in the windows like over-plump sausages, bursting at the weak points, unknown meat and ligaments protruding from the ripped seams.

He saw among them himself, his mother, his aunt from Chicago, more Tim copies, then his wife Tina-Sue. She reached through the open window and screamed. No words came from her mouth, only worms. Tim reached out his hands to help her but as soon as he did, was lifted into the air as if by catapult, launched hundreds of miles through space. He landed on another platform, a stage. The girls were there behind him, soaring and rocking agelessly into foreign dimensions. Tim had no problem keeping up. Down in the audience at his feet were thousands of writhing Tims. They pressed against one another, rocking in unison, this one becoming that one. At the far back of the sloshy mess of bodies he could see three figures seated around a small dining table. It was Pandora, Geryon and himself. They were eating breakfast, making small, awkward talk. The true Tim, the one on stage, held his head high, high, higher and shrieked into the microphone.

“Nobody can keeeeeeeeep us alive, we've come to party until the dusk of time!”

The microphone became softer in his hands. Soft and wet. He was falling now, sucking the corner of a pillow. Samira, Adivas and Karin were circling his bed. He mumbled and bumbled, slurring the rhythms. All the Tims danced. The girls prodded at him with guitars and drum sticks. They wanted to play. Adivas threw a cymbal at the wall just over Tim's head.

The crash brought him to full consciousness. “A paved road,” Tim breathed, “never took anybody to a place... where no one’s been.”

He sat up, alone in the bed. Sweaty sheets clung to his shaking body. Empty bottles littered the floor of the room; some whole, most broken. Next to the bed on the nightstand was a glass of brown liquid with fresh ice. A note sat beside it. Tim reached out and read:

“Whisky in the glass
You, my dear, have suffered much
This drink, drink to cure.”

Without hesitation, yet with unsteady hands, Tim brought the glass up. Ice clanked against the side of the shaking glass. The elixir was indeed what the note had claimed. Tim blacked out into a brief and peaceful rest.

When he again opened his eyes, the heretofore mentioned room of chaos and broken bottles was completely clean and organized. Broken windows had been replaced. Not a single piece of shattered glass remained on the floor and folded wardrobe had been laid out at the foot of the bed. Tim felt his cheeks for beard growth. Not a patch of rough bristle could be detected. He couldn’t remember the last time he had been so clean shaven. Prepubescence?

Geryon entered the room.

“Well, look who’s alive,” he said upon seeing the new man awake in the bed. “When you’re quite through here, James is back and recovering. Meet us in the kitchen. He wants to talk to you.”

Then he left the room as abruptly as he had entered.

Once fully dressed and approaching the kitchen, Tim realized he did not have the hangover like effects typically associated with post-theodine (and whisky-related) episodes. Something quite the opposite was happening. Total clarity had descended upon his normally muddled mind. Previously inanimate objects now took on distinct characteristics. Life itself spoke to him.

The walk down the stairs revealed that the wooden banister

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had once witnessed the suicide of a previous tenant's daughter. The last thing she touched before leaping to her death had been that hand rail.

The carpet made it known that it was woven from fritter rabbit hairs and consisted entirely of the lineage of a single family line. They were known as the Gemini Hours - very birth being of two dating back hundreds of years. Now they were stepped on daily without a thought to their legacy. Tim felt each one of their deaths as he strode across their backs. He whispered apologies as he went.

Geryon discovered him just outside the kitchen whispering apologies to a framed picture on the wall.

“What...” Geryon began. “... are you...”

Unstartled, Tim finished his monologue and took a half step away from the wall, leaving one hand on the frame. “This wooden frame,” he said, “used to be part of a tree that grew up outside of Oakland, California. Can you even believe that? It’s so very close to where I came from. Poor little guy...” He pet the wooden strips.

“That’s not really that close to where you came from Tim.”

“Closer than wherever we are now.”

“Have you lost your mind, son?”

“I think I’ve just now found it,” said Tim.

“Can we go talk to James now? He keeps asking for you.”

They entered the kitchen together. James was resting at a kitchen table. Nearly head to toe in bandages, it seemed his limbs were frozen the way he had been propped. He was still missing the left hand. Only a bandaged stump protruded. James spoke first.

“Tim, you can’t take theodine anymore.”

“That’s fine,” said Tim. “Haven’t got anymore anyway.”

Tim sat down directly across the table from James. Nothing on the table save for a basket of fruit and paring knife. Geryon took a stool against the wall. He was here as a spectator.

“Do you still have access to it?”

“Nope.”

“How do I know you’re telling the truth?”

“You don’t, I suppose.”

“How much have you had?”

“A lot.”

“That’s what I thought,” James said. “Whatever you’re feeling right now Tim; it won’t last.”

“How about let’s not worry about how I am feeling right now. How are you feeling right now, James?”

“Well, I...”

“I think I know exactly how you’re feeling,” Tim said, cutting him off. “I’ll bet you’re feeling like twelve able-bodied men took rocks and mining tools to your torso like you were a pinata on Easter. My guess is that after they had sufficiently knocked you out of your senses, they pinned you down and removed that hand of yours nice and slow.” Tim picked up the paring knife and withdrew an apple from the basket, peeling back a layer of the fruit’s skin with the blade as he spoke. “Nice and slow like a satiated savage, not needing the food, but savoring the carving of a delicate catch. They made you watch. Then they threw your hand into a large wicker basket full of other bloody hands, yours becoming indistinguishable from the rest... just another catch. Huh. Then they rode off into the night, leaving you for dead, but not before one of them circled back around to relieve himself on your face.”

James took this all in silently. Something like shock and wonder on his face. Tim bit into the apple.

“And I’ll bet,” Tim continued, “that you’re feeling like it should have been me out there, alone in the Nevercaves. Is that about right?”

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Mitch Grabois was born in the Bronx and now lives in Denver. His short fiction and poetry appear (or will appear) in over one-hundred literary magazines, most recently The T.J. Eckleberg Review, The Examined Life, Memoir Journal, Out of Our and The Blue Hour. His novel, Two-Headed Dog, published by Xavier Vargas E-ditions, is available for all e-readers for 99 cents through Amazon, Barnes and Noble and Smashwords (which also provides downloads to PC's).

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Shawna X: My work is largely inspired by the way in which my imagination accents the world around us. I particularly enjoy exploring lighthearted themes from a curiously morbid perspective. The image was created for a blog I started (and currently on halt) with friends, where we pick a word and draw it every week:
aword-adraw-a-week.tumblr.com

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