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Minister Plenipotentiary

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Editorial

We've got some great stuff for you in this, our third issue (even our cover is a story!). Aside from the wonderful and exciting fiction, essay and poetry we've got still more photography and a whole new take on the Six Pack Story. I don't know if I can thank our contributors enough for allowing us to run with their work but I'll try: Thank you. Seriously. Thank you.

There is an apology in order as well, a mistake on my part (one of what may have been many....). I the editor, whose job it is not to misspell names damn it, misspelled Jaime Gleixner's, the cover artist responsible for last issue's amazing art. We love you here at Used Gravitrons Jaime and we're pretty sorry.

That said, please read on.

- Shea Newton

Turpentine

- Amy Hepworth

We knew the third bedroom smelled of turpentine when we bought the house. We smelled it when we did our first walk through. The inspector noted it in his report. The sellers shrugged their shoulders and said they didn't know where it came from. We bought the house anyway.

We moved into the house but never went into the third bedroom. It was just Tim and I, and we didn't really need a third bedroom. Plus, there was a lock on the door, so even if we got a compulsion to go in the room, we couldn't. The key to the room was sitting on the molding above the door, but that made it just enough trouble to keep us from going in. That's good, because we have a lot of compulsions. Tim and I. So that's one less thing.

For one whole year, we didn't think about the room at all. But then we noticed the turpentine smell was sneaking out of the room beneath the door. It started in the hallway outside the room, and within just a few days, it was in the bathroom. Within a week, it was in the other bedrooms. Within a month, you could smell it the moment you walked in the front door. Not long after that, you could smell it when you pulled in the driveway. The neighbors started to talk.

One neighbor accused us of using the turpentine to mask the smell of dead animals in our house. We responded in chorus from our front yard.

"Your problem is that your sense of smell is fucked up because your wife's pussy smells like cat food," I said.

"And you both have a low IQ," Tim added. Tim is practical with his insults.

There were other fights with neighbors, and two eventually moved away. The smell stayed, and has done a nice job of keeping potential homebuyers at bay. Our home is now flanked by two empty houses with thigh-high weeds. We like not having

neighbors.

Tim and I have gotten used to the smell, even grown fond of it. I had begun really enjoying my time alone with the smell during the day while Tim was at work, but now Tim is home with us. He was fired last month after several of the cows at the dairy tipped over and died while Tim was milking them. His boss said it was the smell. Since Tim has been home, we bought blackout blinds and installed them. We eat a lot of canned soup for dinner. Many evenings we sit quietly in the darkness and press our ears up to the door of the third bedroom to see if the smell will make a sound.

The Mice

- Ray Succre

We meet, fellow mouse, for a conjoined era
of simplicity, with the diving comet of politic time
between us.

For a jealous rampart of origination, lesser mouse.
your choice is still my choice, my length, my life,
or apart we become unformed and devastated
in a billion black-torn clouds of foreign fire.

Space. Coma Berenices. We're in space, mouse.
Its use is an insoluble everything, and of such slow
waking, it can't but draw us with tails of starlight.

We meet, mouse, nuzzling galactically. Love.
The displume imbibes us, merging our exponents
straight into our lust, shoving us full
of our own young hot blue stars.

As we kiss, there is a great bow of electrons
and a luscious appetite between our snouts.

Occluded stone within me smashes into gas-lands.
a tidal force, and a physical apocalypse eaten.
as we breathe, we kiss, fellow mouse, our spans
made useful in the gut of an ancient withdrawal.
a falling outward so monolithic in size.
it is beyond understanding but for numerals.

We are scratching out our nook in the barren sty,
twitching our whiskers in the empty, vast vanity,
the gone or uncoming, beneath a massive parasol
of vanished things, gone or uncoming,
falling into and out of the beyond.

We are relative by merely one another, mouse:
it seems from within to be all there is.

Early

- Nate Moody

I try to care
about the driveway
being anything but
dirt

as I sit
next to it
in probably
too short
salmon colored
swim trunks. and
don't think I do care
but

it horrifies me
now
to see the flood damaged house
tattooed on your neck.

Master of da Skies

- Abigail Thomas

The women's clothing section in major department stores, fills me w/ false confidence and tingling joy. My agenda, upon entering these places, is to start out in the "my body is lumpy and misshapen, but I have a beautiful, virgin like face" sizes. Once I get past the sideways glares from freshly permed middle aged women in their stars and stripes capris and floral/cheetah print blouses, little do they know how it's revvin' me up, I'm ready to shop till I drop! First, I try on some items I know are going to fit like a 15 gallon trash bag, black of course, (it's slimming), forget about the 7 garb limit in the wonderfully lit fitting room, I can only count this high (middle finger!) anyway. Feelin' groovy about how wide of a SpongeBob-esque 'bring it around town' I can do in the 1Xs and 18Ws. I leave the rejected try-ons exploded all over my (mine! I will be back for you) dressing cubicle, and trot like a pony standing upright over to the "so hot I'm leathery, exercise disorder, girl's night out kind of mom and I went to college to get a husband that would pay for my mani-pedi's and all I got was this lousy video gaming jack hole that only gives me enough allowance to go to Supercuts and I do nothing w/ my marketing degree (pfff) I'm an effing submissive personal assistant to a commercial realtor and duuuuumb" corner of the circus tent and do my thang. On my way I'm captivated by my reflection, Well Hellllo! and have this conversation aloud w/ myself in a smudgy full length mirror. You know, I'm one of those people always being told, you can pull anything off, and I eat A LOT of cottage cheese, so my personality has to be tip

top at all times, if you are what you eat holds true. Another thing is my height, too short to glamorously support my cherubic figure, but dammit I'm cute and rosy, aren't I, why yes, yes you are. Mwah, you go get 'em girl! As I peel myself away from myself. I turn around and right behind me is a glorious 2 piece purple windbreaker jogging suit, accented w/ neon geometric splatters. it's fate, it has to be, this is too fucking perfect. FUUUCK YES! I try on the jacket and shake my little tush on the catwalk, how exquisitely the shoulder pads parallel my recent bowl-cut and the blinding electric blue will match the hair on my crazy Troll t-shirt. I'd bet my own mother's boring 8-5 life on it, that this is the outfit I will wear for the rest of my life. "Do you solemnly swear to love and cherish and tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you god as long as you both shall live?" Consummated, right then and there, present ass tense.

It's tough being 8 in 1990 and knowing pop culture references from the distant future, that usually deters potential friends.

the kids were alright

this is a series of photographs selected especially in appreciation of frontier friends and an era of outlaw adventure in boise: a time when we were all rouge gentlemen and in more frequent cahoots. these photos are simply some of my own reminders of the wild, joyful madness that happened and i positively did not want to forget that. ever.

with that said. i feel I should tell you that I consider myself neither 'photographer' or 'artist.' maybe just a hopeful trapper of feral exuberant times. mostly, i'm a forgetful person and the camera is probably the easiest apparatus for documenting these purely natural goings on.

yrs.

andrew











Homie Don't Play That

- Keith Zimmerman

My mom says some sad shit. Just the other day she remarked on how many people offered condolences when her best friend's husband died, yet nobody had done the same when she lost her own husband, not to death but to divorce, thirty-three years ago. Mom has had a tough go of it, to be sure, and in too many ways to do justice to here. While I cannot imagine the pain and horror of being left to raise three children by oneself at the tender age of twenty-six, I would say it's probably not the same as losing one's husband of thirty-nine years because a tree fell on his head and crushed his skull. But that's not really the point. That she still mourns my father thirty-three years later, post-poverty, post-college, post-career, post-retirement, speaks to the lasting malaise of failed relationships. That she brought it up in connection with a horrible death tells of something darker, sadder. I sort of (*sort of*) get it. I miss him, too.

That's just one example of the sad shit my mom can lay on a guy willy-nilly, out of the blue. These things never come with a warning. The saddest shit she ever said was when, a few years ago, whilst driving down the freeway in her SUV, my mom, Michele, a sixty-one years old lifelong Christian, turned to me, and without irony, humor, or a trace of self-awareness said, 'What do you want to do when you go to Heaven?'

'Um. Heaven, Mom?' Feeling the conversation might be headed someplace sad, I prepared myself emotionally.

'Yes,' she said.

I said nothing.

'Yeah, you know,' she said. 'Is there something you would like to do, or people you'd like to see?'

'I don't know. I mean, do you get to choose? Do you really think Heaven is just a big party and you get to see all the dead homies? Yellow brick road and all that shit?'

'The Bible says that in heaven the streets are lined with gold.' She tapped her Bible on the console. 'Revelations. I think.'

'That sounds like a country song. The yellow brick road thing is from The Wizard of Oz.'

'But what do you want to do when you get there?' she asked.

I sighed. 'In Heaven? I don't... Well, I don't know, Mom. What do you want to do?'

'Play tennis. I want to play tennis with my old friends, and maybe with some friends I never had a chance to make, and I'll be thin, wearing one of those little white tennis outfits they wear, it'll be sunny, y'know, just really sunny and beautiful weather, and we'll all be healthy and young again. We'll be so happy.' She paused, smiling, eyes open wide. 'Of course, there won't be any bills, or jobs or sickness or disease. Nobody will be lonely. And we'll all get a chance to have fun and be carefree and just do the things we never got a chance to do here, in this world.'

'If I believed in Heaven,' I said sadly, 'and I thought I would go, I guess I would want to see Megan. She was a good dog.'

We can take a few things from this exchange:

(1) My mom believes in Heaven. It's understandable: most people don't want to die *for real*, most people don't want to believe their loved ones are gone *forever*. And there are probably a lot of people who would like to be rewarded for putting up with everyone else's shit (the same people would also like to see others punished for not putting up with their, the first group's, shit). If one believes in a just God, and one has suffered a hard life, one must surely believe something better is waiting around the bend. Hence the afterworld. People have believed in heaven for as long as there have been people, and there is no evidence to invalidate that belief. When a person talks about a near-death experience involving a light at the end of the tunnel, a peaceful easy feeling (was that what the Eagles were singing about?), and he insists he was in Heaven, or at least in the presence of God, you can believe him or not. But he almost died, not you. *He was there*.

(2) My mom's version of Heaven is just like Earth, only perfect and all blinged out. This is slightly sad, but only because her conception of Heaven seems somewhat banal. If there are tennis courts and ponytails and little white visors, there must also

be BMWs and manicures, I guess? And lawyers? It seems ridiculous, but I don't know. It doesn't bother me too much because if she asked me to describe, in detail, my perfect fantasy world, it would probably sound ridiculous to her. Heaven, by nature, must be incomprehensible to someone who's never been there, so she used her own vocabulary to describe what she thought it might feel like. I mean, is it even a place? Or a feeling? Because I don't really think of it as a physical thing (you know, if it exists, ha). Whatever. It's like trying to imagine a new color.

(In my version of my mom's version of Heaven, I am a 6'7" black man who plays power forward for the Denver Nuggets. We have just won the NBA Championship due to my fourth quarter heroics in game seven versus the Miami Heat. Yes, I beat LeBron, Wade and Bosh singlehandedly. I never practice, but the coach doesn't yell at me: I *am* the coach. My wife is beautiful, of course, and my children think I'm a superhero. They address me as 'Sergeant' I drink all the time but I never get hangovers. Check that. I never drink, but always feel a little buzzed, on life. I am rich and I own a fancy car. Also, I am an extremely sensitive and eloquent singer/songwriter who critics adore but the general public is unaware of. Ridiculous you say? Hmph. You're just jealous.)

(3) My mom wishes she was someone else. This might be the saddest thing I have ever imagined, so let me explain. She had my oldest sister at an early age, then my middle sister was born, and then me. She was married, had a family. She was happy. And then my dad took off. She worked through college while raising the three of us solo, received her degree magna cum laude, and started a career in accounting. We moved all over the country as she found better paying jobs with which to support her kids. Can you imagine? I mean, I can't even support myself. In other words, *my mom is the strongest person I've ever met, and she wishes she was someone else*. But now she's retired and she sits by herself watching televangelists and Oprah and wishing she was a thin woman in Heaven playing tennis with her friends. She could go on a diet and meet some new people, but she doesn't. That is some sad shit.
Of course, maybe my mom just needs a nice vacation. That's fine. It's normal to want to be thin. But I also know about the desire to be someone else, the wish for a different life. Delusions are my specialty. I *invented* the saying 'I'll change tomorrow.' I do and say sad shit all the time. In fact, I once shit my pants at the airport.

I daydream all the time.

When I was nineteen I fell in love with a girl named Camille. My friend Jeff and I were drinking beer and skateboarding in downtown Denver on a Saturday night when a Volvo full of strangers stopped on the street beside us. They were all girls. The driver said, 'Get in.' We got in. They drove us to Paris on the Platte, a local all night coffee shop where sensitive new wave artist-types and hippies hung out. Jeff and I drank beer in the parking lot while Camille and her friends went inside. Later that night, we ended up smoking pot and getting really high in front of some random house for what seemed like hours. Camille, Jeff and I sat in the back seat. She saw blood on my jeans and she asked me if I was hurt and I said, 'No, it's from skating. I like it.' She said, 'Oh, you like pain?' with a real sexy smile, which was cheesy because I had been referring to skateboarding, not pain, but she was beautiful and flirting with me so I said, 'Sure, I like pain a lot,' feeling like a total dipshit. I don't remember the next morning, but Jeff and I somehow made it back to Lakewood. I found her number in my jeans, written with eyeliner or lipstick. For a year we were just sort of friends, even though we made out a few times, and I think she had crushes on my friend Jeff and my other friend Derek for awhile. Derek didn't like her, but Jeff did. I had a crush on her the whole time, but I was seeing this girl Kristy. One night, it was New Year's Morning actually, it just happened. We did it in my car at a parking lot in the foothills. A couple years later I tried to run over Jeff with that car.

We went out for three or four years. One of the first times we hung out, I took a bus from Green Mountain to Denver in a blizzard - no shit - so I could watch her sing some Tori Amos song at her high school talent show (I was listening mainly to Black Flag back then, but whatever). We smoked pot and drank whiskey constantly. I took her to her senior prom, she was so beautiful. Her dad, Louis, was a painter, and I went to art school. He always gave art books and sometimes he would take me to life drawing classes with all these semi-famous painters in Denver. We saw OJ Simpson's slow speed freeway chase interrupt New York v. Houston in the '94 NBA Finals. She would sing me to sleep. We got in a car crash on a highway in the mountains. The hick cops at the scene arrested me for an outstanding warrant, and her parents drove up there to bail me out. She moved to Philadelphia to attend performing arts school. I got a tattoo of her name at the bottom of my shoulder. She sort of freaked out, said

something about ‘too much pressure.’ I moved out to Philly for a short while, but had to move back home for some reason. I think I had to go to school, or make a movie, or maybe I just didn’t have any money. I was drinking like a fish and working shitty jobs.

We lasted for about a year like that – her in Philadelphia, me in Denver. The situation was untenable for two reasons. One, every girl in Denver was on my jock, for some reason. Two, I just missed her too much. That summer, she visited Denver, and I broke up with her. Rather than figuring out a way to be with her, I think I said something like ‘I just can’t turn my emotions on and off like a switch.’ (Yes, I am an idiot.) I didn’t know if I was drinking corn behind the chuckwagon or shooting a hole in the bottom of my own boat. Two days later, in a desperate drunken attempt to reconcile, I called her parents’ house at four in the morning. Her mother, Yolanda, who I’d known for years, who used to smoke cigarettes and bitch about Camille with me, who bailed me out of jail, who fed me rice and beans and let me sleep in her daughter’s bedroom, told me never to darken her doorway again. I had a panic attack that I thought was a heart attack. The following night I met a girl named Gina at a bar. She was passing through town, so I invited her to my place. The next day we moved to Chicago.

It’s been fifteen years, and I find myself thinking of Camille often. Anything can set me off. It’s usually music, or commercials, or the self-help books my mom gives me. ‘I Wish’ by R Kelly is a big one. Or ‘My Way,’ by Sinatra? I’m exactly like the narrator of that song, except exactly the opposite: I did it my way, but my way was fucking wrong. ‘Regrets? / I’ve had a few’ (Jesus, and I think *my mother* sounds like a sad country song.) I found a song by Camille’s band on the internet last year and for awhile there I played it every day. I don’t really understand the lyrics, but I’m pretty sure she wrote it for me.

Anyway, it’s usually music that sets me off.

Three recent examples:

(1) ‘Unfortunate’ by Trey Songz

As soon as Gina and I arrived in Chicago, I knew I’d done the wrong thing. Actually, we were only halfway there when I knew: she gave me a blowjob in one of those truck stop showers, and later when we were pumping gas the nozzle fell out of the hole and gasoline rushed all over the asphalt. I didn’t know Gina at all, but I realized very soon, with the quickness, that I didn’t like her much. There I was. I’d left

my family, my friends, my hometown, and the girl I loved, for Gina, her ferrets, her rabbits, her kittens, her birds. She hadn't told me that she ran a zoo in her one-bedroom apartment. I mean, I love animals. In fact, I'm an animal lover. But they weren't mine. They were strangers and they smelled bad. They were dirty. I kept thinking about the paintings on Camille's parents' walls. I kept thinking. *All this for a set of big titties and a job cutting grass at the local golf course? Sounds like Pops.* Late one night I drank a bottle of Christian Brothers, bought ten bucks in quarters and walked to a gas station in the rain. I called Camille on the payphone with a vague idea of reconciliation in mind. She could hardly hide her contempt as she fairly spit out the words 'fuck you' and 'get lost.' What does this have to do with Trey Songz? I don't know. Listen to the song(z).

(2) 'Truly, Madly, Deeply' by Savage Garden

We don't really get to pick the songs that afflict us, do we? I mean, I know this is technically a bad song, but sometimes context is everything. The first time I heard it I had just moved to Boise, just quit drugs, moved in with Mom, and worked at some telecommunications job. I wasn't sure how I got there, but I was there, and it was bad. At work one day, on hold and hungover, this song played on the receiver and picked me up, then let me down. I heard these voices, these angels' voices, ejaculating in heavenly symphonic harmony, and time and thought were suspended...the phone disappeared, the office disappeared, my headache disappeared. *I* disappeared...and then the chorus hit and I wanted to stand with Camille on a mountain, wanted to bathe with her in the sea. I wanted to lay like that forever, until the sky fell down on me (us). But of course, the customer returned to the phone. I hung up. The office and the phone and Boise and my job and everything returned. I wept Truly, Madly, Deeply. And then I asked the boss if I could go home.

(3) 'Walk on By' by Dionne Warwick

The opening lyrics of this Bacharach/Warwick joint go like this: 'If you see me walking down the street/And I start to cry/Each time we meet/Walk on by.' Dionne is telling the lover who spurned her (or vice versa) to take pity and politely walk away with her words, and pleading for him to stay with her voice. She doesn't want him to see her crying, but it would be nice if he gave a shit. Her impassioned, mournful vocals are the perfect counterpoint to Bacharach's casual, airy arrangement, imbuing it with the sort of shameful longing usually reserved for only the most disheartening of

moments. I remember riding through the city of Portland with my sisters and Mom, this song would come on, we would all get excited and sing together, and then my mom would just break down and cry. I never understood why: now I know. ‘Walk on By’ comprises two and a half minutes of unadulterated regret, shame, pride and beauty. It is a stone cold classic. It’s also the reason I shouldn’t be writing this essay.

Listen, I don’t mean to sound like an old woman mourning her failed marriage – or, ahem, a stalker – and I don’t want to sound maudlin. It’s not just Camille. Theoretically, I could’ve written this about ten other girls, and I’m sure ten other girls think I should’ve. No, this is about me, as usual. (Sorry, I’d go to confession but I’m not a Catholic. I’m a masochist.) I’m thirty-six now and I wish I would have stuck with it. Not only Camille. I mean everything I cared about. Instead I wander around wondering what happened and what exactly constitutes a failure and what to do next. And yet I do nothing. I just drink and hang out with kids ten years my junior and act like I know shit. I haven’t had a job for years. I talk a lot about writing, but I don’t write much. I never draw. (So much for art school! Thanks, folks!) I stay on people’s couches or in my mom’s ‘guest room.’ She asked me to leave once, and when I asked her why, she said ‘Because I want you to be a man.’ So I guess you could say I refuse to grow up, that in Heaven I would be drunk, and that I wish I was someone else.

You’d be right.

Six Pack Story

- Abigail Thomas













eat shit

I just need a single room to lay my head
in space theater
it gets weirder all the while
the lines of error
build shrines of terror
kind rubble man offers a mirror
"to exceed this limit" this kind would say
"is too heavy a price to pay"

I won't pay a single dime to lay down and rest
in space theater
I always take what's mine
those that follow
the cost that's hollow
stink like dung when you swallow
"to pursue this extremity" the dung said proudly
"you must eat me ever so loudly"

Inspired by GG ALLIN

love

VELVET HOOK

Proper Annunciation Proclamation

- Abigail Thomas

The only catcalls I get anymore are from Latino men, usually in large groups, waiting behind every corner and going real slow over speed bumps. I figure it's because of my wide childbearing hips that could assist in fulfilling any young Catholic's wet dream of getting a better living room sofa set in heaven. It would be another thing altogether if you were hooting and hollerin' at my bouncy, slappable, youthful back section. But noooooo, I'm just a baby machine to you, aren't I? Don't forget though, oh future devoted husband of mine, we will be holy matrimonied of course, that I will not be able to participate (shakin it like a Polaroid pick-cha) in your cultural dance parties, because I will constantly be filled to the brim w/ fetuses. I'm not bringin' the hammer down specifically on the Mexi-Amerimans, my Italian man-dar isn't what it used to be though and the predominant theology in your homeland is Broman Catholic and botha y'all's downtown's are "allergic" to latex. As the old saying goes "if I can't distinguish it by smell or flamboyant shirts, it's still a creepy leer to me!" If you really wanna get down w/ me, make me some din-din first and when you pull out, on my chest, please and thank you. Surely you'll feel too much GUILT (echoechoechoecho) about wasting a strapping young gentleman version of yourself, we'll carefully peel a little guy off and I'll make him a cute Lone Ranger outfit and enroll him in a prestigious boarding school, Catholic of course. That's the big man's way riiiiiight? Right. Now, turn on your blinker, we're making a sharp left turn.

Damselfly

- Heidi R.C. Kraay

Bubbles lift my lips
all is warm on my shoulders
peace in my knees
no shaking

Not drowned in lemonade
sucker punched by sugar

Not grabbed by cat's paw
Serenaded
My oily lover eight legged
hungry for me
he picked me wrapped my wings so carefully
I heard his capillaries filling
his strapping legs
holding me

When he takes me we'll collide
his luscious, shining leather
A pleasure to give him my fluids
midday light sparkling
his masterpiece pattern
built for our encounter
to snag
me

Terror wants to seize my heart
Love is easier to stomach

my children watching to see me struggle?
they'd have no pride left for their mum
I choose death with no distress
damsel or no I
live not for false hopes

One last moment
Seductive
My toes wiggle
Hearing him approach
Trembling

Dear Arachnid: Do me in. I welcome you.

I plead: Be reckless.
Do beastly work.
Singe my pleasure glands.
Damselfly wants her Wolf Spider.

A request: Let me howl orgasmic delight
I never found from insects six-legged

Your meal tasting celestial for this gift
Thrilling prospect in green and orange
I am your muse

He gives in
Arachnid to Insect
Shrieking satisfaction
Soaring through Saturn's wings
Wings collapsing into him
Astounding heaving
He wants more, more
in sunrise clouds
ignoring evening's dismal demons
holding his dead damsel
Full. Free.

The Fresh Bread

- Ray Succre

I once dolloped a day with my family's fresh bread.
hungry-who and mean-mister, so piggish.
I devoured it all, all butter, dirtied all knives
and emptied the house of that kickshaw, all gone.

"You hog," my family said after, crumbs
and flecks of crust still warm on my shirt.

The baking odor thick and heartening
enfolding the dwelling air in my likeness
swelled then, as it was a creature,
a fruit of hungry-who greed,
into an egg that sat beneath my ribs.

My sons looked inside with a candle and noted
nothing within but sundry.

"To renew my days," I said, patting it, pompous,
while the bitsy beasts beneath my lovely soil-porch
rooted about and, not finding my great egg
there just yet, settled themselves for more napping

The Seal Downstairs

- Neila Mezynski

Rancid boys. burning soup, barking seal. Wyoming. Ocean not big enough.
Broccoli. potato soup. 7-Up , too hot not enough? More money! shh... barking seal.
cutie. Mother seal won't eat you. just shoot.

Chronicles Of Tim Part III: Origins of Geryon

- Mike Wiley

Tim trudged along the seemingly endless hallway that led to the never-ending spiral staircase that displayed an impossible number of portraits of monsters on his path to the kitchen. As he made his way through the maze that was his home, his head dizzy with morning fuzz and dread. Tim caught peripheral views of the beasts adorning the walls. They all sat on the same throne, aristocratically poised and hand-painted in the same style. He wished he could say something clever to Geryon about the era or the style from which these portraits had been painted. Something like, "I see the majority of your collection is a celebration in the spirit of 18th century neoclassical works influencing modern oil painting anomalies such as those accomplished by the great Aleksei Antropov. Of course his was as much a time of fraudulent misrepresentations as our own generation's Elmyr de Hory of Hungary." This was, of course, a load of jargon Tim had lifted from a combination of movies and the prattle of a neighbor he used to have who studied art at the community college. It was also not clear whether the passing of "centuries" meant anything in this place where he now lived. There was no way to tell *where* on a map or *when* on a timeline he was. But they couldn't be in a bubble, could they? There had to be some influence from, or acknowledgement of, the outside world if Geryon had been keen to the existence of Tim.

Though he had bathed, Tim had not shaved since his abduction nearly a week ago. His once smooth face had become shadowed and scruffy and the makings of a fine beard were underway. Mindlessly, he stroked it and wondered if he ought to wear something over it while he cooked. The hair on his head was a fuzzy mess as well. Wouldn't want "the master", as James referred to him, to find a hair in his eggs.

The walls began to gray as Tim drew nearer the kitchen. 'How will I know the way Geryon likes his eggs?' he wondered. The task, at once simple and nearly impossible, had Timothy Cutlass ill at ease. He attempted to mentally prepare himself with every dreadful step. Instead he just became sicker and more dejected the more he thought about it. As he rounded the corner to the kitchen, the shocking fluorescent light of the cooking stations contrasting wildly with the somber dark of the hallway, Tim collapsed. A wave of nausea swept over him and he doubled over at the stomach. The gray closed

around him and worry wove its threads into his fibers. He lay motionless. There was no way to tell whether he had hit the floor or if the ceiling had come crashing down on him. For fear of falling back to the earth, he kept his eyes closed while his head swam with excuses not to go on. He wanted desperately to be back on his sofa in the Arizona sun, scheming ways to manufacture shade. He wanted the most exciting part of his life to be the aquafurr hunting trips. He wanted to see Tina-Sue.

It was in this swirling state that Tim thought of his wife. In the wake of the events of the past few days, she had not been much on his mind. He wondered after her intensely now. What was she doing without him? Did she care that he was gone? It was true that it had essentially been a loveless marriage, one conferred to neither out of necessity nor convenience. Why had they married, he wondered? Tim supposed it was because he was lonely, and maybe not just a little messed up. He took very little interest in other people, and Tina-Sue had been just uninteresting enough to demand little attention. She cared for him though, and that was more than he could say of his family. She cooked his meals and cleaned the trailer while he hobbled around from temp job to odd job to no job and back again. Why she had been nowhere near the forefront of his thoughts this whole time, Tim could not be sure. He missed her now, lying there, reeling somewhere between the floor and the ceiling. He remembered her simple, sweet smile. He remembered her interior trailer decorating. And then he remembered her cooking. Her home-cooking! The smell of gently burning breakfast wafted through his olfactory memory. He could taste the eggs that she would whip up and scramble. They had been prepared honestly, with love. He could see her cracking them, one by one, and simply, slowly breaking the yolks over the frying pan. He suddenly remembered every single, damn egg she had cooked for him. It was tiny miracles she had been creating in that humble trailer kitchen and Tim was being overcome with a confidence he had hitherto not known. Tina-Sue would guide him through this task. She had to.

The surging darkness began to fade from Tim's sight. He reached an arm upwards, he thought. Still unsure of his general orientation, he took it slow. Instead of relapsing him through a seizure, the flickering fluorescents of the kitchen provided a guiding light. They beckoned Tim towards the place he had been dreading. He caught hold of a table end nearby and hoisted himself to his feet. The blood began to return to his face and he could see straight again: straight towards his goal. He entered the kitchen, eager to break some eggs.

Straight to the fridge. Collect a large pile of eggs, twelve maybe. Butter. Salt from the pantry. Heat the frying pan, the butter. Start the water for coffee. Grounds, filter. Crack the eggs. His hands not his own. Execute beautifully. Tina-Sue guides them. They sizzle and pop, browning nicely. Scramble a bit. Flip. Salt. Flip. Salt. Done.

Plate the eggs, garnish. Coffee ready. Pour. Present.

Geryon looked up from his plate. He was chewing. He swallowed. He took a few more bites. Tim sat patiently across the table, hungry. He had thought it would be inappropriate to have prepared for himself a meal at the same time so he just sat there and waited for a response. He had no idea what to expect after the ambiguous reaction to his coffee the morning before. Now that the panic attack had subsided and the eggs had been cooked, Tim was calm. He waited.

Geryon stared at him for another moment. What could only be described as a smile began to appear on his twisted, monster face. Then it grew. The smirk became a grin and the grin, a laugh. The beast was cracking up. Geryon pounded his fists on the table and threw his giant head back and laughed. He roared. Unfinished food bits flew from his mouth as he celebrated his breakfast. Tim sat silently and watched as Geryon stood up out of his seat, grabbing the chair and throwing it up against the wall to his right. A picture came crashing to the floor, the chair smashed. Geryon began to dance. He raised up on his bony, clawed toes and spread his wings. They filled the greater part of the dining hall and Tim ducked out of the way as they whipped around and around. Still laughing maniacally, the four-bodied monster jumped up on the dining table and did a jig back and forth across its length. Vases and statues were thrown to the ground.

"Tim!" he roared. The walls shook and dust fell from the ceiling as his name rebounded down the corridors and back. "These eggs are fantastic! They're just like my mother used to cook for my sister and I back when we lived in the trailer park."

Tim sat up straight in his seat. This bit of information came as a shock to him. Not that he knew anything at all about Geryon, but this was not expected in the least.

Geryon climbed down from the table and pulled another chair around to where he had been sitting before. As he caught his breath, he explained to Tim about growing

up, not unlike Tim, in a trailer park in the shadow of the Celestial Mountains in North Carolina.

"You see, Tim," Geryon began. "I was not always as you see me before you now. I was much like you, well, maybe four or five hundred years younger of course. You see where I'm going with this, don't you?"

Tim shook his head back and forth, silently.

"Alright. So, time doesn't work the same in this place as it does where we came from. What happened to me is what happens to a human if it is allowed to age its natural course."

Tim sat up straighter than he had when he learned that Geryon had come from a trailer park. "You mean, you turn into a four-bodied, seal-skinned giant rat with wings?" he asked.

Geryon's good humor lowered a notch. He stretched his enormous body, slowly, up and over the table towards Tim and spoke directly into his face. The steamy breath dampened Tim's hair.

"Tim, you haven't got any respect for age unless it's the number printed on a whisky bottle. We don't speak to our elders that way here. You are fated to the same as I and you better get used to that idea quick. All these portraits you see on the walls and along the corridors? These were great men like you and I before us. When the body ages as it is supposed to, the mortal flesh falls away and several bodies, each containing sets of vital organs develop to sustain a long, natural life. It is nothing like the aging of humans in that other world: pathetic, unnaturally prolonged." Geryon rose from his seat again and lifted his giant arms up over his head in a display of muscular strength. Then he brought them down to the edges of the dining table, some twenty feet in length and weighing hundreds of pounds. He picked up the entire thing and flung it into a nearby wall, causing the entire surface to give way. The table flew clear through into the next room where one of James' projections had been dusting the furniture and shelves. James stopped dusting and looked up at the two men now looking through the wall at him, then slowly, silently backed his way out of the room through the nearest original exit.

Geryon turned back to Tim, who was now standing, shaking a bit.

"I am hundreds of years old and I am in the best shape of my life, Tim. This is what it means to age gracefully. Not like those wheelchair bound senior citizens of your

land. clinging to their unfruitful lives with pill regimens and prayer books. What they prey on is the living. They soak up the resources of the youth and of their planet for just another day, just another meal, just another hour of television. It's disgusting."

Tim was motionless, frozen in place: afraid to move. He tried to control his shaking limbs as Geryon subsided his terrifying rant. The information swelled over and around his head, sinking in in bits and pieces. He wasn't prepared to live for hundreds of years. He'd always been content to live the life he had chosen, back in Arizona. Things were quiet. Things were normal. And no one lived to be five-hundred years old.

Geryon broke into Tim's moment of reflection.

"You have pleased me with your egg-making abilities," he said. "You have displeased me with your winged rat comment. Do not displease me again, Tim. Your next task will be to spend three nights in the think box. This will give you a chance to regret speaking to me as you have. This will also give you an opportunity to deal with what must be troubling information for such a young, puny human intellect. I too, spent time in the think box when I was like you. This task will be easy, yet compulsory. Upon the completion of this task, if your mind has come to peace, you will be met by my youngest daughter, Pandora. You will not dissatisfy my youngest daughter, Tim. She is like a blossomed flower on a rugged mountaintop. And she is fragile. Take great care with her. You will not see me again until after the two days you will have spent with my daughter. If you have successfully pleased her, I will have a serious task for you the following week."

At this point, Geryon leaned his head back and let out an ear-piercing whistle and all at once four of James were at his side.

"Take Mr. Timothy Cutlass to the think box where he may neither eat nor occupy himself in any manner but to lament his childish behavior for three nights. On the fourth day you may release him into the care of my daughter Pandora. Go!"

The James' surrounded Tim on either side, wrapped their arms into his and began to march him down a long corridor he had yet to explore. One James led the team, another took up the rear and left and right had his arms. After they had gone a ways, they rounded a corner to the right and another to the left, and then another to the right. James stopped at a large, wooden door marked "Penthouse". He produced a set of keys and as he unlocked the door, he spoke to Tim.

"A bit of humor on the old man's part," he said, referring to the sign on the door. "Don't worry, sir. A few days down here will do you some good. It must still be quite a shock, the transition from your world to this one."

James swung the door open, revealing a staircase leading to darkness. Tim leaned back. The James' leaned him back forward and gave him a little shove in the direction of the doorway.

"Don't worry, Tim. There's nothing down there's gonna bite you," said James.

Tim stepped forward to the precipice and looked down what appeared to be a long staircase. He could see nothing past a few steps. James prodded him and he took the first unsure step down. He put a hand out to feel along a cold, mossy wall for stability.

"Also, I have no intention of letting you starve down there, son," said James as he reached into his jacket pocket and produced a baguette and a small cube of butter wrapped in tin foil. He handed them to Tim who looked as if he were about to cry. His hand shook as he clung tightly to his edible treasures and he wanted to thank James for his kindness, but before he could utter a sound, the door swung sharply in his face. A heavy latch clicked audibly as James turned the key from the other side. All light was cut off and Tim was alone.

He thought about staying on the staircase, afraid of what he might find at the bottom of the stairs. It was quiet down there. There were no sounds at all, which was more terrifying to Tim than if there had been a humming air vent or a murmuring furnace. Even some scuttling rats would have been a familiar sound. But the silence meant *anything* could be down there. It meant that if something was down there, it was laying quietly in wait.

But there could be no rest on the rickety staircase if he stayed there for three whole nights in fear of what *might* be down there. He had to suck it up and find out. So he took the first step. When nothing jumped up at him, he took another. And another. Then another. He descended into the darkness, one step at a time until he gauged that he must have climbed several stories down. At this point, somewhere in the midst of utter darkness, he stopped. Tim decided to drop something over the banister to see how much farther he might have to go. Having left his keys and some spare change in his blue jeans, all he had was the bread and butter James had given him. Deciding that the loaf of bread would survive the fall and that he could likely retrieve it once he

reached the bottom. Tim braced himself along the banister and extended his arm over the void. He let go of the bread and listened.

He counted in his mind the number of seconds until he could hear it hit something. Five seconds. His heart rate increased. Ten seconds. He could hear his heart beating in his chest now. Fifteen seconds. Tim had almost given up hope of being able to hear anything at the height that he now ascertained himself to be. Twenty seconds. He stopped counting. Either the loaf had landed on a soft, pillow-y divan (which was unlikely) or it was falling indefinitely and the bottom was so far away that Tim wouldn't reach it by staircase in time to make it back up for his date with Pandora. He sat down to lament his position some more.

But then he heard something. A tiny sploosh, far off in the darkness below. He was sure that had been it. The bread loaf had landed in water! He quickly decided that it was certainly a long way down, but not so impossible as to never make it. He also realized that the bread had landed in water and would quickly be ruined if he didn't get to it fast!

Tim took off down the stair case, going steady and easy at first, as he could not see anything. Then he picked up speed as he acquired a rhythm and descended faster and faster into the dark. He kept going and going, with one thing on his mind. His fears of the void quickly evaporating as he disappeared further and further down.

Contributor Bios

Cat Baldwin is a 28-year old artist who resides Brooklyn, NY. She'll eat almost anything once, loves story-telling events and french bulldogs make her squee. Check out <http://catbee.wordpress.com> to see more of her illustrations and other art.

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Ray Sucré is an undergraduate currently living on the southern Oregon coast with his wife and son. He has had poems published in *Aesthetica*, *Poets and Artists*, and *Pank*, as well as in numerous others across as many countries. His novels *Tatterdemalion* (2008) and *Amphisbaena* (2009), both through Cauliay, are widely available in print. *Other Cruel Things* (2009), an online collection of poetry, is available through Differentia Press.

Nate Moody is a degree holding member of America's not-wok force, and is content with this. His continual goal is to help guide the ship.

Abigail Thomas will never be caught dead within 100 yards of a Renaissance Faire.

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Mike Wiley is an avid cyclist, amateur botanist and spare-time author. He currently resides in noisy Brooklyn, NY
