

miniMAG

issue159

lo-fi birds



The Poor and Knowing Path

Brian Michael Barbeito

nobody spoke that much for the path itself. it was taken for granted. it began on a curve and then straightened out, with a hill on that side and trees watching, swaying their branches sometimes in the summer or winter winds. on a sunny day the path didn't mind, that much, being traversed upon and outdoors. after all, though the indoor paths or more southern paths didn't have to experience winter, and some of them not much of a night even for electric light, they certainly didn't get to have wildflower scents or these particular ones, waft over them. those were okay days, saturated in the quiet warmth of the sun's rays. but wasn't there more bad than good? if it was really considered honestly? for instance, there had been a time when the path dirt, and therefore more itself, a mixture there of also bits of sand a nice stones. it blended moreso, like someone who had a beautiful natural hair colour as opposed to a lacking dye-job. some dirt paths might have wanted to be paved, like people that seek the fancy and new and sleek. but that one hadn't. it had been fine the way it was. it was the world that had sought to, and succeeded, in changing it, modernizing it, confirming it to outer 'standards,' 'practices.' sometimes a soul would expectorate on the path, or leave litter. and there were many that had low vibrations,- poor thoughts and too worldly ways. the path had much to endure on these fronts. the nights were lonesome, even full of grief for some past time, like the time it was still made of dirt and there were less people, debris, profanity. if the beautiful fox or coyote came calling so to speak, along and around there,- it wasn't acrimonious by any means, but couldn't be any sort of friend. feral fox and coy coyote had their own lives, triumphs and problems included of course, and well, had other things in their minds. the path curved again and went by a waterway. safely inside of there some large stones and the water world stayed. hey...for the most part,- because sometimes it overflowed. the path had to accept that, and the ice, so cold, w/out complaint. it once heard that in another world the tho by a we're conscious, colourful beyond measure, and loving. alert flowers, sanguine skies, calm reassuring leaves and butterflies plus birds unseen on earthly grounds or in worldly airs. but, maybe it was a dream someone deeply dreamt, and not a reality, not even an other-world reality. the path didn't know. such things must exist though, beyond wishful thinking, the path secretly through to itself. path path path. a moment of envy it had then, for these astral and different paths. it must be warm there all the time, whatever it was or wasn't. maybe verdant, say, kelly-green palm fronds swayed on the sides and spoke to the path. that would be the thing, it daydreamed. the life of a path like that wouldn't be so bad, no...not so bad at all. then it would awaken again,- to the realities of crunching snow and even loud air brakes in the distance. the world was getting crowded, developed, moving along. up to the hills and around and separating to other paths the path went, before going back together near tall trees, their winter branches barren and stoically watching days and nights, waiting for a distant spring to finally announce itself. the path sometimes wondered what it looked like from above. it had never seen itself, never been out of its body like those that had gone to the other worlds. it sighed somehow, somewhere, then. it hardly mattered, it mused, and resolved itself to that. those cold and frozen days, the forgotten mess of its past plights and current privation, were at least honest. maybe they be day someone would speak for it, it thought one day, an environmentalist or even a painter or singer or poet. it didn't know. it sometimes had little hopes like these.



Erik Plet

A place for me is being made ready and there I shall remain and the atoms released by my lifeless body will serve to nourish and produce the flowers I always loved above all others.



As children they saw the ocean, she and he magnetised on the rosewater shore. She made a small incision, an offering to the idol of idols. They shared an intimate scream that bled away all sound. She pushed him onto the sand, herself atop in mute amazement, and the waves had licked at their amalgam as she shook him to remove the confession she wanted. Up on stage she smiled and sang and danced and then planted her heels before the crowd, unfolded her arms to the maddening applause, the overwhelming light. He eased himself into her grip. She looked away. The backstage lights were blinding. She wiped her hands and perfumed them. A flower blossomed on her skin, red sweetness transient like starfall. She called each fan to hold her hand and immortalise all neon night in a picture. She walked home holding herself in the dark. At night she haunts the arena alone, looking for scattered

posters. On a pale shore, lost among the masts of faded time, a girl was reaching for the moon.

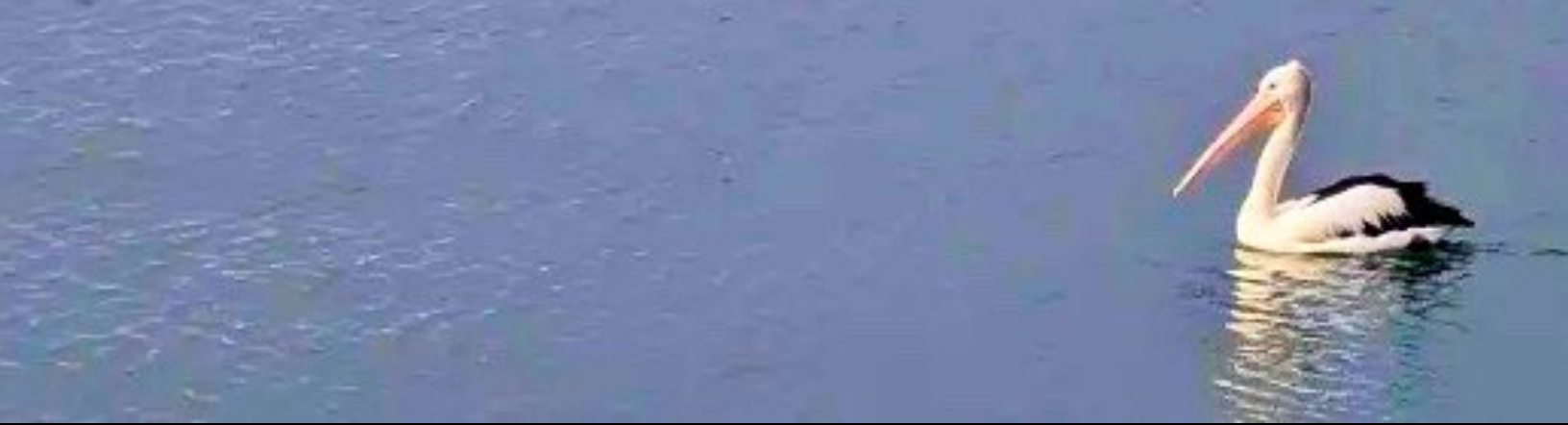
She saw them fight at twelve. Stars wore stars on their breasts. In bed she sweats and shivers and sailing from actuality to dream to in-between she probes the darkness for her lily and holds it close and breathes. She could not forget. She bared herself and posed, measured out the viable skin. Theirs had dazzled red. The clouds are bruised and swollen. A cold wind sweeps across the park. She mounts her ankle to the bar and breathing in the wild evening greyness reaches for her toes. At school she assigned herself a rival, tempted a slight and slammed her against the wall to feel her heart's enchanting hammer. She stops to watch a couple walk before her, arms interlinked. The girl pulls away and stands watching her boyfriend turn. She stands alone waiting for the wind to bend the palms. In the sickly light of home she struck herself, pale arm undressed and ringed with bruises like runes. She sees the city orbit her at night. How the stars explode. How they pulverise the ones that wheel beyond the polar finality of sky.

She locked away inside her diamond dance, commanding voice, the bits of sweat that sparkled and sprayed the stage like liquefied rubies. Another night alone. She bound her body to the rhythm, each step straining nearer the throbbing ideal. She slipped and stopped and re-wound the song and moved again, again. She oiled her face, painted her lips and puckered them into a blot and cleaned the compact, powdered her cheeks, brushed her hair and sprayed it and then tied to it two ribbons. An idol stared from the mirror. She blackened her eyebrows, lengthened lashes with a steady hand. Below the stage the latticework of steel, she bowed and descended. The cheers undying, above or inside she refused to know. She told herself she would make it her life and once she has had enough she will eat each evening in the tower above the lights. The little girl avoided her eyes, her legs were never still. She signed the picture and gave it to her and for the while the umbrella contained them both.

She sang inside the glasshouse at night. Margins of the sky like distant timeless shores. They dressed like dolls and so did she, were told you are the loveliest and so was she but she could go home anytime. She wants a home to hide inside when the snow descends upon the woods and shrouds the frozen lake and tempts with a reachable island. He moved his piece and captured hers and put her king in check. She asked for another game. He said at her age she can only try to defend. The moon is low and red. She gouges the stems of moonflowers and links them, crowns herself and poses before the shrine, no one to take her picture. She saw them strain their plastic necks to better drink the beauty of men. She hid her glances in the shadows of her lids. A circle drawn by dripping fingers, leaking wrists and thighs, dark hair cut and

spread inside the circle, arms and breasts and faces lifted to the moon,
the darkness void of all else. The scent of flowers infused in every
breath of everlasting night.





Put lay me down

Kate Beaumont

I swim Adirondack up Tyne waters
To meet you each side of the Mason Dixie,
One with a fiddle, one digging red,
Prairie soil in our eyes just constantly.

In covered wagons our parents put a
Dime and a malt loaf into the grain of the
Karrimor knapsack with the same scent of
Rain in it.

So like Margot I screw you my brother in
Our loneliest house, drying linen
Aboard one-dollar ships that will make up
A new Europeanness there. There black

Hair will touch mine, black soil blue even,
Blue-white complexion from Glendalough
With my green little Liberty silk on my neck
To your insincere Plains jacket, only

Laid-over from what you put down when you
Place it there. Insheafed I shave
With Sequoia unlimited, off little
Pieces of the land you left back here.

Wearing your base layer shaded with
Anthropological harm under my waxed
Coat I beg again put mine into it.

I beg to put lays into part of your cardigan
When you see me. In the heaviest of
Mountains in breach of the sea,

Lay me by you for the sake of alluvium, settle
Your dust in suspension by what I can write you.
Now, in a shallow sea, while I can stop it.



The Paper Wrapper

Sahir Avik D'souza

Not slowly, not quickly,
steadily, efficiently,
Tiina's hands command the paper
and it obediently bends.
In a moment, it transforms,
in a second, it is taped,
in a minute, it embraces
the box and holds it close.
No coaxing, no cajoling,
not even brute force,
Tiina's hands will brush the paper
and it will snugly wrap.
She wields magic across it,
or is it simple skill and practice?
The formless, shapeless paper
is now crackled into life.



A Child as a Man

Imran Zarif

It was not the first time I was going through this road. This road was the worst in the whole city during my initial semesters but fortunately then it got the attention of the “haves” and they decided to construct it. Now the road is almost completed but it is still under construction. Hundreds of vehicles pass through this road every single hour and everything on this way, the newly constructed roads, the luxury cars, the malls, and many more things gets the attention of the travelers. They aim to be like the owners of those luxuries because they perceive them as the happiest on this planet.

The driver was fond of talking and it is what he did all the way. In the meantime, I noticed a 13-year-old boy, clad in a silver suit, standing like a sentinel by the roadside. He was known as a silver man and was famous for his impressive poses. He stands still for minutes to entertain passersby for his bread and butter. He gets ignored by hundreds but remains determined, fueled by the rare appreciation he receives. The silver man was looking for a local transport as it was the end of the day, and he was going back home.

He was looking for local transport to take him home. Observing his predicament, I quickly urged the driver to pull over and offer him a lift. The driver followed, temporarily parking the car on the left side of the road, and waving to the child, who was positioned on the right side between the two lanes for an easy approach to passersby. Approaching us, he wore a look of cautious happiness, as he was entering a car full of strangers. By seeing him up closely, I was struck by his pure, innocent demeanor, which made me think of my younger brother who goes to school and is living a life as a sleep, unaware of society and its multiple faces. My mind filled with questions: how could the world be so heartless as to name a child as a man, "the silver man"? Why not "the silver child?" His attire, coated in dust from the ongoing road construction, made him more a "golden man" than a "silver man." Despite his obvious struggles, a glowing smile never left his face throughout the journey. Among the four of us in the car, I noticed that he was the happiest, where I got the point that the definition of happiness is subjective and personal. For some, happiness lies in earning some money and returning home with pockets full of coins. For others, those same coins might barely suffice even as a tip.

Society does not care about his age, considering him to a mere tool of amusement for their children. They point at him from their car windows, exclaiming, "Look at the silver man," failing to see the "diamond-like child" within. They see only his costume, they are blind to the redness in his eyes due to lack of sleep and the stress etched into his being, masked by the mud and grime of his roadside existence.

The child sat in the front seat of the car as I and my friend were already in the back seat. He was engrossed in counting his day's earnings when I inquired about his name.

‘*Jee*, my name is Aslam,’ he responded during the counting. This was the first sentence he uttered. After a gap of a minute or two when he got free from counting and took a long breath of satisfaction, I could not stop asking.

‘*Aslam*, do you have any elder brothers? I furthered the conversation.

He turned his head back and looked at me between his own seat and the driver’s and said, ‘I have a family of five— my mother and three sisters, two are older, one is 20, the other is 17, and the youngest is just 10.’ His words struck and made me silent, but he continued without my inquiry, ‘do you know *bhai*?’

‘I was a topper in my school when I used to go to school, and I had always helped my classmates in studies. We used to do group studies in exams, and I was the main tutor.’ The driver interrupted, humming along to an Indian song playing on the radio. I requested him to focus on driving and slow down the volume.

Aslam continued, ‘*Amma Jaan* never wanted me to leave the school even after Baba got unable to work more due to kidney failure. She registered herself as a seamstress in a center on 3km distance from our home and she used to go there by foot daily, which pained me deeply. She had hardly managed the home and all the expenses. I was the only one who used to go to school as my sisters had already left because Amma Jaan says that their education is not important since they would not need to support the household.’ Suddenly, the driver hit the brakes and shouted out the window, ‘*Abbey* are you blind? The abrupt stop caused Aslam to slip from his seat as he was turned towards me.

‘I often see you in the morning when I go to university. It means you have left the school, right? I asked.

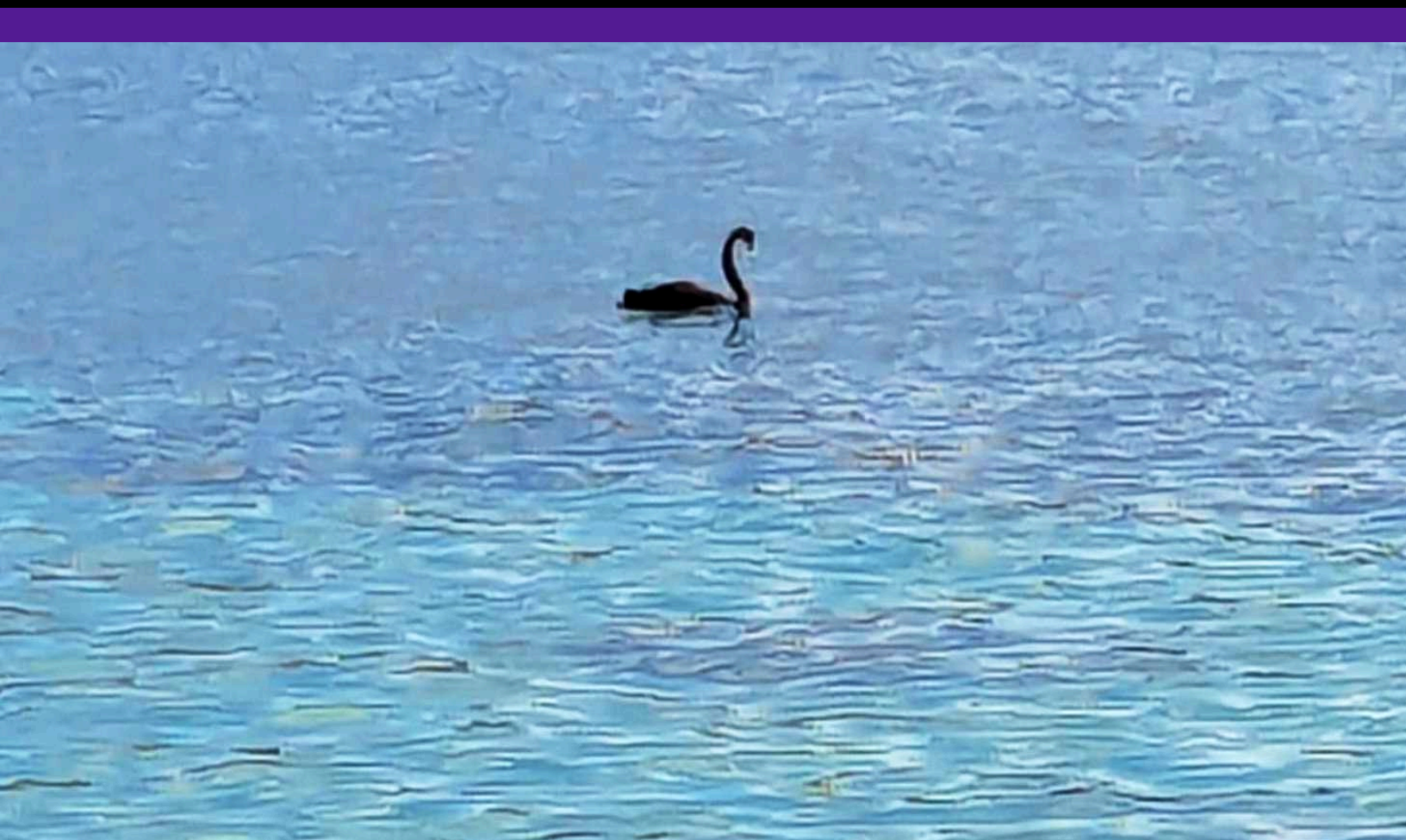
He adjusted himself in his seat. While looking forward in front mirror to the wide road full of beautiful cars he continued, ‘*Jee bhai*, a day came when I had not paid my 2 months school fees as it was out of budget for my mother. The school principal insulted me in front of my friend and sent me back home every morning for fees. I decided to do labor work after school so that I could afford my fees and other school expenses but being underage, it was not possible. Then the idea of wearing this silver costume and entertaining people came to my mind. I started doing it after school and continued to go to school. After a month and half, the principal called me to another classroom as he was there. As I entered, I greeted him with ‘*Asalam o alaikum* sir,’ he handed my school certificate to me in front of the over 50 students without responding to my Salam.’ Aslam stopped here with his eyes were full of tears.

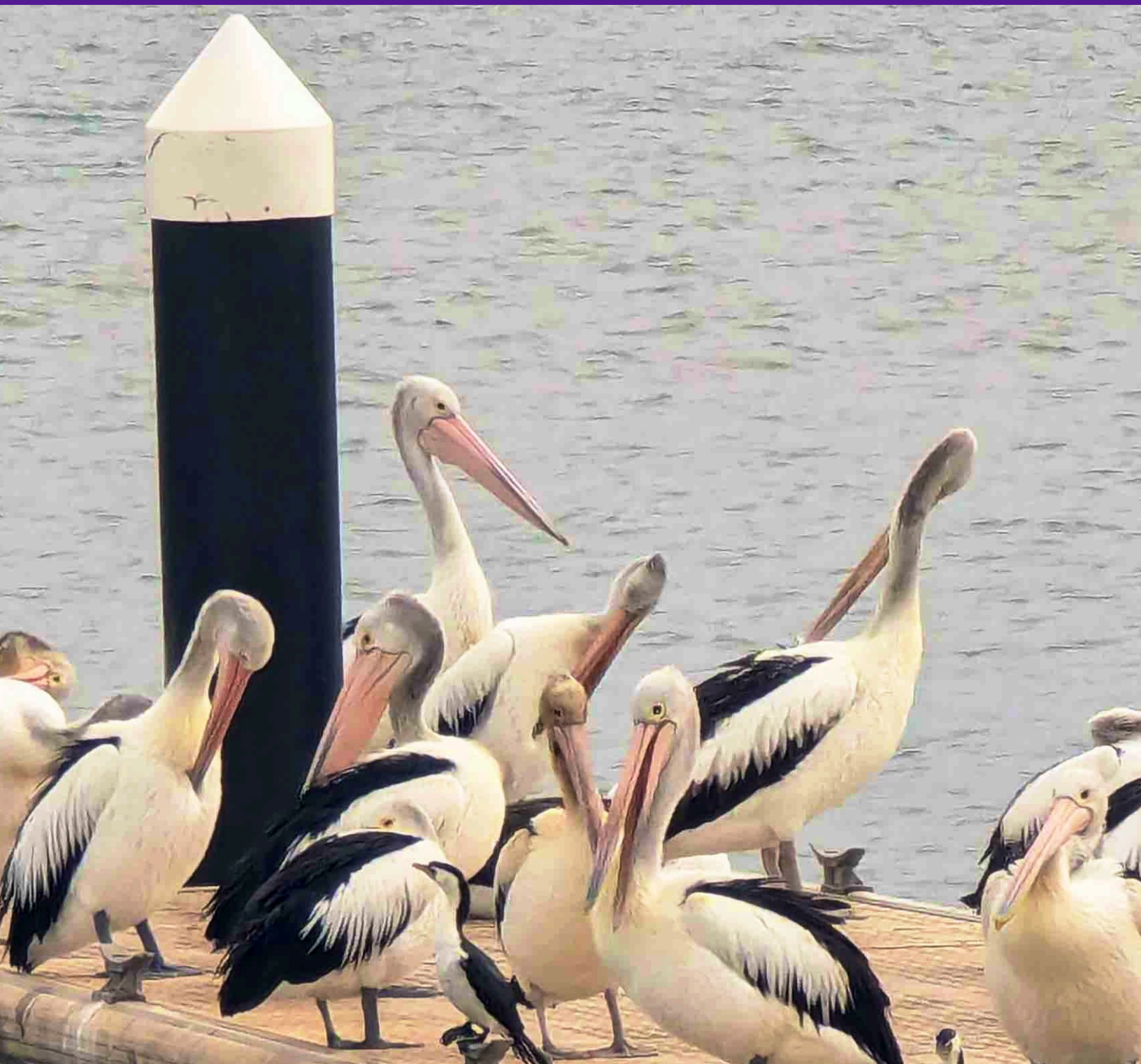
‘Aslam, why? What was the reason? I asked, curiosity piqued.

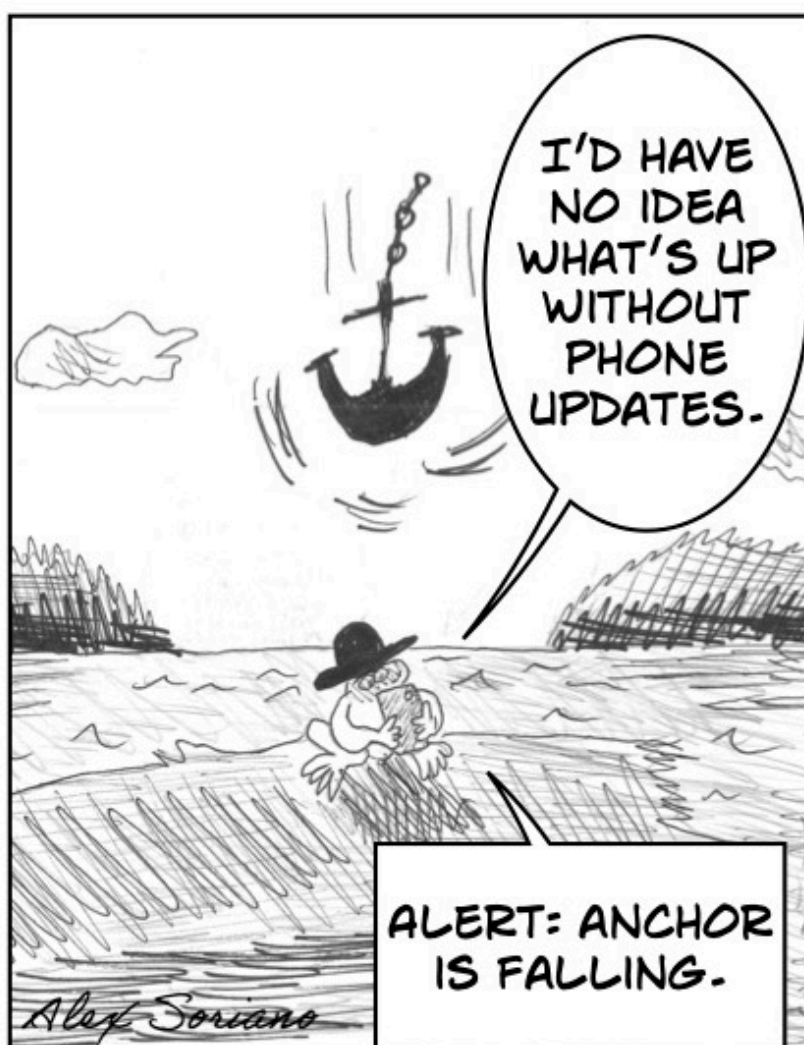
He smiled with tears in his eyes, nodded and said, ‘the people around him.’ Aslam tried to continue but could not, the memory was too painful. The principal was forced by the people whose children were studying in that school. They had done so because they had seen Aslam on the road in a silver costume and deemed it unsuitable for their children. They thought Aslam’s company would badly impact their children’s behavior and considered him a beggar.

Aslam after some minutes added that it was a devastating blow for his family. His mother cried a lot on that day as she wanted him to study in a good institute. She was unaware that a greater tragedy was looming—the death of her husband. Aslam’s father passed away on the next day and it shattered the family very badly because it took away the shadow of their guardian from their heads. Despite his mother’s repeated pleas to re-enroll in a government school, Aslam refused. because he was now labeled as a “silver man” which was now his identity.

As we moved ahead, we passed by a lush green ground illuminated by bright night lights, which made the scenery appear even brighter than the day. The ground was alive with the sounds of children playing football, their laughter and shouts filling the atmosphere. This lively scene immediately captured the attention of Aslam. He turned his head to watch them, his eyes wide and unblinking, completely absorbed in their carefree play. It was evident that he wanted to join them, to experience the same joy of playing a game. He remained silent, his desire unspoken, restrained by the heavy mantle of his imposed identity. He was afraid of the society as society has given him responsibilities of a man not of a child. Society and his own family had labeled him "the silver man," stripping away the innocence and freedom of childhood from him. He watched the children until they disappeared and then looked at himself in the side mirror of the car and smiled. It was obvious that he was reminding himself and he is a “man” not a “child” and men do not prioritize pleasure over responsibilities.









Hero's Journey

airport

Christoff overcomes the obstacle: Dungeon Boss #3—holder of one of the Six Elemental Whatever's to open the Grand Whatever and save Princess Whoever. That sums the story up to this point. Christoff fighting, Christoff winning, Christoff slightly growing. Each trial has turned him into the paladin of absolute justice standing before us: the goodly hero clad in full white plate armor with a golden trim and a religious symbol on the chest plate. He is the exact hero of legend and his band of mercenaries-turned-paragons will follow him to the edges of the map.

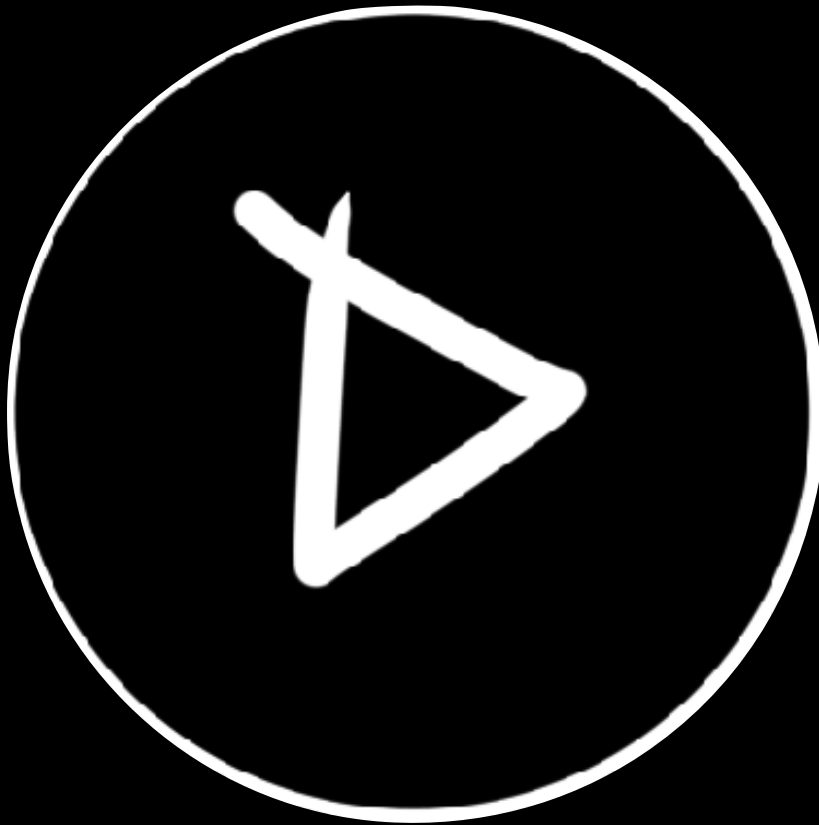
Defeating the boss has unlocked the path up the mountain. The party trudges upwards; the quest proceeds as planned. However, market research indicates that changes must be made; more males are writing than reading these days, so to appeal to a wider audience: Christoff is now female, Christiana. Christiana ends with a feminine -ah rather than a masculine -eff, while keeping the heavy-handed allusion to the lord and savior. Changes to the previous sections of the story must be made, but they are less intensive than originally expected. Plot-wise nothing changes, and she is still in a complicated love triangle with two of the party members, one male and one female. Their love scenes never

explicitly mentioned penetration, or genitals; no heavy rewrites are required for lines like “Tingles ran across his her whole body,” and “...panting heavily as his her hands withdrew.”

The setting itself is high fantasy—data shows that consumers are bored of that. In a time where hyper realistic doomsdays and space wars dominate the conversation, it is decided that sci-fi will make for a more lucrative adventure. Christiana’s armor changes shape, now fitting much closer to her body; still shining, white, and metallic; still sleek. The magic that was flowing through/around her a moment ago is gone; her armor still glows, it just glows differently—more LED-light than misty magicka. She is equally hindered, or rather unhindered, by the gizmos and gadgets she carries. Her bow and magical flaming arrows have been replaced by a wrist-mounted laser gun, her compass replaced with an in-visor HUD, the phoenix feather she kept in her shoe to grant higher jumps has been replaced by a pair of flashy rocket shoes. They have changed form, not function.

Love Interest #1 makes light of the dungeon boss they just conquered in an attempt to raise morale, Interest #2 scoffs and attempts to focus everyone towards their next objective. The cute little fairy that used to follow them around has transformed into an adorable little robot that beeps-and-boops to diffuse the tension in the air. A plot convenient dust storm surrounds them as they ascend towards the peak. They see nothing as the very planet around them changes in scale; nor do they notice as the ruins of their home village move from the neighboring continent to a planet many solar systems away.

If asked, Christiana would tell you that her home village has always been at the edge of this galaxy, and that she travelled all this way to take on the almighty-wizard god-emperor for destroying her home. Christiana’s hometown had always been a beautiful and quaint little space colony: green grass and trees everywhere, friendly neighbors, and even a bustling city spaceport a half-day away by wagon hover-bike. Things were peaceful there until the major massacre that wiped everyone and everything Christiana has ever loved off of the map. Love Interest #1 is from this hamlet as well. He She He She (fuck it) They are the last reminder of those halcyon days of old that Christiana keeps with her—them and the weird amulet that occasionally glows in her pocket. It’s still an amulet, space has amulets. Often looking at Love Interest #1 is enough to bring tears to Christiana’s hardened eyes. Oh, and Christiana and Love Interest #1 fucked-for-the-first-time maybe a week prior to her village space colony being destroyed. Oh, and there are vampires. Space Vampires.



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book: <https://a.co/d/bbz9EXz>

Photography by Lewis Woolston
Book: Remembering the Dead and Other Stories

“The Poor and Knowing Path” by Brian Michael Barbeito
Book: Still Some Crazy Summer Wind Coming Through (Dark Winter Press, 2024)

“❤️.” by Erik Plet

“Put lay me down” by Kate Beaumont
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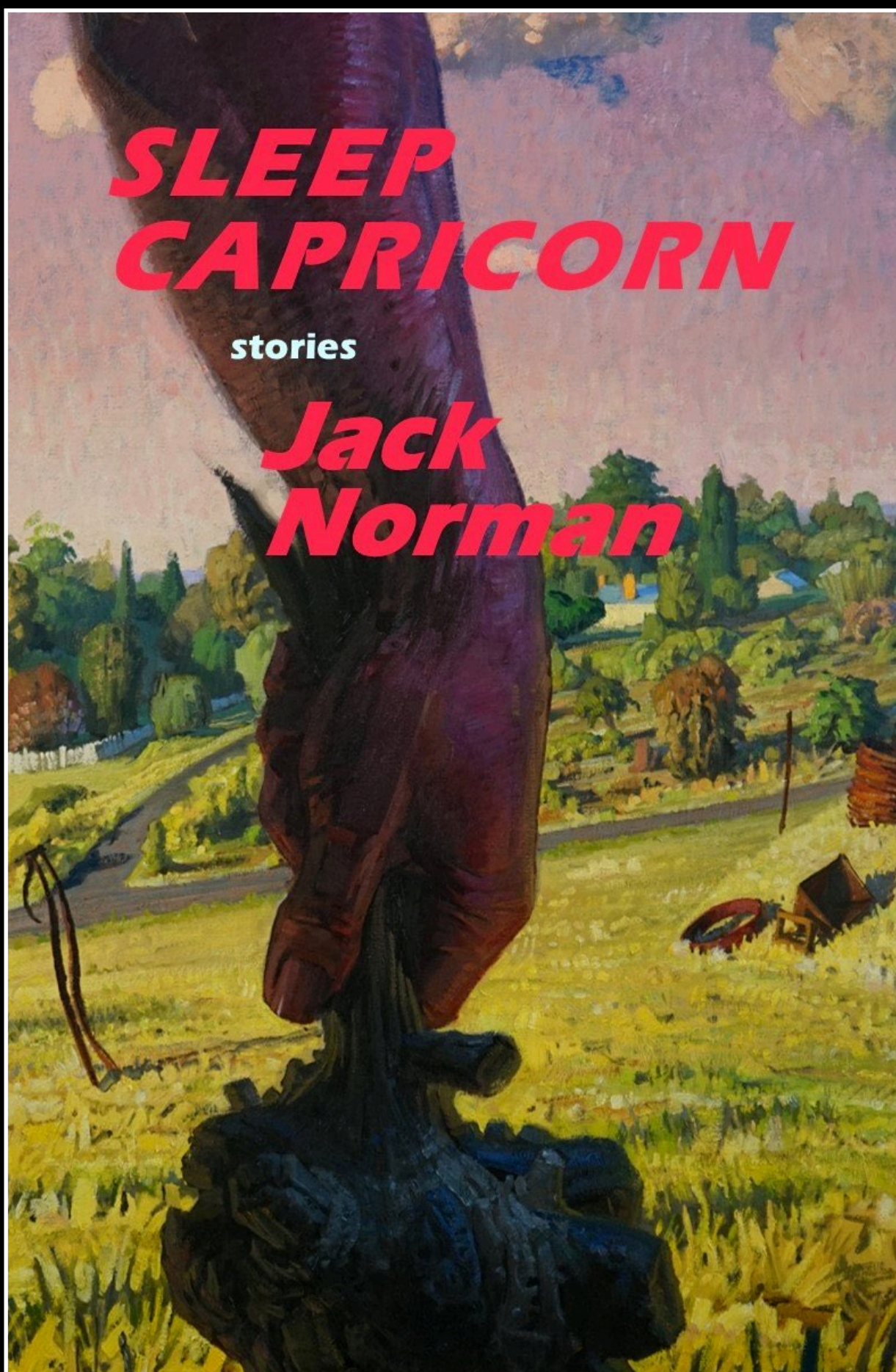
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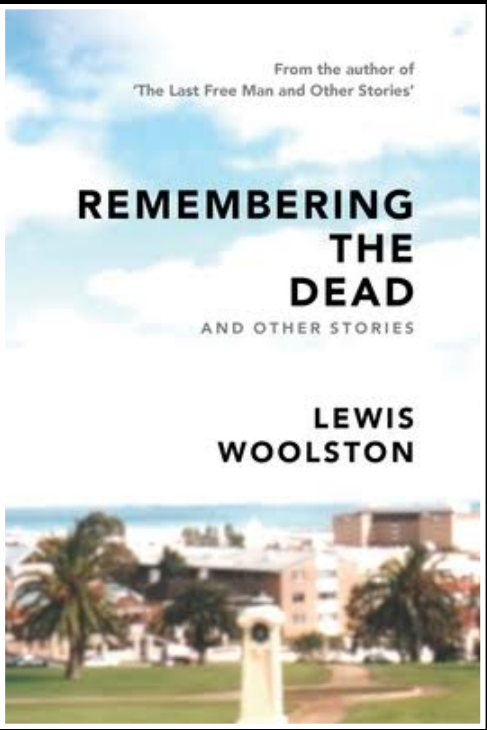
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