





patio column nest

airport

mockingbird flies to its suburban nest
if i could fly anywhere i would
mockingbird flies to its suburban nest

it's modern, it glimmers, the hoa fee is higher than 3rd world rent, we keep
up appearances, we see the trendy things, we hold the good from our past, it
is still good, and we have no need to face the future as anything other than
bad, we mourn the passing of rockstars we used to call losers

i'm hopeful, i can fly
mockingbird flies back to its suburban nest
i can fly, i'm hopeful

radicals grow older, dark-maga, dark-covid, dark-mother, dark-lit, dark-
thiel, dark-palantir, dark-dark, dorkus, and they grow older but the battle
never started never finished, dark-dark, dorkus

joker 2 was good, actually
i didn't see the first one,
but I've seen taxi driver,
so i got it

mockingbird flies to its suburban nest
i'm hopeful, i can fly



Building a Snowman Yes, Yukon

Keith W. Kaplan

Kira stared longingly at the ginormous snow puffs shellacking the large expanse of the family room slider before congregating into a fluffy mound at the foot of the door until she could no longer keep her amber eyes open and nestled herself into my lap by the fireplace. She was dead weight as I set aside my Jameson and carried her into her room and set her into a sea of “Frozen” bedding and stuffed animals.

I awoke early the following morning to find her tugging at my blanket and chirping excitedly.

“C’mon, Daddy. You promised we’d build a snowman today.”

My wife was of no help.

“Go ahead, Daddy. You promised.”

I dressed us both in layers and warm booties and brewed myself a coffee while Kira sang out loudly and organized her Cheerios into small friend groups before ingesting.

“Alright, Kiddo.”

Our feet disappeared into the powdery snowdrifts and tufts of wind dropped snow from the rooftop and snowcapped branches as we trudged into the front yard. Kira scooped a pile of fresh snow into her mitten and licked at it like a snowcone.

I corralled a pile of snow with both hands and kneaded it into a ball-like shape. It compacted firmly, but sparingly for the amount of snow I had gathered, and already some wayward powder found its way down my sleeve and sent a shiver the length of my arm, making the coffee a moot point.

I worked arduously to add girth to my little orb, but the weightlessness of the powder left me disappointed with the accumulation of each new layer.

Occasionally, Kira took a break from her own antics to check on the progress and offer her support.

“Bigger, Daddy,” she squealed.

I was exhausted by the time I had built a base layer that met Kira’s approval but kept at it till there were three hefty sections of snowman stacked one atop another.

“Let’s go inside and warm up.”

I was getting concerned with how blue Kira’s lips appeared and didn’t want to face her mother’s wrath if I could avoid it. I rushed her inside, rubbed at her frigid hands until they stopped tingling, undressed her, and sent her upstairs to find a hoodie to keep her warm.

“Can we name him Olaf?” Kira asked upon her return.

“That’s a great idea,” her mother chimed in. “I’ll get a carrot and some other decorations we can use to dress him up.”

“We can go outside again after lunch, I added.

“Maybe Mommy can help us decorate.”

The lines in her cheeks tightened at my suggestion.

“What a great idea.”

When we returned outside, Kira was completely unrecognizable, under what seemed like thirty layers of outerwear her mother had selected. A little astronaut in a snowy landscape, she contrasted greatly with her mother, whose sporty snowsuit was certified to minus 40 degrees Celsius and still had the tags to prove it.

Olaf is an odd-shaped snowman and I had a lot more work to do than I anticipated during the decoration phase, between a tummy tuck and some facial reconstruction. But Kira and Mommy were both finally appeased and we returned to the warmth of our home. Eventually, I poured myself another Jameson while Kira sat perched by the window on the sofa in the living room admiring her new friend.

“Daddy,” I heard Kira wailing the next morning. “Something happened to Olaf.”

“I’m sure Olaf is fine.” I prayed for a few more minutes of shuteye. She pulled at my pinkie until I arose.

“You have to come now.” Kira ran downstairs to the living room, where she pointed out the window.

She was swimming in tears. Olaf was clearly missing his head.

“Maybe it’s just the sun playing tricks on us.”

Kira was unconvinced.

“Give me a few minutes and I’ll go outside.”

I set the Keurig in motion and grabbed a coat and boots from the closet and went out to investigate.

Sure enough, Olaf’s head was no longer attached to his body. I tried my hardest to keep my cool though, since I could see Kira’s small silhouette at the window and didn’t want to exasperate the situation.

But the freshly fallen snow left a clear set of tracks to my neighbor’s property where I found Olaf’s head mounted to the hood of his GMC Yukon.

I pounded on their door till they answered, sleepy-eyed.

“What’s the matter, buddy? Eddie questioned.

“What’s the matter? I’ll tell you what the matter is. Kira is in g-d-damned tears because her snowman is missing its head.”

“I didn’t mean nothing by it,” said Eddie. “I just figured he’d fit in better in the Yukon.”

“That’s rich, Eddie. Now you’re going to make this right.”

I stormed back into my house, and Kira nearly tackled me at the door.

“What happened to Olaf, Daddy?”

I paused for a second to collect myself.

“It seems that Eddie brought Olaf to the Yukon to make sure he wouldn’t melt. But he promised to bring him back as soon as he’s ready.”

Just then, Eddie appeared in the front yard and made Olaf whole again.

For the rest of that day, Kira sat glued to the window.

I dumped the coffee, poured another Jamesons, and sought refuge by the fireplace.



Packing Memories

Matthew Spence

Kara sits cross-legged on the wooden floor of the living room, surrounded by open boxes and piles of carefully folded newspaper. The house is eerily quiet, save for the occasional creak of the floorboards as she shifts her weight. She holds a small, ceramic vase in her hands, turning it over with a wistful smile.

“This was our first housewarming gift,” she murmurs, remembering the day her mother handed it to her, filled with fresh daisies. It has sat proudly on the coffee table for years, a silent witness to late-night talks, holiday gatherings, and lazy Sunday afternoons.

She places the vase gently in a box labeled Living Room and rises to her feet, her gaze drifting to the empty walls. This is where she and Ben danced on their anniversary, pushing aside the couch to create a makeshift dance floor. She can still hear the soft melody of their favorite song, the way Ben twirled her until they collapsed in laughter.

Moving to the kitchen, she runs her fingers along the cool marble countertop. This is where they have shared countless meals, where

flour dusted the air as they attempted to bake bread during the lockdown, where Ben proposed, ring hidden inside a takeout box from the little Chinese place down the street.

She traces the faint scratch near the sink—a reminder of the time they tried to open a stubborn bottle of wine with a knife. The memory makes her chuckle.

In the hallway, she pauses by the doorframe where tiny pencil marks record the years of their lives, each line marking a birthday, a new job, another year of togetherness. She hesitates before packing away the marker that has traced their journey.

Their bedroom is last. She sits on the edge of the bed, smoothing the fabric of the quilt her grandmother made. This room has been a sanctuary, a place of whispered dreams and late-night confessions. It is where they have comforted each other through losses and celebrated triumphs, where they have whispered “I love you” in the dark.

Kara takes a deep breath, forcing herself to her feet. The house is just a structure, she tells herself, but the memories are theirs to keep. Carefully, she seals the last box and turns toward the door, where Ben waits, holding his own box in one arm, his other hand outstretched toward her.

With one final glance around the home that has shaped their lives, Kara takes his hand. Together, they step forward, carrying their past with them as they move toward their future.



Things Doug Has Done

Mike York

Every Christmas swims with Dolphins

Raises his own goats

Makes pasta from scratch every time

Was the person who suggested Flavor Flav wear a clock around his neck

Just returned from Antarctica

Has never had an egg salad sandwich

Was in a boy band

Can identify any type of wrench, screw or nail - used to work at a hardware store

Lived on a sub underwater for over 4 months without surfacing

Former collegiate squash champion

His favorite song for karaoke - "Gangnam style"

Has been to every one of the 50 states

Is a volunteer fireman

Favorite sandwich is a fluffernutter

Learned how to ride a unicycle before he could ride a bike

Was the mascot for Syracuse (the orange) while he was still in high school
Was the first person in the US to get the Pfizer vaccine
Is a Free Mason
Was the "smooth operator" in the Sade song
Champion ballroom dancer
Nickname in high school was "Bing" because people thought he looked and acted like Chandler
on "Friends" Does all his own stunts
Just got his first smartphone
Has a perfectly symmetrical face
Lives near a cranberry bog
Was an extra in "Men in Black 2" (played a passenger in a taxi in a city scene)
Can't hula hoop
Was a back up dancer for Chaka Khan's tour in 2021
Has beautiful handwriting
Was a voice actor for a kid on "Rugrats"
Does all his training at altitude
Has very strong opinions regarding use of breadcrumbs in meatballs
Can tell the difference between "I can't believe it's not butter" and butter
Has an excellent credit score
Voted "Mr. Albany" in 2015
Middle name is "Vanderbilt"
Refuses to recycle aluminum
Won a competition for parallel parking
Both of his eyes are lazy
He beat Bobby Flay
Has grown prize winning hydrangeas
Always uses a #3 pencil
Favorite tree is birch
Once met Ryan Gosling and called him "Brian Gosling"
Finds all hot sauces too mild
Doesn't tolerate fools
Has a need for speed
Doesn't like any Girl Scout cookie flavor
Can always buy perfect avocados
Tried to be the lead singer of Creed to fill in for Scott Stapp
Just bought a new house and every room is a different shade of white—
pegasus, prairie winds, aesthetic white, oyster white, moderate white, white
duck and creamy—he can identify each glidden white color perfectly
Registered for his wedding using a "GoFundMe" page



A Frosted Patch of Pavement

Bradley Sutherland

Vivi stood on a sideways chair while Mom hovered beside her, clutching a mangled whisk.

“We want the cake to be fluffy,” said Mom, “and it doesn’t get fluffy unless you give it a little guff. Like this.”

Mom whipped around the batter like it was wet cement. Her intensity made Vivi giggle at first, but then her smile flipped to a pout. “Let me do it,” she said.

“Okay,” said Mom, sneaking in a few more vicious whirls.

“Mom!” Vivi’s lower lip began to tremble.

“Alright, alright.” Mom handed over the whisk. “Just like that, okay?”

Vivi used both hands to plunge the whisk into the bowl, then whipped it around as fast as she could.

“Very good,” said Mom. She reached out to shadow Vivi’s hands with her own, but Vivi flared out her elbows in quick defense.

“She sure has her mother’s arms,” said Nana, moseying in from the living room and posting up behind me at the kitchen’s edge.

Mom shot Nana a look, but Nana ignored it and turned her attention toward me. “You know how much your mother hates a crowded kitchen.”

“I’m just waiting to try the cake,” I said.

“The cake won’t be ready until after lunch,” said Nana, side-eyeing the mixing bowl. “If it ever makes it.”

“But I’m waiting for the batter,” I said, stomping my feet.

Mom clapped her hands together. “Alright,” she said. “Clear the kitchen!”

“But you said I could—”

“Now!”

Nana grabbed my shoulders and turned me toward the screen door. “Go see how your dad’s burgers are doing.”

Mom’s eyes rounded with worry. “He hasn’t started them yet, has he?”

“I’m not sure,” said Nana. “I’m just trying to get this hyperactive little pill out of your hair.”

“What’s hyperactive?” I asked.

Mom sighed. “You see how they can hear you when you just blurt these things out?”

“Oh, relax,” said Nana. “He doesn’t even know what it means.”

Mom took a deep breath and returned her focus to Vivi’s whisking. “That looks good,” she said, poking Vivi in the back to slow her down. “We’re going to pour it in the pan now.”

Nana peered into the mixing bowl again, her eyes still twinkling with judgement.

“Can I please see the whisk now?” I asked.

Vivi held up the whisk like an Olympic Torch and stuck out her tongue, waiting to catch any bits of batter that were sure to drip down.

“Hey!” I shook a tortured fist in the air.

Mom stuck out her finger to cut me off. “Go outside and tell your father he better not be making the burgers yet.”

Batter was now smeared across Vivi’s cheeks, and the sight of it stung my eyes like shampoo.

“But—”

“No *buts*,” said Mom. “Go!”

I bent into the shape of a dinosaur and hissed at Vivi, then bolted out back.

Dad was on the patio in his flip-flops, casually dousing our little brick bbq with lighter fluid.

“Mom says you better not be starting the burgers yet.”

“Well,” said Dad, with an unlit cigarette poking out from his mustache, “tell your mom I’m just getting the coals hot.”

He struck a match off a nearby brick, lit his smoke, then dropped the match through the grill. A flame instantly jumped up and nearly bit him in the face, causing him to leap back and yelp like a dog.

“Can I have a soda?” I asked, pointing to a small cooler on the ground.

“You’re going to turn into a soda,” he said, fanning the last remnants of heat from his face.

“Please?!”

Dad marched back up to the grill. “We’re about to eat,” he said.



“I thought you were just getting the coals hot.”

Dad glanced down the side of his nose at me.

“I won’t have anymore after lunch,” I said.

“Uh huh.”

“I promise.”

His attention drifted back to the grill, his eyes squinted and darting back and forth across it, plotting out the precise coordinates for each patty’s location. “Grab me one, too,” he said.

“Yay!”

“Don’t tell your mother.”

“I won’t.”

I snatched two sodas out of the cooler and held one up for him to grab. Dad motioned to the edge of the bbq. “Just set it there,” he said.

I placed his soda where he told me and cracked open mine, using two-hands to take my first chug.

“What do you say?”

“Thank you,” I said, gasping for air.

The screen door slid open, and Mary Jo popped out with her giant blue sunglasses. “Do I drive you as crazy as Elaine drives poor Sheila?” She pinched Dad’s ear and kissed him on the cheek.

Grandpa Marvin followed behind, gnawing on his usual toothpick.

“Jesus Christ, boy, slow down,” he said. “You’re gonna turn into one of those.” His elbows were cocked back, arms spring-loaded.

“That’s what I told him,” said Dad. “Where’ve you been?”

“Draining my lizard,” said Grandpa. “Might have messed around and sprung a leak. Sometimes, it just don’t stop.” He looked down at me and ruffled my hair. “Don’t get old.”

Mary Jo scolded Grandpa Marvin with a performative scoff and playful pinch to his side.

“How those patties looking?” asked Dad.

Grandpa jumped back and dropped his jaw. “Well, I’ll be,” he said. “You’re the one with the goddamn spatula. You tell me.”

Grandpa shot me a wink, then shuffled behind Dad and shadow-boxed his back. Dad spun around with the spatula and used it as a sword to fend him off, cigarette still dangling from his lips. I giggled at their shenanigans, and Grandpa shuffled over to me. He snatched my arm, and said, “I got it. Your dad’s got it. And you got it. It’s called, *nervous energy*, boy, and the only way I know how to fix it, is work. Let’s go grab some tables and chairs.”

“And some beef,” said Dad.

“And some beef,” Grandpa repeated to me. “Go on. Better hurry up before your dad gets all excited and tries to grill up one of them loose bricks he still ain’t fixed yet.”

Grandpa followed me around to the garage and made me dig out a pair of card tables and a dozen folding chairs and stack them all in a nearby wagon. By the time we returned to the backyard, the grown-ups had all assembled on the patio, with Aunt Janet and Uncle Fred now among them, both in matching track suits. Vivi was on the lawn with our older twin cousins, Annie and Austin, and the three of them were taking turns sipping from the hose.

“How’s your stupid cake?” I asked.

Annie and Austin clicked their tongues at me, then at each other. They were about to start middle school next month and had developed a little attitude over the summer.

Vivi finished her pass at the hose and handed it to Annie.

“I *said*, ‘how’s your stupid—’”

Vivi slugged me in the shoulder before I could finish.

“Ouch!” I cried out, just loud enough for Mom to hear.

“Don’t hit your brother,” Mom yelled back from the patio, now wielding a butcher knife.

“He called my cake stupid,” said Vivi.

“Don’t call your sister’s cake, stupid.”

“It *did* look like it might come out a little flat,” said Nana, casually scrutinizing a pot of geraniums hanging from the gutter.

“Once again,” said Mom, “a grandchild is *within* ear shot.”

Nana threw up her hands in an exaggerated plea of innocence. Mom shook her head and sliced up some watermelon.

As soon as Mom turned her back, I snatched the hose away from Annie and sprayed Vivi in the face. Vivi shrieked and chased me around the yard. Annie and Austin joined the pursuit, quickly giving in to their elementary urges. The chase turned into a game of freeze tag. Then hide-and-seek. Then red light, green light. Then back to hide-and-seek. Then we were all catching our breaths, taking turns slurping from the hose again, and Mom was yelling for us to run inside and wash up.

Mom and Aunt Janet prepared everyone’s dishes, sending the grown-ups to one table and us to the other. Annie sat across from me and mixed her baked beans and potato salad together with her fork. She scooped up a modest bite and politely smiled at the rest of us. “Did you know that we’re gonna have a different teacher for each subject next year?”

“You shouldn’t talk with your mouth full,” I said, taking a huge bite of burger.

“You’re gonna have more than one teacher?” Vivi’s eyes widened with both wonder and fright.

“Five teachers,” said Austin.

“You’re gonna have *five teachers*?”

“Yep,” said Annie. “One for Math. One for Language Arts.”

“One for Social Studies,” said Austin. “One for Homeroom.”

“And one for Elective,” said Annie.

“What’s that?” asked Vivi.

“It can be anything we want it to be,” said Austin.

“Anything?”

“Pretty much,” said Annie.

“Ms. Jennings says I’m already reading at a middle school level,” I said, still chomping away on my first bite.

“You shouldn’t talk with your mouth full,” said Annie and Austin.

I opened wide to reveal a glob of mush, and the twins shielded their eyes in horror. Vivi stood up in her chair.

“Let’s play I-Spy!”

“Eat your food,” I said.

Vivi turned to Annie, “Will *you* play I-Spy with me?”

“You should finish your food first,” said Annie.

“I *am* eating!”

“Just eat a little more,” said Austin.

“I wanna open presents,” said Vivi, plopping back down in her seat and folding her arms.

“Mom’s just gonna tell you to eat your food first,” I said.

Vivi nibbled on her burger and shifted in her seat like it was burning. Then she slid out of her chair and ran over to Mom. Mom leaned down for Vivi to whisper in her ear. Mom whispered something in return, and Vivi came skipping back to us, her chin lifted high with pride.

“Guess what?!”

“What?” we all asked in unison.

“It’s almost time to frost the cake!”

“What kind of cake did you make?” asked Annie

“German chocolate with coconut frosting,” I said.

“Hey!” Vivi folded her arms and stuck out her lower lip.

“What? That’s the cake Mom’s helping you make,” I said.

Vivi stood back up in her chair and jabbed her chest with her thumb.

“*I’m* making the cake.”

“Mom’s helping.”

“Nuh uh.”

“Yes huh.”

“Well, we can’t wait to try it,” said Annie.

“Sounds yummy,” said Austin.

“Only because Mom’s helping,” I said.

“Mom!” Vivi jumped down from her chair and ran back over to her.

Mom leaned down for another earful. When she sat back up, her lips were pursed and her nose was scrunched. She pointed at her eyes, then pointed over at me, then pretended to slice her neck with the inside of her finger. Everyone ooh’d and ahh’d, and I slid down in my chair with an embarrassed grin. Mom announced I was on cleanup duty and that the Birthday Girl was going inside to frost the cake. *By herself*. Everybody applauded and cheered, and Mom and Vivi marched toward the screen door.

When Mom popped back outside, she instructed everybody to gather around the grown-up’s table. She waved her arms like a conductor and led us in a hideous rendition of Happy Birthday. Vivi emerged from inside, holding the cake and wearing a crown. Her forehead was tilted down and she was biting her lower lip, equal parts bashful and proud, taking the smallest and slowest steps toward the table that she possibly could. As the singing ended, we all hooted and hollered and whistled, and it jolted Vivi forward with a sudden charge of excitement. She took off in a full sprint, and just before Mom could warn her not to run with cake in her hands, the cake slid out of the pan and splattered upside-down on the pavement, right near Nana’s feet.

The grown-ups all gasped and covered their mouths. Vivi let out a wale from deep inside her tiny belly and pushed her face into Mom’s stomach. Mom kissed the top of Vivi’s head and rubbed her back in comfort, and the rest of the grown-ups took turns letting her know

everything was going to be okay. I tried my hardest not to laugh, but when I saw the twins doing the same, I felt my cheeks tingle with rage.

Nana reached down beside her and grabbed a fistful of cake from the pavement. “Still looks pretty good to me,” she said, and plopped the chunks of fallen cake into her mouth.

The grown-ups gasped once more, and Annie and Austin’s jaws dropped in unison. I bent down into a dinosaur and hissed with excitement. Vivi whipped her head around at all the commotion, and when she saw Nana licking cake off her fingers, her tears came to a screeching halt.

Nana flickered her eyebrows at Vivi, and Vivi gazed back up at her in petrified delight. “A little dirt never hurt,” said Nana, reaching down for another bite.

Grandpa Marvin shot up from his seat and shuffled over to the cake pile. “I’ll be,” he said. “Better grab me some before Jerry tries to mess around and eat it all.”

Grandpa Marvin shoved a fistful of cake into his mouth, as Dad flipped him a subtle bird. Mary Jo groaned in playful disgust, and Aunt Janet told Uncle Fred to go fetch them a couple bites of their own.

I looked at Mom, then over to Dad; Dad looked back at Mom, then over to me. They both gave me a single nod, and I grabbed a chunk of cake and stuffed it in my face. Nana reached down for thirds, but this time offered some up for Vivi. Vivi scrunched her face in shyness, then finally snatched the ball of cake from Nana. She took a few nibbles and hurled the rest at my chest. I managed to catch a stray crumb and quickly slipped it in my mouth the way a frog would scarf down a fly. Mom nudged Vivi with her elbow and said, “Seems like your cake is still a real hit.”

While Vivi cackled with joy, Nana leaned toward Mom and held up a hand meant for a whisper. “It *is* a little bit dry,” she said, loud enough for everybody to hear.

Mom threw her head back and groaned, but before she could utter out another protective scolding, Vivi pointed to the ground and said, “It’s dry because it’s missing all the frosting.”

We all ooh’d and ahh’d, then burst out with laughter. Nana shrugged and rolled her head with her eyes, glancing down at a frosted patch of pavement, doing her best to keep from cracking a smile.



The Last Letter of Papa Pat

JS Apsley

When I was a young girl I'd often find my grandfather languishing at the desk in his study jousting with his typewriter, pipe smoke curling around him like a wraith. He was prodigious. Yet, everything he typed, every word on every piece of paper, he then burned in the open fire. Everything that is; save one thin sheet.

I called him Papa Pat, and sitting at his desk is my most abiding memory of him. That, and the long walks after school when he'd fill my head with nonsense about the *old ways* and how there was yet magic in the world. "Magic," he'd say, "is science undiscovered, my lady." I loved him for that; that he gifted me the appetite to *discover*.

Some years later, after Papa Pat died, I asked my mother about his writing. She said he was a man who suffered from crushing self-doubt, and that he exorcised those demons by writing nameless unknowable stories. To banish his torments, he'd cast his words to the flames of the open fire. I was amazed to discover he had never shared any of those words, those stories.

As we grieved together; it struck me. What about the story he *had* kept? The memory sparked in my mind like the lighter he used for his pipe. I had been sitting in his armchair, scuffing my little feet against it (though he had asked me not to), trying to copy one of his card tricks.

Whatever he had been working on was ripped from the typewriter, and a whole stack of papers consigned to the fire. But then, looking at me with a wink, he placed a fresh sheet of paper in the typewriter, and turned the dial. Watching me, he had clicked and clacked, before producing his page with a flourish. He tapped his finger on the side of his crooked nose, and locked the page in the drawer of his mahogany desk.

He had then reclined; at peace, puffing away on his favourite pipe. Leaning forward, he grinned at me like a child at the fair. “That one my lady... that one is a keeper.”

I asked him if he would tell me the story in the drawer. “Aye lady, when you’re older. Whether I’m hingin’ in, or past my sell-by-date, I assure you’ll be the first to it.”

All these years later, the memory hurtled into my mind, and was all consuming. His study had yet to be cleared, so my mother and I spent the morning hunting high and low for the drawer key; she as curious as I. We could have jimmied it open with a bread-knife, but we agreed, smiling, that would be beneath us.

My mother was a little frightened about what we might discover. So far as she knew, he’d burned everything he’d ever written. To learn I had witnessed him lock something away in that drawer was perturbing, and as her anxiety grew, so did mine.

Eventually, we discovered the key inside a whisky bottle. I had lifted it to flip through a stack of books, and heard the rattle. I pulled the cork, and the little key fell into my hand, pungent with the remaining fumes of the malt, *Bunnahabhain*, as it happens.

My mother asked me to open the drawer, which I did with trepidation. It slid out effortlessly. Inside; three items. A careworn polaroid of my mother holding me as a child, his old *Zeppo*, and... a single sheet of paper.

With trembling hands, I held it aloft. It was a letter, *addressed to me*. The words were blurred; I was in tears. Holding this last piece of him hit me like a hammer blow and I grasped, finally, that he was truly gone. All that was left was the smells of his study; the wood, the books,

the tobacco, the whisky. But he had also left this letter. “You should be the one to read it,” I asked of my mother. So, she did.

Dearest Ellie,

I know you’ll come looking one day, my lady. Looking for the story I couldn’t share. It isn’t here, I’m sorry to say. Well, not really.

I confess I must have typed hundreds of thousands of words as I searched for it, willing my brain to spoon out that opus I knew was inside me, somewhere. I just couldn’t find a way to get the words out of me and onto the paper in a way which made it sing. I’m afraid that, though I thought my stories were worthy, perhaps I was not worthy of them.

They will have to remain stories uncommitted to page; stories that no one will ever read. If the creator alone holds the knowledge of his creation... if there is no audience, then he is a fool. For what is his creation if it exists floating in some dark void of his own making?

But it all came clear to me as you were sitting with me today—you’ll know which day when you read this, I hope long years from now. I realised I had already told the story I wanted to tell. It wasn’t written down, but that’s of no importance. I wonder if you know where my story abides. It’s not in this drawer.

It’s in you, my lady. You, dearest child, were my audience; the only audience I ever needed. What joy your mother has given me, to bring into the world my beautiful granddaughter, and what joy I took from our walks, when I told you of the old ways; of a time when perhaps magic and science blurred. That’s my opus: our story. You and I, you listening to your old Papa Pat delight you about the magic of the old ways. And perhaps, my lady, perhaps... there may yet be a little of that magic left. So go find it.

With all my love, Papa Pat.



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“Building a Snowman Yes, Yukon” by Keith W. Kaplan

“Packing Memories” by Matthew Spence

“Things Doug Has Done” by Mike York

Mike York is a practicing rheumatologist in Boston. In his free time, he plays hockey and soccer in over-50 leagues. He has an affinity for Moxie drinks, durian fruit, and Newfoundland.

“A Frosted Patch of Pavement” by Bradley Sutherland

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“The Last Letter of Papa Pat” by JS Apsley

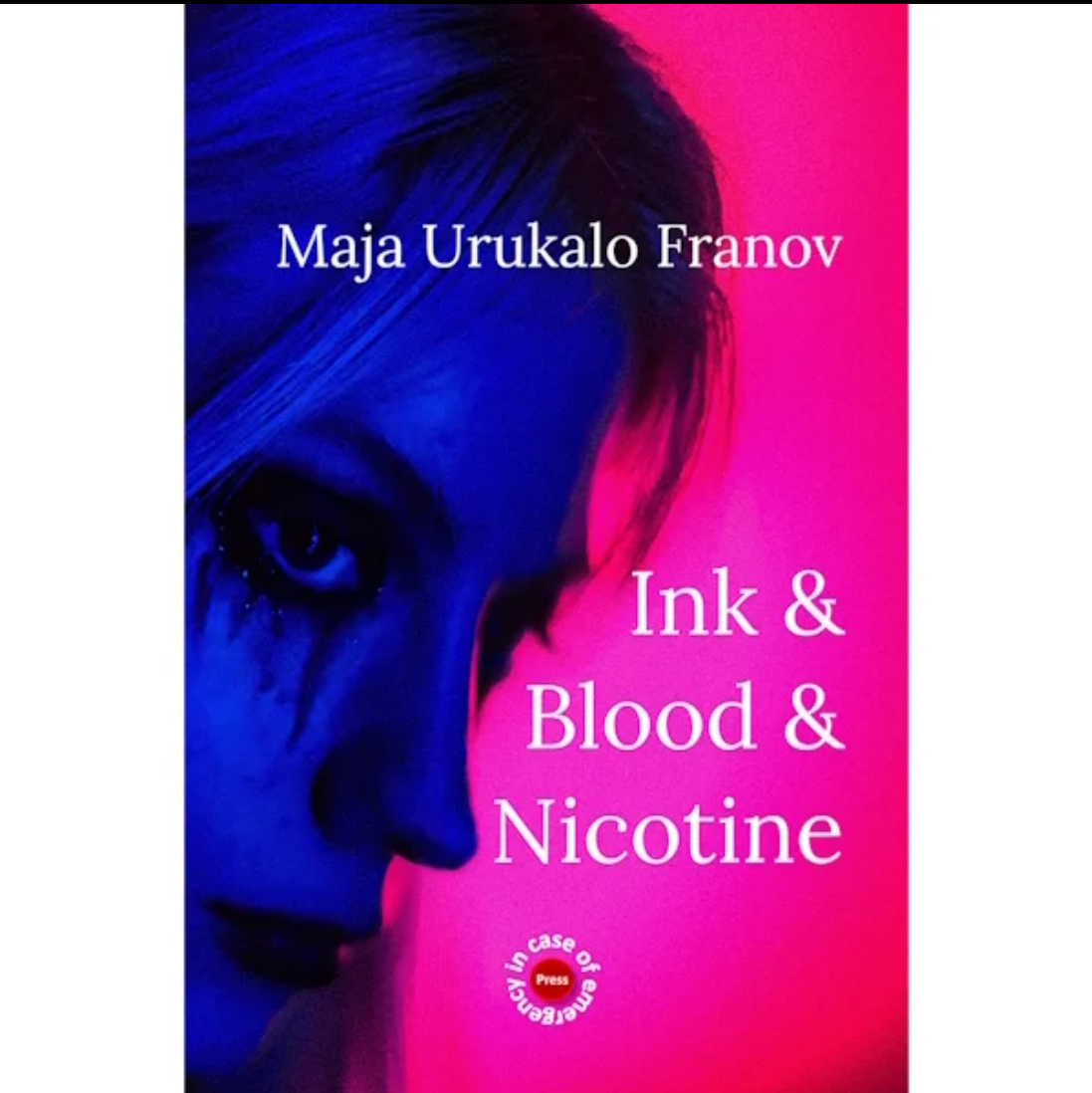
Website: www.jsapsley.com

ISSUE165 edited, ai art, and “patio column nest” by airport

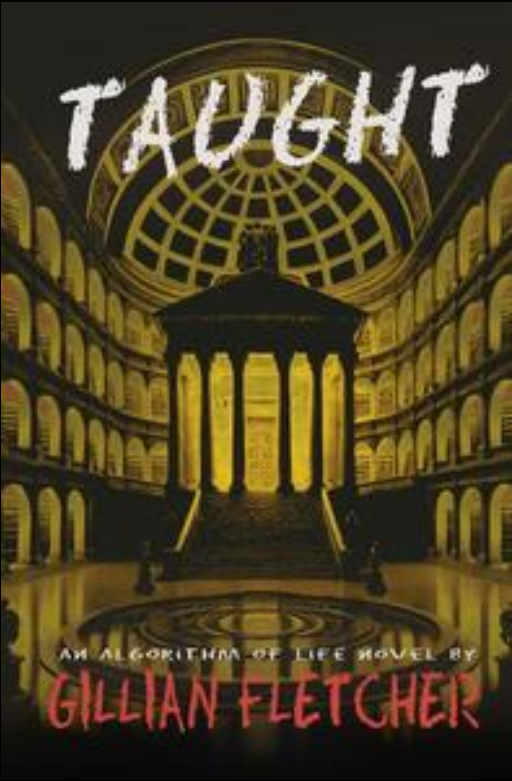
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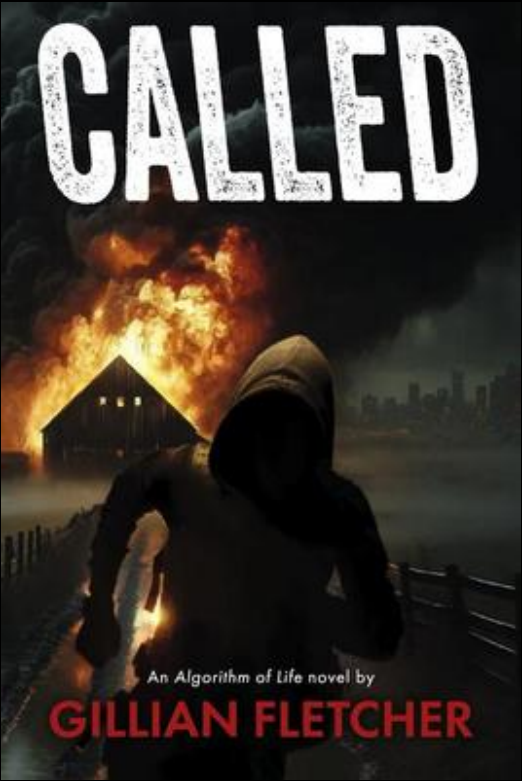
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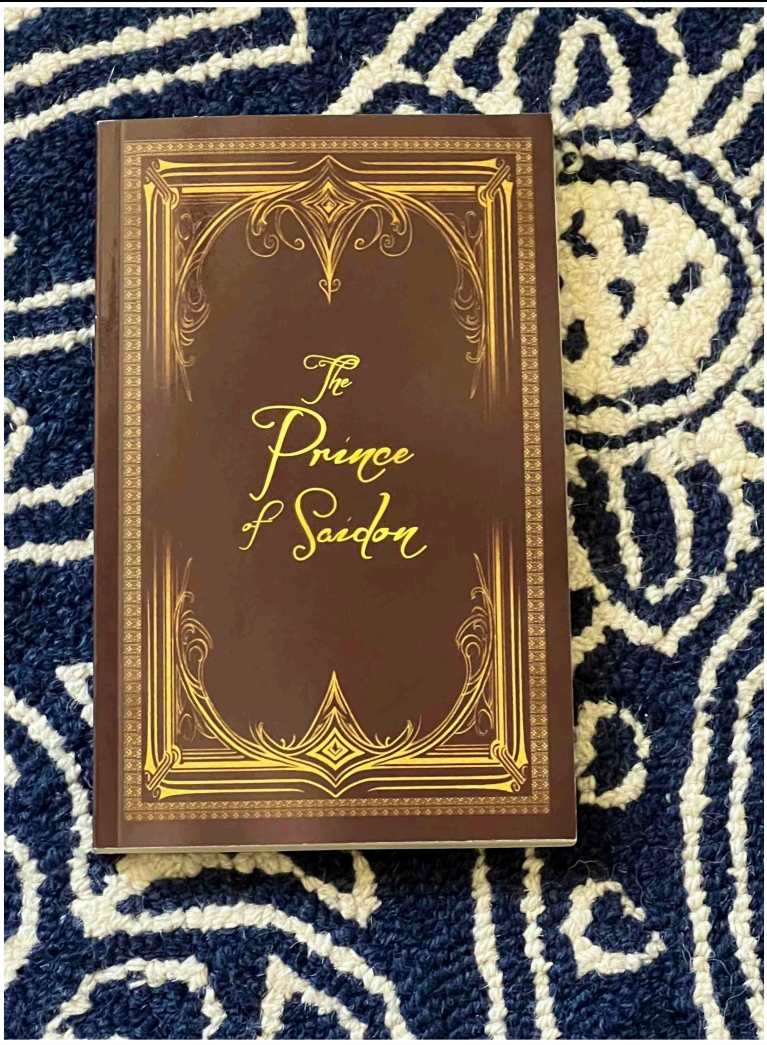
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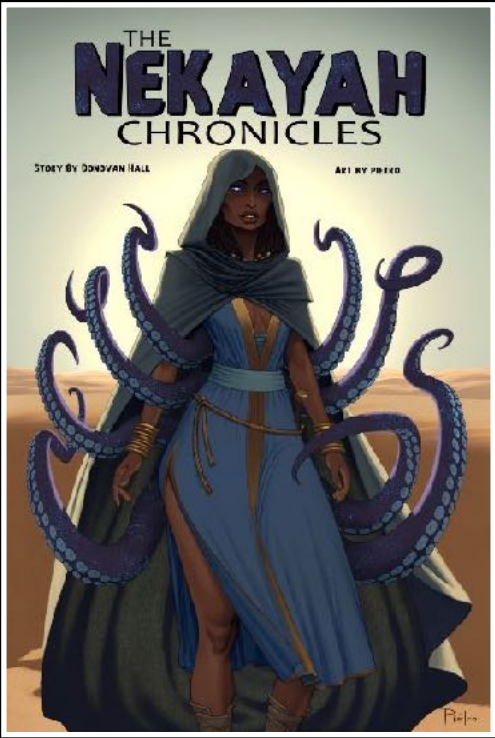
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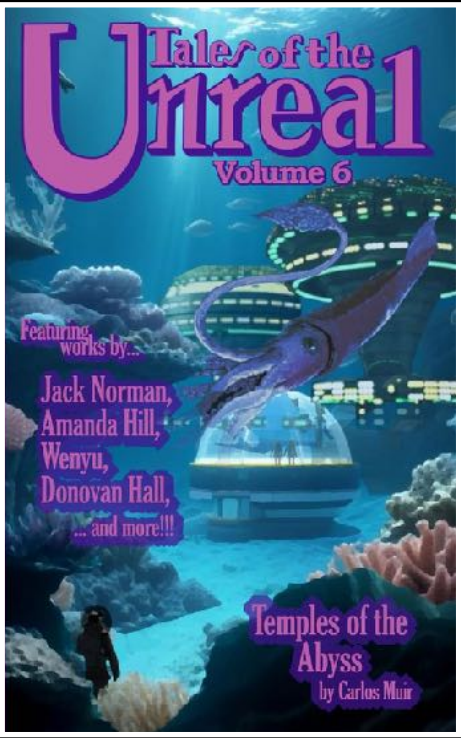
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