miniMAG

issue226

summoner



Sinshow

Flloyd Largent

Welcome to the Sinshow:
look around and see
All the things you ever want,
the beasts that haunt your dreams.
Flare your fear and mendacious thought:
capitulate your felicity:
for everything is doublemeant,
and not just as it seems.
Take all you want but bring it back;
burn bright in hell for a day;
transfer guilt unto to your brother;
he'll die of greed and shame.
Adultery is nothing new;
it always palls at best.
Gluttony may have its day,
but that path’s never fresh.
Arson's just an empty heat,
murder's a titillating treat,
rape is death with no entrails
and cannibalism's never neat.

Touch me not and touch me do
Rip me from my shell —
Heaven's just a step away,
But it takes guts to opt for Hell.



Fall

O.P. Jha

Heard. The enemy post has fallen. Asked, “Who’s risen?” The captain murmured, “The dead slept forever and the living are taking sleeping pills. Vultures rose high to watch and then fell on the corpses. Since the beginning of the war, no man has risen above.” Then he also fell silent.



The Little Fate

Mellory Bats

I let my spirit sit in the abyss.

Waiting for a certain demonic kiss

My stomach full of golden butterflies

My wrists held up to scarlet skies.

I whisper the words ever so quietly,

"Please, let me die."



ABANDONED DARK

Diana Webster

Inside the abandoned house
shadows yearn for escape
through splintered window
frames skewed by winters.

Inside the abandoned house
sunshine shafts stab
the interior like cat paws
darting in holes to feel
for the cowering mouse.

But the cat's leg is shorter
than its desired reach.
The mouse dodges death
dragged across the threshold.

Darkness avoids murder
by sunshine as it stares
outside and sidesteps
the sundial daylight.

Sacrifice

Avery Helliks

There would be a murder in the fields. Joshua knew. But he could not accept it.

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The late afternoon sun beat down on the wide, golden fields that stretched to the horizon. In the distance, the booming sound of a sermon, amplified by an ancient, crackling loudspeaker mounted on the weathered meeting house, drifted across the swaying knee-high wheat. It was 1978, but out here, in the heart of what the Faithful called the 'Pure Lands,' time was measured by the turn of the seasons and the rhythm of the Blessed Word.

Viktor, all angles and uncomfortable with the length of his limbs, was sprawled flat on his back, a gangling scarecrow abandoned in the field. He was seventeen, but his height made him seem older. A half-empty flask, still radiating the faint, cloying scent of home-distilled corn liquor, lay loosely in one of his hands. His face was turned upward towards the sun, exposing the sharp angle of his jaw, and his eyes, a mismatched pair that marked him as an outsider even among the Children of the Pure Word, gazed up at the clouds. One eye was the clear, startling blue of a summer sky; the other, an abyss of solid, unyielding black. It was the mark, they said, of the Devil's Son, a birthright cursed.

Beside him, propped up on his elbows, was Joshua. His hair was neatly combed and next to the disheveled Viktor he looked almost like a parody of an All-American kid. His eyes were focused and shining with unabashed eagerness as the preacher's voice boomed across the fields. "Are you hearing this, Viktor?" he said. "He said evil doesn't just come from outside, like the heathens with their rock music and their painted faces. He said it festers within. Like a worm in an apple."

Viktor's only response was a slow, deliberate blink. The blue eye focused for a moment, then unfocused, swimming in a boozy haze. The black eye remained an unchanging bleak vacuum, reflecting nothing.

"It's about temptation, see?" Joshua continued, undeterred by Viktor's lack of engagement. "He says the Serpent is a voice in your ear. Like, when you feel the urge to… to stray from the path. That's the Serpent." He paused, adjusting his thin-rimmed glasses and glancing at the flask by Viktor's hand. He didn't mention it, not directly. He never did. Joshua just talked around things, hoping his words, like seeds, might eventually bear fruit.

Viktor groaned and shifted lazily. The world was tilting, slow and gentle, like a boat on a calm lake. The drone of Father Eckridge's voice was a fly buzzing in his ear, annoying but easily ignored. His eyelids felt like lead weights.

Joshua sighed. "I know it's hard, Viktor. I know. But Father Eckridge is talking about redemption. He says even the most lost sheep can be brought back to the fold. He says… he says it takes a pure heart to see the light, even in the deepest darkness." He looked directly into Viktor's face, lingering on the two mismatched eyes. This was his mission, his personal crusade: to convert Viktor. To see that black eye, that mark of the Devil's Son, somehow softened, somehow redeemed. He was sure he could save Viktor from eternal damnation, even if he was born "wrong", as the elders claimed. He had to; Viktor, against all odds, was his friend.

Viktor found himself sinking into the grass. He felt like a part of his body was paralyzed, or perhaps completely dead. He was always drunk. It wasn't a choice so much as a condition, like breathing. He couldn't remember a time he wasn't carrying the poison in his blood. It was his shield, his only defense against the whispers, the averted gazes, the fear in the eyes of the other Children. He was the exception, the anomaly, the one who carried the mark of the Beast. A wolf among lambs, most loathed and much feared.

He vaguely heard Joshua talking about Lot, or maybe it was Noah. Joshua got excited by the Minor Prophets. He'd once spent an entire afternoon trying to explain the nuances of Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones. Viktor hadn't understood a word, hadn't cared to. He just liked the sound of Joshua's voice.

The sermon ended, and the sound of fervent applause rocketed across the loudspeaker. In the distance, they could see a filing of parishioners, all dressed alike - men in dark suits, women in beige dresses past the knee—making their way across the path to the cul-de-sac at the end of the field.



Following them at a respectable distance was the preacher himself, Father Eckridge, dressed all in black.

Joshua watched him intently, then shook Viktor by the shoulders with nervous excitement. "He's coming over to us, Viktor! Look alive!"

Viktor’s eyelids fluttered, then slowly, agonizingly, lifted, but only partially. He was trying to not reveal the full extent of his heterochromia. Was it self-consciousness, due to the preacher's approach? He was so, so tired. It wasn't even the sluggishness from the alcohol. It was a lifetime of carrying the weight of the mark, of being watched, judged, pitied, dreaded, and hated. He longed for the complete blankness that only oblivion could offer. He wanted to be dead.

"How are you, Joshua?" Father Eckridge said, nodding at the boy. Joshua braced himself, expecting some kind of reproach for hanging out with Viktor. But the preacher actually turned to Viktor next, and addressed him directly.

"You are seventeen, are you not?"

"Yes," Viktor said very quietly, after a long silence.

"And you will be eighteen in five months, yes?"

"Yes."

"Then you understand what we must do."

Joshua's blood ran cold.

"Is it the...?" The words escaped him before he even realized he'd opened his mouth.

Eckridge didn't answer.

Viktor languidly rose, and almost stumbled over his own feet. The sun was so aggressive that he could see red stars even when he closed his eyes.

"Thank you, Viktor," said Father Eckridge. With God's strength, we will purge you of the demon's grasp and restore you to the fold of the righteous."

"But Father—“ Joshua's trepidation had reached a level he didn't even think possible. "He's my friend. You can't… you wouldn't..."

"Your ‘friend,’ Joshua?" Eckridge raised an eyebrow. "If he is really your friend, you'll understand this day was inevitable for him. Since the day of his birth, it was written."

Joshua's heart sank. He looked at Viktor.

Viktor let out a short, hollow laugh, and placed his hand on Joshua's shoulder. It was cold, despite the heat of the day. "Don't worry about it, Josh," he slurred, his voice barely above a whisper. "I'll be back before you know it."

"That is right, my son," the priest concurred, his tone reassuring. "This is but a test of faith. He will emerge pure, reborn in the eyes of the Lord."

The words had a finality about them, as if the matter were closed to any further discussion. But Viktor leaned into Joshua, and whispered into his ear: "I’ve been dead for years, Josh. They can't hurt me." And then Joshua knew for sure that the matter was closed.

His knees still buckled against his will as Eckridge led Viktor away. The world began to tilt. The sky seemed to press down on him, crushing his chest and lungs. He felt the earth beneath his feet turn soft, shifting like sand.

It’s swallowing me, he thought, hot tears stinging his eyes, blurring the golden fields into trembling streaks of fire. *The dirt is coming up to take me, too*.

He fell to his knees in the dust, nauseous, praying that no one could witness him in this moment of weakness. He heard the barn door creak open, sounding like a tomb being unsealed, and then it slammed shut.

His mind couldn't comprehend what was happening. That he was never going to see Viktor again. He felt something wet on his leg; instinctively he knew it was blood, and he thought one of the harsher stalks of wheat had cut him, but when he looked down he saw his own fingers digging into the flesh of his calf.

Suddenly he remembered—something he didn't care about, something he'd never cared about, something that was more of a hindrance than anything—but it was of critical importance now. He had to make sure the corn had been harvested from the eastern field before sunset. And the ravens who liked to nest there—maybe they needed water. He got up and started running in the opposite direction from where he'd been kneeling on the ground.

As he ran, he thought he could hear the sound of something—or someone—breaking. But maybe it was just the wind, or his imagination. He didn't turn around.

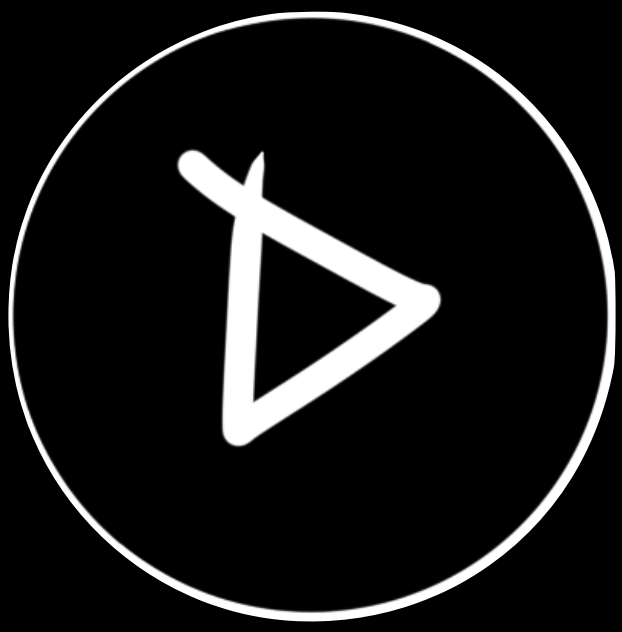


My Cat Sees My Corpse

Sulaiman Zorin

In the rainy morning, I wake up on the cold floor. My breakfast is bad news, bad news, more bad news, and so on, and so forth. Ad infinitum. I get choked to death while staring at the wooden wall. My cat sees my corpse and asks for food. My mouth remains silent.

It still asks for food while sitting on the table and staring at my hollow eyes. It cannot fathom what has just happened in this narrow room.



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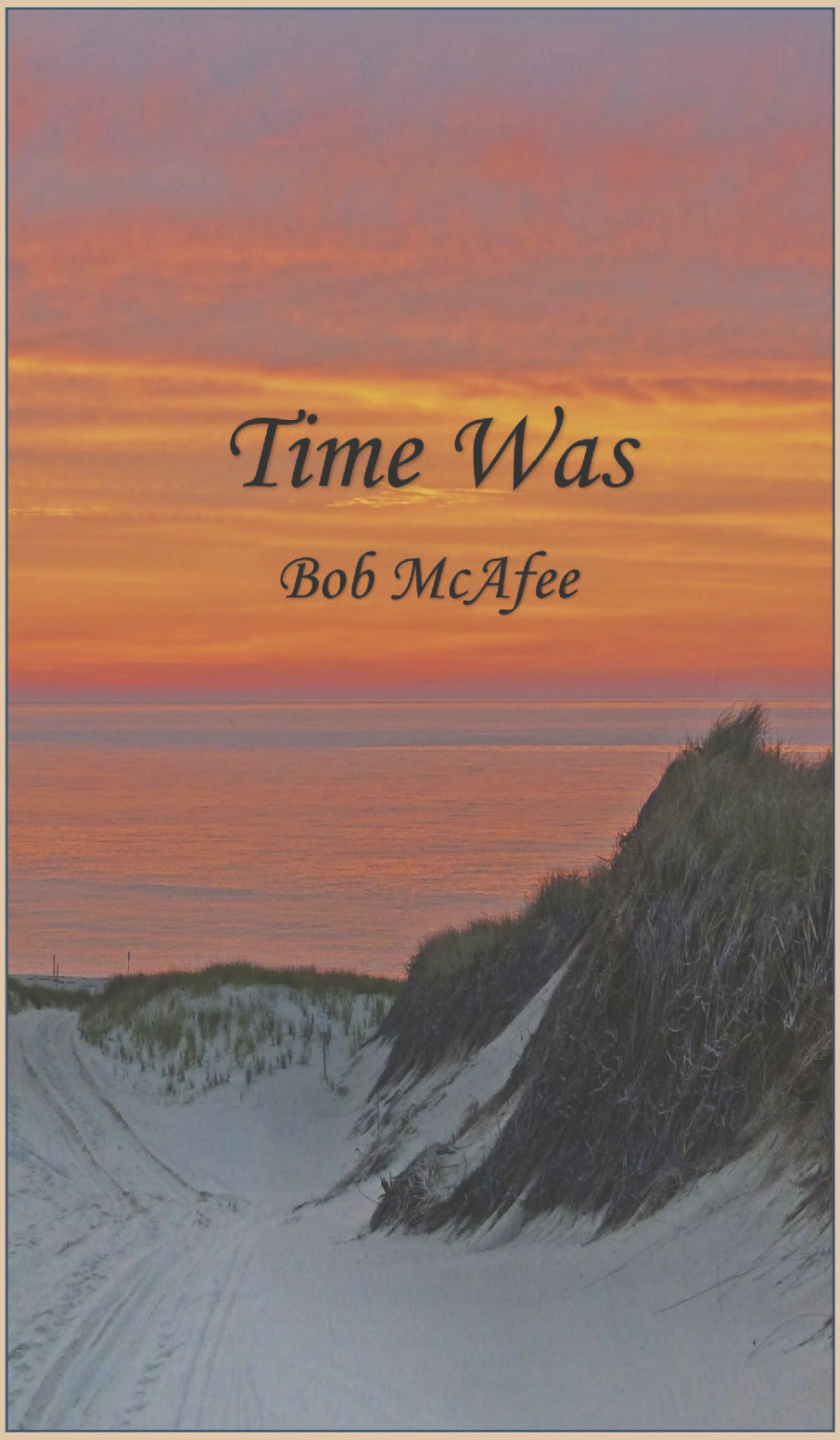
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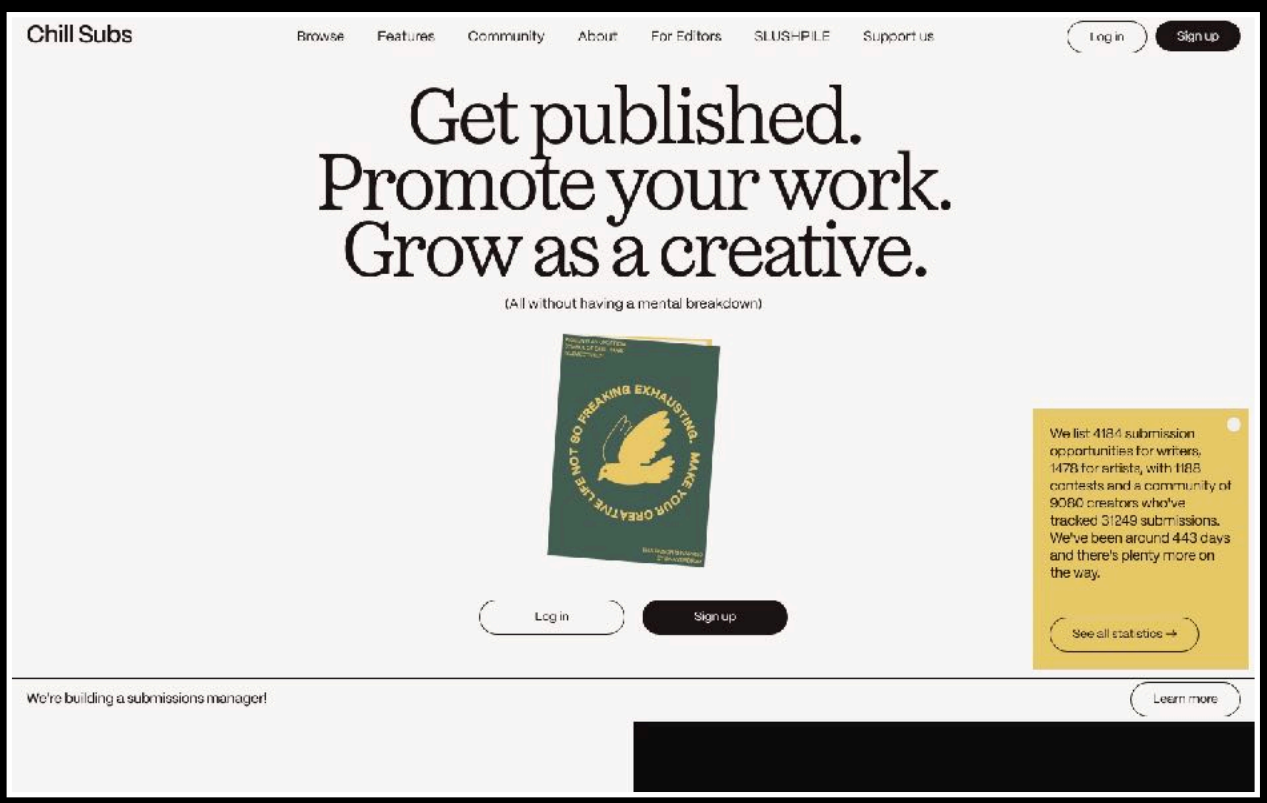
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