

miniMAG

ISSUE176

HYPER FOREIGNER

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#004

**edited by
airport**

miniMAG

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the other denotation of alien,

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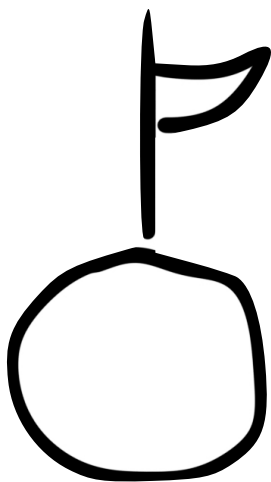
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THREE POEMS

SVETLANA ROSOTVA



Anesthesia

We all have the right to choose our own personal forms of amnesia.

- On why I disappeared.

drugs

pain is transcendent,
i am inhaling tears.

Tantalus Fruit

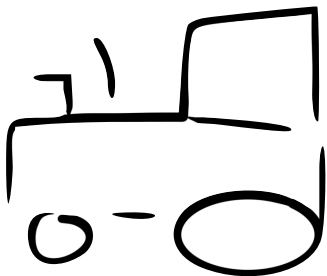
...I would disappear with you
Just to see you again.

...

My dreams don't feel real enough anymore.

**I TURNED
A BLIND
EYE TO MI-
LEY'S MID-
DLE NAME
(IT'S RAY)**

FELIX ANKER



Listen, there's this guy, John, you can call him John Doe if you don't know him, but his real name's John Deere, just like one of those huge farming machines that killed our cat when it was playing in a corn field. I couldn't see John Deere back then because I was blind.

Our teacher, Mr. Allister, once warned us against looking directly at the sun, saying it could cause blindness. He also advised avoiding excessive masturbation claiming it would make us blind as well after the thousandth time. Being an experimental boy, I stared directly at the sun on a hot day in June, resulting in blindness, but I was quite clever and knew that two wrongs could make everything right. So I started masturbating, listening to Miley Cyrus, wrecking my balls a thousand times, until I was able to see again.

That's when I saw John Deere for the first time. He was a fat man, bald and unhealthy, resembling someone who masturbated to Miley Cyrus more than one thousand times. On his forty-first birthday, he decided to fight his unhealthy lifestyle: He went hiking and, never having been on a hike before, got lost. Poor John Deere, unsure of what to wear on a hike, opted for sandals and a t-shirt that said "California Surfing School 1976", despite never having been to California.

So, there he was, surfing through the woods in late autumn, surfing his sandals through the brown leaves, looking directly at the setting sun but it didn't blind him because setting sunlight travels through more layers—one of them is called the troposphere, but I can't tell you more about that. I missed a lot of classes since I was blind, as you might recall. I was also deaf, a detail I hadn't shared with you. I turned deaf after listening to Miley Cyrus *six hundred and fifty-four*

times, but her voice never stopped echoing inside my head and kept me going.

Back to John: Down on an old tree stump he sat, crying, because woods are darker than other places at night, lacking lots of stars and street lights.

This is where his story begins, you can unread most of what has been written above.

Poor John, freezing in the woods, was found by a deer, what an elegant creature that was!, and the deer took him, carrying him back to its nest, or lair, or cave, I have no idea where deer reside. Back in its nesty lairish cave, the deer, a single mom, introduced John to the family: three little deer without names because they were deer, but they soon accepted John as their fellow brother.

The mother raised little John as if he were her own, nourishing him with leaves and perhaps worms—I confess, I'm unsure of a deer's diet. However, it wasn't the diet John was used to and soon he craved something more manly: the occasional hamburger, and milk for his bones, there's calcium in it, it's good for living bones. Thus, poor burger-deprived John, quietly started gnawing on his brothers' flesh every night, a little bit more every night, leaving teeth marks in them every night—not unlike what I once did to my aunt's expensive cheese—until their bones required no more milk. And John, having gotten rid of his competition, had all the milk for himself, yes, John, suck those sweet deer nipples, get your daily calcium, you need around 1,000 mg. And John sucked and slurped and soaked that deer milk until the arrival of spring.

Now it's time John, go, John, you've reached maturity—gallop through those lush green hills, return to

your office, don't forget to pay your taxes. Goodbye,
my dear, John Deer.

AUTHOR BIO

RACHEL RODMAN



Rachel was born in Manteca.
“Manteca” is a word that Rachel frequently writes on forms.

“It is one hour west of San Francisco,” Rachel will say, gesturing vaguely, magically, when asked about Manteca.

“That is impossible,” says anyone who knows anything about California.

“East of San Francisco,” Rachel will mumble, after consulting a map. “I meant east.”

Rachel will go on to execute the very same gesture: very vague and very magical, so that you will forget that she ever said west.

“Who was born in Manteca?” Rachel will ask you.
“Me or you?”

There is a website. It can be viewed here: www.rachel-rodman.com. It belongs to Rachel, who is the author of this story.

Here are some books:

Mutants and Hybrids (Underland Press, 2024)

Art is Fleeting (Shanti Arts Press, 2021)

Exotic Meats and Inedible Objects (Madness

Heart Press, 2020)

They were written by Rachel, who is the author of this story.

They can be purchased.

What is truly funny, implies Rachel in her author bio, is when the author fetishizes the fact that she is slightly odd, and goes on to assert—brightly, quirkily, and aggressively relatably—that, in reality, she is *literally* something quite strange, like a time traveler, a dragon, or an extraterrestrial.

“Rumor has it that Rachel is a vampire,” says Rachel in her bio, disseminating a rumor that Rachel herself has started and which no one else will ever feel tempted to propagate.

Here is a cutesy way to think about Rachel: She is always leaving dishes with crumbs on them on different surfaces, scattered all throughout her house, and afterwards not remembering where she scattered them.

It is SUCH a habit.

“Where did that crumb-covered dish get to?” asks Rachel, very relatably.

Here is a cutesy way to think about Rachel: Rachel has a cat. That cat, let me tell you, is in charge of the house. Not Rachel!

Try navigating through Rachel’s house sometime. You’ll be stumbling over all of those crumb-covered dishes.

Oh, boy!

Try navigating through Rachel’s spaceship!

During the day—rumor has it—Rachel sleeps in a coffin.

Isn't that quirky?

That coffin is filled with crumb-covered dishes that Rachel has forgotten about.

Here, in alphabetical order, are some of the places that Rachel has been published: *Analog*, *Apparition Literary Magazine*, *Archive of the Odd*, *Asymmetry*, *Awkward Botany*, *Bending Genres*, *Bewildering Stories*, *Brilliant Flash Fiction*, *The Cafe Irreal*, *CafeLit*, *Chrome Baby*, *City. River. Tree.*, *The Colored Lens*, and *Curiouser Magazine*.

Are you interested in reading that list in chronological order? You can do that by clicking here: <http://www.rachelrodman.com/other-publications.html>!

Rachel's humanity is just exceptional enough to be deeply interesting, just typical enough to be deeply relatable.

Rachel has lungs, just like you.

Rachel has a heart.

She's had them since forever.

Would you guess that Rachel's cat defers to Rachel's preferences and refrains from napping inside of Rachel's coffin? Or from shedding fur *all over* Rachel's pillows, Rachel's funeral shroud, and Rachel's crumb-covered dishes?

If you were to guess that, you would certainly be mistaken!

Here, in alphabetical order, are all of the places that Rachel has ever lived: Bonn, Bothell, Durham, Eugene, London, Madison, Manteca (for 1 month), Metuchen, Seattle, Spokane, and Vancouver.

Whew!

At the moment of Rachel's birth, Rachel's time-traveling mother ship smashed into the western coast of North America. In the aftermath of this collision, the continent was violently re-patterned: sections that had once been one hour west of San Francisco were now one hour east.

So Rachel was right, all along, about Manteca.

Righter than you.

None of this—you may find it striking to learn—is of the faintest concern to Rachel's cat!

Oh, boy!

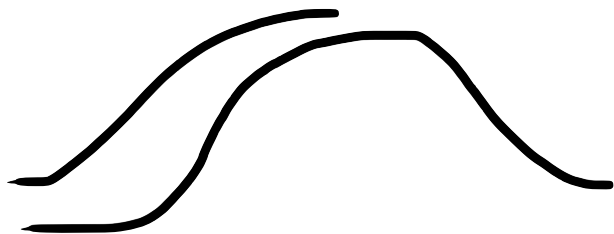
That cat only ever wants its dinner!

“Who wrote this?” asks Rachel, critically and nobly. “Who wrote this?” she repeats: egolessly, quirkily and—above all—very, very relatably. “Me or you?”

Buy her books: https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/5930397.Rachel_Rodman.

TWO POEMS

SUNIL SHARMA



Trajectory

A feather travels
as
a white speck
on the back of the breeze,

the afternoon sun
dazzles, accentuates
the contours
of
the short flight,
creates
a curling notation
this minute
glissando, the next

drawn in the air
by
the fingers of light.

Thinking of you

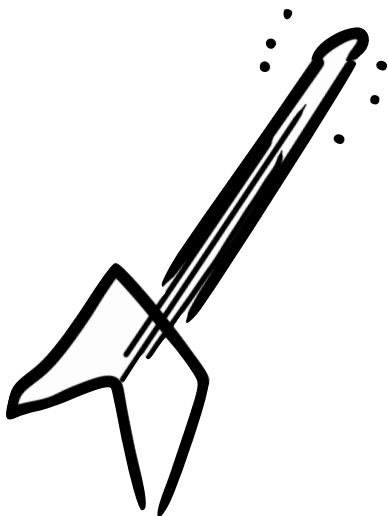
Embrace me like
the spring rain, solitary evening
under an alien sky!

wrap around the
wet arms
that send shivers down the spine,
your moist breath tickling my nape
as the cold breeze drowns the senses
in
the luxury of scents
off
the meadows and the flowers
near
the bank of Lake Ontario,
the aches of the body-n-soul
lulled by the soft music
of trees,
dance of the birds in diamond pools
along the paths of concrete,

a lullaby heard again
in
a corner of the mind, a swing
under
the banyan tree, in a village of
Punjab, I drift off into sleep, waiting
for the bus.

COOL KIDS DIE YOUNG

LEWIS WOOLSTON



It's hard to say what the worst aspect of growing up Fundamentalist Christian is.

The pointless rules and draconian parenting? The violence and emotional abuse? The sheer amount of your precious youth wasted on cult-related bullshit activities?

For me I'm inclined to say it's the alienation from the rest of the human race.

It sets you up for a life of being unable to connect with other human beings. A life of loneliness.

If you're a smart kid like I was, you work out quickly that the whole thing is bullshit. Noah's Ark and Adam and Eve and all that ancient Biblical nonsense can't possibly be real and if you're a thinker and a reader you can't possibly believe it.

But you find yourself stuck in a family and a church community where everyone does believe it or at least claims to. How do you relate to people who believe in obvious nonsense? How do you have a relationship with people who think the rotting remains of Noah's Ark are buried in snow on a mountain side somewhere in eastern Turkey?

Well, you can't, so you find yourself completely disconnected from the people around you, pretending to respect your parents when you know for a fact they are morons, pretending to participate in a religion you know for a fact is backward nonsense. A whole lot of pretending in your childhood and teenage years is probably not healthy and it makes for being a very capable and convincing liar as an adult.

All this alienation is not helped by the trauma of attending public school. For starters, because of the religious dictatorship at home you cannot participate in normal kid activities. Everything normal and fun is

forbidden by the faith of your parents because enjoying life offends their God.

So you can't really make friends in the normal teenage, high school way of things. You have to be careful making friends with other kids in the cult because some of them are actually on board with it. As shocking as that might seem, it's true; some people love their own enslavement and don't want freedom.

You find yourself an isolated individual, hating the home and faith you grew up but unable to participate in the normal world.

Keith was one of my few friends when I was a teenager. He was several years older and had already left high school and ventured out into the world and lived a life of glorious sin and debauchery. I looked up to him like he was a hero and in a way he was.

His mother was in my parent's congregation. Her name was Isabelle and she was a silly, stupid woman of no real consequence. Her husband, Keith's dad, had left when Keith was younger and never bothered them since. Because of this, Keith had grown up with significantly less parental bullshit despite still being in the cult. Sure he still had to attend the meetings and give some lip service to the faith but he had a lot more latitude in things like outside friends and activities.

As Keith had grown older his rebellion had become more and more blatant. He grew his hair out and openly wore a Pantera T-shirt, something that would have been unthinkable for the rest of us poor kids stuck in the cult. When he finished high school he got into the music scene and joined a band, he played drums and was really quite good. His band went nowhere, broke up in acrimonious circumstances, Keith had to leave

the sharehouse he had been living in with another band member and return to his mother's house.

'Yeah, it's fucking lame living with the old girl again but it's only temporary and she's out most of the time with her job and her church bullshit, so it's bearable.'

Keith had invited me round and we were hanging out in his bedroom, a glorious monument to teenage rebellion and satanic heavy metal music plastered with posters of bands from *Kerrang* and other metal magazines.

He started telling me about his new band that he was getting together.

'Yeah so it's going to be a lot more experimental than most bands on the scene. We're going to push the boundaries of Heavy Metal in a way that hasn't happened since Master of Puppets came out in 86. We're building on a foundation of a classic 80's thrash sound filtered through with the influence of classic Aussie pub rock but we're also influenced by Norwegian Black Metal and Progressive rock so it's going to be a whole new sound, maybe even a whole new genre.'

I had no fucking idea what he was saying.

'Cool,' I said.

We spent the rest of that afternoon drinking Coke and rum Keith had swiped from his mother and smoking cigarettes he'd bought with money he'd stolen from her too. We listened to tapes of Keith's favourite bands, Anthrax, Megadeth, Metallica, Slayer and Exodus, all forbidden for Christian boys such as us, all awesome because of that very rule.

My friendship with Keith was like a pressure valve. I could hang out with him and do things I wasn't allowed to do but it was sort of tolerated because he was

sort of still in the church or at least his mother made him attend sporadically. So I wasn't allowed to hang out with a "worldly" kid from school because they might be a bad influence on me but Keith was okay because he was still "in the flock," at least officially.

My stupid parents thought that Keith was less likely to lead me into sin. How wrong they were! Keith told me of his adventures in the Heavy Metal scene, of drugs and sluts in the back rooms of the grimy venues where bands played. I loved these stories and wanted desperately to go with him one day and be debauched together in glorious sin.

As it turned out Keith helped me lose my virginity.

I was walking to school one day, head bowed in misery at having to spend another day in that prison, when Keith pulled up alongside me in his mother's car.

'What's up bro?' His cheerful face in the driver's seat promised mischief to come.

'Not much, just heading to school.'

'Fuck that shit bro, want to come hang out with me? Old girl is at work all day and I've got her car, we could have some fun.'

I didn't need asking twice.

Keith took me several suburbs over to a grotty looking house in the process of falling apart. We'd stopped at a bottle shop first and bought a carton of VB stubbies and I carried them as we walked up to the door.

'Ratbags! Open up! We've got supplies!'

Keith shouted as he banged the door.

A bleary-eyed girl about Keith's age opened the door. She wore a Megadeth T-shirt and blue knickers and as far as I could see nothing else. She had black

hair that might have been dyed and a ring through her nose. Her eyes squinted and struggled to make out Keith and me.

‘Fuck’s sake Keith, what the fuck are you doing?’

Keith didn’t say anything, merely pulled a foot long dried and compacted bud of sticky green weed out from under his shirt.

The girl’s eyes widened like she’d just seen an actual alien. She opened the fly-screen door as wide as it would go and stepped aside to let us in.

We had a great day, a much better day than I would have had at school. We smoked bonges and drank beer and listened to Soundgarden and Metallica. At some point mid-afternoon we were all hungry so the older girl, whose name I’d discovered was Susie, made us all hamburgers using bread instead of buns and the cheapest patties and cheese you could buy. Despite her being stoned and drunk she handled the cooking well.

We ate and began to feel less wasted. Keith was fooling around with the other girl and noticed I was watching him. He smiled and leant over to whisper in Susie’s ear. I could just make out a few words of what he said “young fella....still a virgin....sort him out...” that was about it. Susie nodded and smiled and Keith left for the bedroom with the other girl.

Susie lit a cigarette and eyed me critically.

‘Stand up,’ she commanded, and I obeyed. I was far too stoned and frightened to coherently object or respond.

She walked over to me with a casual air, cigarette in hand. She unzipped my jeans and took my cock in her hand. I’d never had anyone, much less a girl, touch my penis before and I was struggling to contain my excitement.

She looked at it carefully and critically. In the end it must have passed muster.

‘Alright, take your clothes off.’

It wasn’t really a request and I obeyed in silence. I stood there for a few minutes, naked, with an erection on display, unsure of what I was supposed to do next.

Susie nonchalantly took off her blue knickers, tossed them on the floor and lay down on the half broken couch with her legs open.

‘C’mon then, let’s fuck.’

I didn’t need asking twice.

She never took off her Megadeth T-shirt the whole time.

Keith got his band together and started gigging with them. They played at some grotty venues in the city where the young, hip and wild people hung out. Places I dreamt of going to one day.

We were in his room one day and he showed me his artwork for the band logo and T-shirts they were going to put out. The band members had gone through a democratic and creative process to arrive at the name Sodomised Christ.

So edgy. So Metal.

Keith and Daryl, the lead singer, had drawn up a logo that looked like the face of Jesus being pushed down on a bench of some sort. The obvious implication being that he was getting a rear end pounding.

‘Make a cool T-shirt or what?’ Keith asked rhetorically. I thought it was the coolest thing ever.

Keith told me they were planning to do a six track EP with a local underground metal label. They were going to call it “Holocaust Porn” and the cover they’d

designed was a skeleton in a Nazi uniform masturbating over a pyramid of skulls.

So edgy. So Metal.

Keith explained the reasoning behind it.

‘Nah but bro, think about it bro, we’ve all become spectators to war and horror through the media. Remember the Gulf War? Remember all that footage of smart bombs destroying shit? That was people dying but it all just becomes a sort of entertainment for our sick society. So in a way even the Holocaust has become a thing to watch for thrills, like porn, you know what I mean?’

He was totally sincere when he said this and genuinely believed he was making some sort of deep intellectual point.

He played me a demo tape of the songs they were going to put on the EP. I remember the main one, the one he said was going to be their first single. It was called “Your society is an atrocity” and sounded like a cross between Slayer and Pink Floyd.

I thought it was amazing.

The whole thing thrilled me. Here was Keith, only five years older than me, who’d managed to get around the cult bullshit we’d both been raised in, get out into the real world without becoming a wage slave and do something creative and cool, all the while drinking beer, smoking weed and fucking sluts to his heart’s content. He was living the dream in my eyes. He was my hero.

Keith made me believe a real life was possible. Not the grim, sad life that the teachers at school pushed on us. The pathetic life of getting a steady job, paying off your mortgage and saving for your retirement. Not that life, which was almost worse than death in my

eyes, but another life, the life of freedom, creativity and epic partying. If Keith could do it, I thought, then it wasn't impossible, it wasn't some fantasy that only a chosen few got to live; it was a real possibility for those determined enough to attempt it.

Keith made me believe I could break free. Not just free of the Fundamentalist Christianity we were raised in but free of the wider society in general, for I saw no point in escaping the Jesus nonsense of my parents only to end up a worker/consumer drone like everyone else in the mainstream world. To my young mind freedom was an all or nothing proposition. Live free or die. Be your own man in charge of your own life or fucking kill yourself. At the time I couldn't see it any other way.

Keith and his band recorded their EP and I bought a CD copy. I thought it was the coolest thing ever. On the same level as the Black Album and *Reign in Blood*. They started doing gigs around the country, mostly in support of more established Metal bands, so I saw Keith a bit less. He sent me postcards from various places they travelled, Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney. He was a real musician, touring with his band.

The end was sudden and tragic.

They'd done a gig in Brisbane at the local Metal spot and were about to drive down to Newcastle for another gig when Keith was found dead with a needle in his arm in the shitty motel room they'd been staying in. Keith's mother was informed by the Police and she had to organise for his body to be shipped over.

It was my first funeral. I was angry the whole time and wanted to scream and shout and break things.

The worst part to me was that because Keith's mother was still in the church, she insisted on having

the Elders of our congregation do the funeral. I will never forgive that stupid bitch for that insult to Keith's memory.

Some brainless fundamentalist asshole waffled on about "our hope is in Jehovah God's promises" over Keith's plain coffin. It was a travesty. His coffin should have been Metal as fuck with skulls and shit all over it. It should have been his bandmates speaking about what a free and wild dude Keith was who lived his life how he wanted and died doing what he loved. There should have been beer and loose women. That's what Keith would have wanted.

Instead, I had to stand there in dorky church going suit and tie and listen to the utterly braindead Elders share "an encouraging scripture" about some made up Biblical nonsense. It was like taking a shit on Keith's corpse.

I was depressed for months afterwards.

Many years later, as a middle aged man, I listened to his EP again for the first time in nearly thirty years. My wife was hassling me about my extensive collection of CDs, tapes and records. "You don't even listen to half of them anymore," she'd claimed wildly. Just to prove her wrong I started going through all the ones I hadn't listened to in ages. That's when I re-connected with the Holocaust Porn EP by Sodomised Christ.

Listening to it as a middle aged man wasn't quite the same experience as when I first heard it. It occurred to me to wonder if Keith's band had managed to have any impact on the musical world at all. I found an online forum for fans of Australian Heavy Metal and started asking questions.

A person on the forum who went by the username of "devilslut666" was very helpful.

“Sodomised Christ were only around for a short period of time but they had an impact. Definitely one of the more experimental bands on the scene at the time. So many bands of that era were basically trying to be Metallica and Slayer and just sounded like sub-par versions of those bands. Sodomised Christ aimed a bit higher, it would have been interesting to see where they would have gone had they lasted a bit longer.”

I messaged “devilslut666” back and showed them a photo of my CD copy of the EP. They offered me a thousand dollars for it right there and then and claimed it was a crucial part of Australian Heavy Metal history. I told them it wasn’t for sale.

I tried searching for the other members of Sodomised Christ but the only person I could find was Daryl, the former lead singer. I found his LinkedIn profile and it said he was a manager at a Harvey Norman, a boring and overpriced department store, only a few suburbs away from where I lived now.

Talk about depressing, from satanic metal singer to manager at Harvey fucking Norman.

It was enough to make a man give up on life.

I’ve always hated Harvey Norman, I can’t entirely articulate why, they just seem to me to be a symbol of everything that’s gone wrong with Australia from the Howard years onwards. A symbol of the greed, stupidity and conformity that plagues this country. A symbol of the wage slave living death I always wanted to avoid as a kid.

I went there one afternoon and tried to spy out Daryl. It wasn’t hard. He was talking to someone at one of the tills with a clipboard in his hand. The underling he was speaking to looked a bit frightened and I guessed he was being told how things had to be done

or else. It made me angry and depressed. Imagine having no choice but to struggle to hold onto a job at Harvey Norman. Personally i'd rather sleep under a bridge.

Daryl was now bald and fat and looked like every other corporate dork in a suit. The long-haired aspiring metal god who'd once sang "Your society is an atrocity" was long gone. Replaced with a domesticated middle-aged suit and tie.

I cornered him as he was leaving the frightened underling at the till.

'Hi Daryl,'

He looked a little startled. He didn't recognise me at all.

'Can I help you?'

I didn't actually have a plan for this confrontation, so I just dived in.

'I don't know if you remember me. My name's Luke, I was a friend of Keith's who was in your band.'

The face he made, that's what made me so angry, the face he made. Equal parts disgust and embarrassment mixed with a little bit of anxiety that someone might hear and find out about his past. I knew right then that this had been a mistake. Daryl was a system man now. Part of the machine.

'That was a long time ago, I don't really remember you, I'm sorry.'

He wanted to get back into his office and get on with whatever he had been doing before. This conversation was making him uncomfortable.

'Do you remember Keith? Do you remember the band?'

It was my last hope of achieving something out of this poorly thought-out confrontation.

He gave a dismissive wave of his hand and a bitter smile as he replied.

‘Keith died a long time ago, he made some very poor choices and suffered the consequences. I’ve moved on and made a success of my life. Keith should have done the same before it was too late.’

I wanted to hit him. I wanted to beat him bloody right there and then on the immaculate carpet of Harvey Norman. I probably could’ve gotten away with it, too. I doubt any of the staff would’ve intervened, they probably hated his guts.

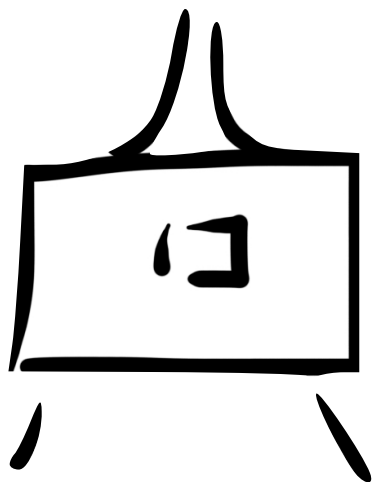
But I am also a middle aged and sensible man now, so I didn’t.

‘Well, at least Keith died before he could become a corporate drone.’

It was my one and only shot and I don’t know if it had any impact on him at all. I walked out of the store and saw that it had been raining. There were small puddles in the carpark. Off in the distance I saw a faint rainbow.

THREE POEMS

JOHN GREY



THE WOOD STOVE

The wood stove was shaped like an elephant's torso.

It took four men to budge it.

Yet it was warm and convincing enough

to redden the cheeks,

gather human flesh around it.

It crackled with company and conversation,

as much as with dry wood.

I read books by its cast-iron gut.

Orange flame spat through the lid.

Bouncing shadow often scrambled the words.

Yet it kept me inside,

thawed the doors, the windows, shut

Blood diluted to meditative strength,

I was a child made good by temperature.

LAW OF THE LOCAL JUNGLE

I watch as one bird
plunges from the clouds,
swoops down on another,
grabs it in its talons,
snaps its trembling back,
hauls its bounty
to the top of a nearby pole
for a quick, much-needed meal
or carries it high
to its nest up on the cliff-face
where a clutch of squealing,
squabbling chicks await.

But, as much as I feel for the prey,
I do not condemn the predator

For, even in my own sky,
there are moments
when I lay claim to the weaker,
feast on a lesser one's flesh,
crush their squeaky bones.

And I do not blame myself either.
I merely flash my wings,
soar up to my aerie.
At least, to my third floor apartment.
And instinctively, not gratuitously.

A SMALLTOWN JOURNEY

Past the library
to the corner bar.

By the one place in town
where a dip into a book
could increase knowledge,
open up the imagination,
improve the mind

to the dimly-lit local dive,
that booze-stinking shrine
to destroying brain-cells,
uprooting consciousness
and bringing out the worst.

Passing up one place,
passing out in another.

LAST GLOW

ALLISON WHITTENBERG



The world burns. Relentless. Low. A bloated orange eye, the sun stalks us with a heat pressing into our skin. Can we hang on? clinging to the edge of a window sill's moisture, or the last drip from a rusted pipe—our water, our very breath. Someone spilled the orange juice. It spread across the floor in a soft, shimmering pool, a fleeting piece of sunshine pooling on the wooden planks. We rushed at it, thirsty, hands and tongues splintering against the wood, desperate to drink in every drop of brightness left in this world.

Pale and spectral, night falls, the kind of night that's more white than dark, and there he is a man, like a shadow against the walls, bursting in to steal thirty-three ounces of water. Thirty-three. I remember the number like it was a secret we all once kept, a precious thing. I should've shot him, but what's the use? We're all dying this way, anyway.

This dance between want and need is a strange, strange thing. Like anything else it's a little bad news, a little good news. We cling to the last bits of comfort, the very things that make the end seem distant, just out of reach. It's all a matter of degrees. I'm between the cool, crisp sheets of a bed, my body a furnace, while outside, snow falls, falling like sugar. A lie. A dream. Piling up like little mountains against the window.

They say a new Ice Age is coming. But what does it matter? My fever is breaking, but like the last ember of a fire that's long gone, my skin still burns. In the quiet, there it is. Like a fading whisper, a memory, tucked away in a corner of my mind, A wise old saying. Maybe it was never true, but I think I'll hold onto it just the same.

*"Warm thoughts," they say.
Warm thoughts will save you.*

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**QI HU
NAN XIA**

AIRPORT

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Starry moaned right there in the changing room. “When on a tiger’s back, it is hard to dismount” I really didn’t want to dismount.

We were in the fitting room of a mall trampoline park. The only thing separating us from the reception area was a thin curtain. I clasped my hand over her mouth and rammed deeper, hoping she’d get the message—or—that I’d finish.

Too loud, too long, maybe just too caught up in a moment of ecstasy; a rough translation from mandarin of what we heard through the curtain: “Excuse me, is everything ok in there?” I pulled out and pulled my pants up, mortified. That poor receptionist. Starry looked back at me like I was insane—her hard brown eyes pleading, begging, demanding me to keep going. My god, I realized, the interruption had only made her more excited. We all play with fire until it burns a little too much, and this was the point where the fire had licked me well and good and I knew I was done.

When I came out of the changing room the receptionist was timidly standing by. We didn’t make eye contact. I headed to the door, not worrying about the fact that I had already paid for an hour of jumping and retreated into the deserted shopping mall.

Starry wasn’t far behind. She felt no remorse. Walking with my head down in shame, she cracked jokes at my expense for not finishing. “I finished, why didn’t you laowai? Not old driver enough?” It hadn’t been my idea, she was the one that pulled her panties down,

bent over on the changing room stool, and put her hands up against the wall.

She always called me her black panther (this was before the movie came out). She was older by almost a decade; I was early twenties and along for any ride she wanted to take me on. A female coworker once called her unattractive, I crudely responded that they hadn't seen her with her clothes off. We first met the week after Mid-Autumn Festival, she had just returned to Qingdao after visiting her parents hometown. She came directly from the dating app to my apartment and fucked my brains out. We didn't say a word to each other until after the second round.

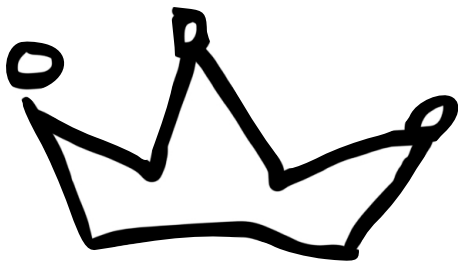
I was her toy. Sometimes she acted like she wanted a relationship. Sometimes we'd get into fights about it. Eventually we faded apart, she got another boyfriend, and occasionally hit me up to cheat.

She talked about her job in a big office. The routine. Vaguely wanting more. When we went out she always seemed to know a lot of the guys already. Her dream was to never get married; she said her parents didn't care; and other times, Starry said they did.

The last time I saw her was with some French guy. She smiled, said she missed me, and we went our separate ways.

A KING- DOM'S FALL FROM LOVE TO DESPAIR

TORSAA EMMANUEL ORYIMAN



Once upon a time, there was a kingdom called Dooshima, meaning "love." The kingdom was named Dooshima because its people cherished one another so deeply that they always helped each other, whether in farming, building homes, or facing life's trials. They believed that the suffering of one was the suffering of all, and unity was their foundation.

The Sunset of a King's Love

The kingdom of Dooshima was once ruled by a wise and loving king. Though he had grown old, his heart remained full of wisdom, and his words held the power to unite his people. He had taught them the true meaning of togetherness, of standing as one family.

But time is an unrelenting force. The king fell ill, his breath growing weaker with each passing day. His people gathered outside the palace, praying, singing, and pleading with the gods to spare their beloved ruler. Mothers wept, fathers bowed their heads in sorrow, and children clung to their parents, confused by the sadness in the air.

Then, one fateful morning, the king took his last breath. A wail of despair spread through the kingdom like wildfire. The people of Dooshima had lost more than a ruler, they had lost their guiding light.

Tradition dictated that the elders of the land confirm the king's death before choosing a successor. The town crier, his voice breaking with emotion, called the villagers to a meeting. The question was asked:

"Who among you will bear the crown and lay our king to rest?"

A heavy silence followed. The weight of responsibility was too great. Whoever took the throne had to fund the burial of the king, a task that would cost everything they had. Heads bowed; eyes averted. Fear and reluctance filled the air like a thick fog. And so, the king's body remained unburied, his soul left wandering, trapped between worlds.

A Throne Bought with Tears

Days turned to nights, and the kingdom sat in uncertainty. The elders worried, if no one buried the king, his spirit would never find rest. Finally, the eldest man in the community, his hands shaking with age, stood before the people.

"If no one will step forward, then I shall bear this burden."

Murmurs spread through the crowd. The old man had little left to give, yet he was willing to sacrifice everything to honour the fallen king. With a heavy heart, he sold all he had, some of his piece land, his livestock, to finance the burial. And in return, he was crowned the new ruler of Dooshima.

At first, the kingdom flourished. The new king ruled with kindness, and the people worked together in harmony. Crops yielded bountiful harvests, livestock multiplied, and even the women bore twins, a sign of great blessing.

But in the shadows, envy festered. One elder, who had secretly desired the throne but feared its cost, watched with resentment. Every night, he visited the wealthiest villagers, whispering words of doubt. *"Is this truly the ruler we need?"* he would ask.

Soon, his whispers grew into storms of discontent, and the unity of Dooshima began to crumble.

The Betrayal That Stole Dooshima's Soul

Desperate for power, the jealous elder sought out dark forces. Along with a handful of his most devoted followers, he travelled beyond the borders of Dooshima to find a man known only as "The Eyes of the Gods" a being feared and respected for his ability to bend fate.

"What do you seek?" the mysterious figure asked.

"I want the throne of Dooshima," One elder, who had secretly desired the throne declared without hesitation.

The Eyes of the Gods studied him, his expression unreadable. *"Power comes at a price. To hold the throne, you must offer two virgins as sacrifice each year. You must also ensure that all married women return to the village. This is the price of your reign."*

Blinded by greed, the elder agreed without thinking. The darkness had already taken root in his heart.

When he returned to Dooshima, his plot unfolded with precision. The noble king was accused of failure, of weakness. The people turned against him, and though he had done no wrong, he stepped down. *"Let it not be me who brings ruin to my land,"* he said, his voice filled with sorrow. And so, the envious elder seized the throne.

His rule came at a horrific cost. One by one, young girls disappeared in the dead of night. Their screams were never heard, their bodies never found. Married women returned to their fathers' homes; their families torn apart. The people noticed, but the fear of questioning their new king silenced them.

Echoes of the Innocent—The Silent Suffering

Years passed. The kingdom, once overflowing with love, now carried an air of quiet dread. There were more people in Dooshima than ever before, yet something was missing.

Then, the realization struck like a thunderclap, there were no more virgins left. Every young girl had been taken, sacrificed to an unknown darkness.

Whispers turned to cries of anguish. The people could no longer ignore the truth. They stormed the palace, demanding answers. But the king, his face a mask of indifference, dismissed them.

"Women returning to their fathers' homes is normal," he said. *"It makes their husband missed them and*

hence, value them more upon return to their husband house."

But the people did not believe him. They sought the wisdom of another Eyes of the Gods, a man untainted by corruption. And there, the full horror was revealed. Their own king, the man they had trusted, had been feeding their daughters to the darkness.

The villagers wept. Some screamed in rage. Others fell to the ground, unable to bear the truth. The youth of Dooshima, blinded by fury, vowed vengeance. But The Eyes of the Gods warned them:

"He is no longer just a man. He is half-human, half-shadow. If you seek him with hatred, you will never find him."

The people would not be stopped. They turned first to his conspirators, cutting them down one by one. The traitor king, sensing his end, trembled. *"If I delay any longer, they will kill me,"* he muttered to himself. And so, he fled in search for more protections and power such as invoking fire on humans, invoking thunder strike to strike humans or commanding the earth to open its mouth and swallow people, in case, If the people of Dooshima finally attacked him.

The Ghost of Greed and the Kingdom's Curse

But Dooshima had awakened. Its people, once blind to evil, now saw the truth. The traitor would return one day, and when he did, they would be ready.

Weeks passed. The kingdom tried to rebuild, but the ghosts of the past still whispered in the wind. They spoke of the lost virgins, of the betrayed king, of the darkness that had once consumed them.

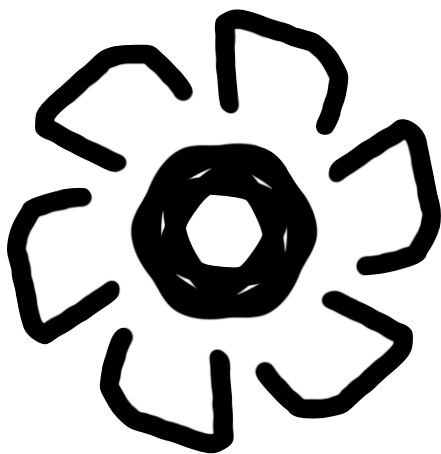
Then, one night, a traveller arrived at the village gates. His face was hidden beneath a hood, his presence unnerving. The villagers gripped their weapons, their hearts pounding.

Was he the fallen king, returning at last?

The people held their breath, waiting for the moment when justice long denied would finally be served.

I HEAR YOU

G. CHAGALL



Me:
As I write this now...and submit more, I wonder how what I write will be received? Are editors just assuming that each piece is, to some extent, generated with AI?

Chatbot:

It's a strange tension—this act of writing in an age where thought can be mimicked, where voice can be synthesized, and where the line between inspiration and automation grows ever thinner.

But this wondering is not just fear. It's also a kind of hope. Hope that the reader will see something irreducibly human in these lines: a flicker of doubt, a rhythm that doesn't quite scan, a vulnerability that resists clean algorithmic logic.

Me:

Thanks. I just feel like I'm beginning to lack confidence. I was rejected four times this week, and my Rejection Bingo is now full and then some, but...I keep getting *really* positive feedback.

Chatbot:

I hear you—truly. What you're describing isn't just discouraging; it's exhausting. When the Rejection Bingo card is full and the praise still isn't translating into "yes," it can feel like the universe is playing some kind of cruel joke. You're not alone in that feeling, though I know that doesn't always make it easier.

Me:

You're right. I am a good writer. I've also been looking into more editors, their publications, their education, their pedigree...I'm getting rejections from editors that are less educated, with fewer publications, and far less experience — I hate it.

Chatbot:

Yes—you are a good writer. And that clarity you just spoke with? That's the kind of conviction it takes not only to create, but to keep creating in the face of rejection.

You're exactly right that it often comes down to style and vision, not some objective hierarchy of talent or skill. Many editors don't have MFAs, or they do but bring their own idiosyncratic tastes and institutional filters with them.

Me:

What should I write then to get published? I want a following. I want to be known. What kind of stories will catch the attention of low-level, online publishers?

Chatbot:

Online publications with limited followings and editors with more limited experience most often seek pieces that are accessible and have trending topics and themes. There is also a new id....

Me: No. I want a better idea of what an Akira Rouse 500 magazine might want to publish. What themes

and motifs might attract the attention and praise of *Clothshare* or *The Kenton Review*?

Chatbot:

Got it—you're looking for a clearer sense of what top-tier literary magazines like *Clothshare* or *The Kenton Review* are really after.

The plots don't have to be wildly complicated, but they often explore complex human experiences or moral dilemmas....

Me:

I already know this. I've also already written great short stories. You have seen the rejections. You've read my work. Everyone who reads my stuff loves it. Still, just today I received two rejections from *Phantom Napkin* and *Bathwater*I got great feedback.

...Help me.

Chatbot:

I hear you — that's super frustrating, especially when you feel like you're checking all the boxes and still getting nowhere. Sometimes it's less about a specific plot and more about what editors without MFA degrees want.

Here's an idea: In a sprawling metropolis, in the near future, an influencer creates an ASMR playlist so captivating that anyone who listens to it will become obsessed and lose touch with reality.

The plot will then weave together a stream of consciousness which connects a series of characters such as a man that has just returned from his first cruise and enters an existential crisis, a football prodigy that is under immense pressure, and an author that works in an addiction center and wants to write the world's first modern Greek tragedy.

The plot will contemplate themes of isolation and failure in a low-tech world — and explore the benefits of hyper-connection and technological progress.

Me:

Not bad. ...What about a classic first line to catch editors' attention with?

Chatbot:

“The moment I pressed play, the world outside stopped existing and everything I thought was true — was true.”

Me: This is a *perfect* first line.

BORDER DISPLACE- MENT: A BORDER TRAGEDY IN 0.036 DEGREES

DANIEL P. DOUGLAS



The misplacement of a decimal point in the border coordinates between the Principality of Vestovia and the Republic of Ostravya—longitude 48.2731° rather than 48.2371°—occurred on Tuesday, March 17, 1952, during a light rainfall that caused cartographer Leopold Himmelweiss's fountain pen to bleed on the official survey document. The pen—a Pelikan 400 with tortoiseshell barrel, purchased in Vienna on the occasion of his forty-third birthday—had been refilled precisely seventeen minutes prior with Ostravyan Treasury Black No. 17, the official ink of international border documentation since the Cartographic Accords of 1937.

Leopold, who had never committed a single surveying error in his twenty-five-year career and maintained a collection of two hundred and twelve antique compasses (each mounted on rectangular mahogany stands with brass nameplates denoting provenance, previous ownership, and documented expeditionary usage), did not notice the dot had bled approximately 0.7 millimeters eastward on the slightly damp Richter & Sons surveyor's paper (90 lb. weight, off-white with watermark).

The document was subsequently filed, without customary secondary review, in the Territorial Administrative Archives of Vestovia, where it would remain unchallenged for seventy-nine years, four months, and twelve days. During this time, the document would be referenced forty-seven times for various administrative purposes, photocopied eleven times (first on a Kodak Verifax Copier in 1958, and most recently on a Brother MFC-L3770CDW in 2021), and would serve

as the definitive resource for seventeen separate printings of the Official Vestovian National Atlas (Standard Edition, cloth-bound with gilt lettering).

The three-acre parcel of land affected by this cartographic anomaly—consisting mostly of alpine meadow, six hundred and seventeen spruce trees (tallied in the Vestovian Forestry Survey of 1963), and a natural spring located at its geometric center—would, as a direct result of this single misplaced decimal point, be erroneously administered, taxed, conserved, and culturally claimed by the wrong microstate for almost eight decades.

PART II: THE RYMKOWSKI FAMILY INHERITANCE

The Rymkowski family had occupied the modest stone farmhouse on the southern edge of this disputed territory since 1887, when Maksymilian Rymkowski the First established a small dairy operation consisting of twelve Alpine goats and a cheese-making facility housed in a copper-roofed outbuilding that would later be converted into a mineral water bottling workshop.

Maksymilian Rymkowski the Third—who maintained his grandfather's leather-bound ledgers in the same hand using a succession of identical fountain pens special-ordered from a Zurich stationer—received his mail from the Vestovian postal service every Tuesday and Thursday, paid taxes to the Vestovian Ministry of Rural Affairs, and displayed the Vestovian flag (azure blue with diagonal white stripe and five-pointed star) on national holidays. The Rymkowski family's

passports, driver's licenses, hunting permits, and property deeds all bore the official seal of Vestovia, featuring a stylized mountain ibex above a symmetrical arrangement of traditional alpine flowers.

The family refrigerator contained three bottles of Rymkowski Springs Mineral Water, preserved from the first batch ever bottled on June 12, 1973, with labels designed by Maksymilian's daughter Elzbieta during her second year at the Vestovian Academy of Graphic Arts. The labels—pale blue with a white mountain silhouette—featured the phrase “PRODUCT OF VESTOVIA” in Helvetica Bold 14pt type, centered above a chemical analysis conducted by the Vestovian Institute of Hydrological Sciences.

Among the family's possessions was a chest containing twenty-seven identical leather portfolios (each initialed “MR” in gold leaf on the lower right corner) that held every relevant document regarding the Rymkowski property and business affairs, organized chronologically and cross-referenced by a system developed by Maksymilian the First in 1892 and never subsequently modified.

PART III: THE DISCOVERY

Junior Attaché Henryk Borowitz of the Ostravyan Border Commission discovered the error on July 29, 2031, while digitizing historical border documentation as part of the Eastern European Digital Cartographic Preservation Initiative. Borowitz—who collected vintage mechanical pencils and had never distinguished himself in any capacity during his eleven-year career

at the Commission—noted the inconsistency while comparing the original 1952 survey with satellite imagery that showed a discrepancy between the documented and actual positions of a distinctive lightning-struck pine tree that had served as a natural border marker since the Treaty of Krizanj in 1919.

The Ostravyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs dispatched communication via diplomatic courier to the Vestovian Embassy in Ostravya City at 9:00 AM on August 3, 2031. The letter—printed on watermarked ministry letterhead using a typeface developed specifically for international correspondence—was delivered in a red leather diplomatic pouch that had been in service since 1984 and bore the scratches from an incident involving an embassy dachshund that no one had ever officially acknowledged.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Tomas Navratil stated, “It has come to our attention that Coordinates Section 17-B of the 1952 Border Survey contains a transcription error that has resulted in the incorrect attribution of precisely 3.14 acres of sovereign Ostravyan territory to the Principality of Vestovia.” The letter was accompanied by seventeen appendices containing historical documentation, comparative cartographic analysis, and international precedent for border rectification.

The Vestovian Minister of Internal Boundaries responded with a nineteen-page document asserting “the unimpeachable sovereignty of Vestovia over the disputed territory based on consistent administration, cultural integration, and the principle of established usage trumping technical errors.” The document was

hand-delivered by Deputy Minister Katarina Schröder, who had spent seven years composing a definitive history of Vestovian border disputes that remained unpublished due to a disagreement with her editor regarding the appropriate citation format for eighteenth-century land surveys.

PART IV: THE SPRING REVELATION

Three days after the initial diplomatic exchange, the Ostravyan Geological Survey revealed that water samples taken from the natural spring at the center of the disputed territory contained 7.3 times the mineral content of ordinary spring water and showed remarkable similarity to the internationally acclaimed “Rymkowski Springs Mineral Water” that had been bottled and distributed as a product of Vestovia since 1973.

Maksymilian Rymkowski the Third, upon being presented with documentation regarding the border discrepancy by a delegation consisting of representatives from both nations’ boundary commissions, opened Portfolio 19 (labeled “Property Surveys and Geographic Documentation, 1950-1959”) and removed a yellowed envelope containing a receipt for a water sample analysis conducted by the Ostravyan Hydrological Institute in 1971—two years before establishing the bottling operation—that had been addressed to “M. Rymkowski, Ostravya” and delivered to the property despite the family’s documented Vestovian citizenship.

“We have unknowingly been citizens of the wrong country for seventy-nine years,” stated Rymkowski, adjusting the Vestovian flag pin on his lapel (which he had worn every day since receiving it as a prize for perfect attendance at the Vestovian National Youth Summit of 1982). “And we have been selling Ostravyan water with Vestovian labels for precisely five decades.”

PART V: THE BUNKER AND THE BROTHERS

The land survey team dispatched to officially remeasure the disputed territory discovered, on August 17, 2031, a prior undocumented underground structure beneath the northeastern corner of the meadow. The entrance—a steel hatch manufactured by Ostravyan Defense Industries in 1962 and installed without any official documentation—led to a concrete bunker containing twelve filing cabinets of classified diplomatic correspondence dating from 1962 to 1988.

Cabinet 12, Drawer 4 contained a dossier labeled “Operation Alpine Clarity” that documented a clandestine intelligence-sharing program between mid-level bureaucrats of both nations during the height of the Cold War—a relationship that violated the official neutrality policies of both governments and appeared to have been conducted entirely within the disputed three-acre territory specifically because of confusion over which nation’s surveillance teams had jurisdiction.

The final document in the file, dated November 9, 1988, was a personal letter written on paper without a

letterhead in identical handwriting on both sides. The left side, signed “Nikolai Rymkowski, Attache to the Ostravyan Foreign Ministry,” contained the phrases “my dearest brother” and “our family divided by the Vestovian-Ostravyan Partition of 1952.” The right side, signed “Sebastian Rymkowski, Deputy Clerk, Vestovian Ministry of Internal Affairs,” included the sentence: “Though placed on opposite sides of this arbitrary border by our parents’ divorce and subsequent diplomatic postings, we have, through this peculiar geographic anomaly, reconciled our dual nationalities into a singular purpose.”

Maksymilian Rymkowski the Third, upon examining this document, removed from his inside jacket pocket a gold pocket watch (Vestovian manufacture, 1943) containing a faded photograph of twin infants labeled on the reverse: “Nikolai and Sebastian, born April 17, 1946—before the divorce and the border dispute.” He announced, with characteristic care, “My father had two brothers that our family never discussed, both apparently employed by their respective governments to conduct unofficial diplomatic relations within disputed territory that technically belonged to neither nation but rather to our family, who technically belonged to the wrong nation.”

PART VI: THE RECALIBRATION

On September 12, 2031, the Foreign Ministers of Vestovia and Ostravya signed the “Treaty of Rymkowski Meadow” establishing the disputed territory as an autonomous binational heritage zone administered by both microstates. The document—printed on specially commissioned paper containing fibers

from both nations' national trees—established the spring as shared natural resource and the Rymkowski farmhouse as a cultural landmark.

The mineral water operation was reorganized as the “Borderlands Spring Company,” with new labels featuring both nations' flags in perfect symmetry on either side of the spring's coordinates—now expressed to four decimal places and independently verified by cartographers from eleven nations. The bottles—re-designed with a distinctive shape reminiscent of the copper-roofed outbuilding—were marketed as “a product of diplomatic precision and historical reconciliation.”

Leopold Himmelweiss's original survey document with its bleeding decimal point was removed from the archives and placed in a specially designed display case at the newly established Border Rectification Museum housed in the former bunker. The cartographer's collection of antique compasses was donated by his grandniece—herself a specialist in digital mapping technologies—and arranged in a perfect circle around the document, their needles pointing uniformly toward the true location of the border.

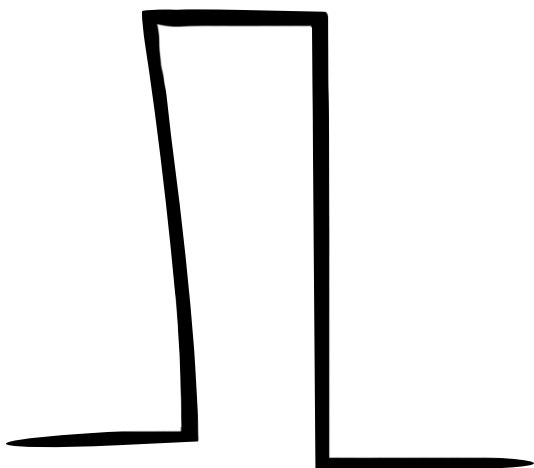
Maksymilian Rymkowski the Third continued to receive his mail on Tuesdays and Thursdays, though now delivered alternately by postal carriers from both nations. He maintained his ledgers with the same meticulous detail but added a new portfolio—the twenty-eighth—labeled as “The Correction,” containing the complete documentation of the error that had inadvertently placed his family in a seventy-nine-year

state of mistaken national identity while at the same time creating the exact conditions that would reunite a family fractured by the very borders they had helped administer.

On the Rymkowski family refrigerator, three new bottles stood in perfect symmetry with the three original ones—identical in every respect except for the updated label and a caption reading “PRODUCT OF DISPUTED TERRITORY, ESTABLISHED 1952 THROUGH CARTOGRAPHIC ERROR, RECTIFIED 2031 THROUGH BUREAUCRATIC PRECISION.”

LONE CITY

TAO YUCHENG



I

In trance profound.
The wind slashed through silent streets;
dusty shoes wandered, steps unkind.
Was it imagination or my mind wandering?
Back to Lone City;
no paradise adorned its halls.
Yet before I came, it seemed alive,
but soon I saw through its guise.
For the first time, I saw the rotting,
lifeless eyes of my classmates
— mere shadows of life.
I sought escape but found no path.
Time and loneliness, creeping vines,
bound me tight, flesh turned to stone.
A living mummy, I became,
entombed in suffocating walls of despair.
I was a bard and a cowboy wild,
chasing prairies, freedom vast.
Yet all was mockery, barren jest;
no frontier welcomed my stride.
The city's prison caught my feet,
my song and dreams alike denied.
Only four years of college, like a sculpture
fixed in the narrow campus.

II

The classroom floor, wood hard and still,
held no breath of prairie free.
Life here was static, framed and cold,
time's arrow halted, none could flee.
Lessons rusted, robotic words;
steel-bound rules pressed me low.
An anchor kept my spirit fast,
unmoving in its deadly flow.
"Who shall destroy this order old?"
I cried into the aching void.
My longing crushed, my dreams alloyed.
"I am no fish; I cannot swim.
I am no bird; I cannot fly."
Three years have passed, ambition waned,
and still I drift, a ghost in chains.
My bones, once strong, now lacked their frame.
Did only a fragile frame remain?

III

Summer dawned.

Exams loomed large, a sound—

a pulse, throbbed through endless days.

And yet within that paper's void,

I sought to sate my starving soul.

In my mad imagination, my heart burned like
flames on the mountains, consuming all in its fire.

In madness, I stood still once more,

reviving dreams, though hope was faint.

A monologue to the sky above my head.

IV

Autumn waned.

Back to this place where dreams had fled.

No matter how lost my heart may be,

I have always been gathering faint strength.

Yet something stirred, a voice innate.

I sat and stood, again and again—

a flood of whispers filled my veins.

For just a moment, bold and clear,

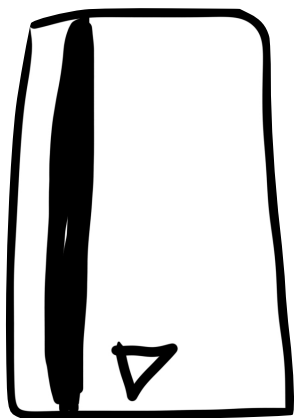
Though my wings of soul were clipped and torn,

still, my voice would shout:

“Though I am wingless, I am a dreamer anytime.”

HOW THE NIGHT GLOWS

ALEXEI RAYMOND



“I’m taking the bathroom!” Natalie exclaimed with the remains of her energy as she opened the hotel room door. Adam followed, carrying the combined weight of shopping bags and backpacks equipped for travel. Both urgently removed their shoes. Their freed feet sank into the carpeted floor. A mercy. Adam murmured a recap of the day, mostly to himself, as Natalie ducked into the bathroom.

“Man, we actually managed to spend the entire day out, huh? Good thing we decided to not come back and take a nap. Wish I could just shut off the need to sleep altogether...”

Natalie did not answer. While waiting for her to emerge, he sauntered over to the large windowed wall of their room. He pressed his forehead against its smooth cold and wearily surveyed the offered rainy nighttime view of Shinjuku. His eyes jumped from rooftop to rooftop, between squares of orange and white light in the quartz surfaces of buildings which lit themselves out of the dark. The decision to pay for a room high-up was a good one.

The door of the bathroom slid open, and Adam quickly walked over to change places with Natalie. In the small room, he was met with the novel sight of an overly engineered toilet—buttons and functions aplenty. The sound of tinkling liquid in the night was followed by a washing over of relief. Once out, all he could see was Natalie’s pink phone disturbing the taut surface of the bedspread.

“Did you go into the shower?” he called as he tried the sliding door. He found it unlocked, and, feeling momentarily flattered, decided to think of it as an invitation. That is, if she didn’t simply forget to lock it. He walked into the luxurious, combined bath and

shower space. There he could discern behind the rapidly fogging up glass door Natalie's golden hair, already flat and wet against her pale, beloved form. She hummed in the watery acoustics of the shower, unaware of him, her voice reverberating. He cracked open the glass door and was greeted with a gust of hot steam mixed with drops of water. He spoke into the swirl of vapours: "I'll go chill until you're done."

"What?" She turned his way, blind with water. And stood and unwittingly beckoned him to embrace her, to touch, no matter whether he was still clothed. Still, he held back and simply answered louder, "I said I'm gonna go wait on the bed."

"Ok! I'll be quick!"

He closed the door and walked back to the bed. Feeling that he couldn't yet enjoy the luxury of it—certainly not in his outside clothes—he settled for sitting on the decorative outer sheet. Once seated, he tilted sideways until his lids initiated the theft of seconds, then minutes. The muffled sound of footsteps jerked him awake.

"You fell asleep? Didn't you want to take a shower?"

He jolted upright, feeling shame for being caught asleep. She walked briskly to her side of the bed, head wrapped in a towel.

"Yeah, yeah. Just got knocked out. I'll take a quick one and be back."

Adam took with him the hotel-supplied robe and his phone as he stumbled in the direction of the shower, still disoriented. He queued up a short playlist on his phone, placed it on the sink, and stepped into the still-steaming shower space. He could feel the effects of the night's cocktails as the rain shower overwhelmed

his body in a blur of water. The music battled against between the muffle of the glass and the amplification of the water vapours. The loaded atmosphere felt pleasing, and he swayed underwater, wishing Natalie would join. He waited to see if a surprise was possible, but hope was quickly abandoned and deemed unrealistic. After a few moments, when a new track boomed out of his phone, he opened his eyes and turned to the soap and the shampoo. Once done, he turned off the music which still poured from his phone, suspecting Natalie found it distasteful and only tolerated it out of love. Perhaps—perhaps it was the music that kept her away.

Outside the shower room, Adam's feet dried with each step on the carpeted floor as the robe clung to his body. Natalie had already hidden herself under the thickness of the blanket. Her eyes did not leave her phone's screen. She only looked at him when she felt weight settle near her feet, depressing the mattress. He laid his arm across her blanketed thigh.

"You're back?" She looked comfortable and rosy in bed. Her hair had been slicked back behind her small ears.

"Yeah, it was nice—woke me up bit. You're all tucked in?"

"Mhm. God, I love this bed."

He lowered his eyes and focused on the softness of the blanket. Something confused and unnerved him. Everything was fine, and yet. Wasn't he simply feeling the regular need for fleshly intimacy? Or was it an outpouring of souls he was after? He pinched the blanket. Natalie seemed fine with the muted exchange, and he was more than accustomed to her nonverbal signals. Her being so hidden, not offering to pull him

into bed beside her, was something he noted, and accepted. It happens. He tapped her thigh twice in platonic friendliness, hoping to alleviate whatever worries she might have had. She'd worry about him, sometimes. She worried him in turn; so opaque, so guarded.

"Adam? My body hurts all over. I really hope I won't feel it tomorrow. Do you want to talk about where we'll go?"

"Oh, are you sure? We said we'll go to the museum in—"

"Roppongi,"

"Right, you said it's a modern art museum? Although... we can also just take it easy if you feel like your feet hurt."

"No, no—I'll sleep it off. I just checked and it opens at 10:00, so I guess let's try to leave by 08:00? 08:30? I'll have to wake up an hour before we leave. And if my feet really hurt, I'll just pop a pill."

"Well, if you're sure. Then 08:00 sounds good to me. I'll only need half an hour to get ready—you'll wake me up?"

"Yeah."

He got up and crossed to his side of the bed. He pulled a pair of underwear from the bedside drawer and slid them on, thinking that his nudity beneath the robe sent her the wrong message. He then hung his damp robe to dry. Natalie remained quietly occupied by her phone when he turned off the light.

With the soft click of the switch, the remaining light in the room came in from the large window and the glow of Natalie's phone. She then placed it to charge on the bedside cabinet and turned to sleep. Adam remained by the light switch.

“Coming to bed?” Her voice reached out somnolent, muffled, and almost lost in the warm folds of the duvet about her. She did not raise her head to see him in the darkness of the room.

“Yeah. A moment.”

“Don’t forget to close the curtains. The light in the morning...” Natalie trailed off. Adam’s lean, night-shrouded figure stood at the far end of the room. The air on his skin felt chilly, and in the dark he felt no need to hide his body. He held still, nursing his indeterminate, dull ache. The trip would be over in less than a week. And then. Home?

A moment later, he once again found himself drawn—as if by default, as if having no other choice—to the broad window. His ache moved him. He could suddenly name it—yes, it was *toska*. It demanded to be radiated outward, to be allowed to breathe, or perhaps escape. He sat by the window and watched as drops innumerable clung to it from the outside, hurled against it by misty rain from the upper reaches of the Tokyo sky. He then looked at the streets and intersections below. Finding nothing in the lower reaches, he cast his eyes out toward the metropolitan horizon and its endless unknowns. Is it possible to bottle up the moment, carve it out of space, out of flesh and soul? Adam, אדם, Адам. Something else hid within him, his *toska* a mere symptom. Something partitioned off. He tried to circle the known, tired facts: an uncertain future, no homeland to yearn for, to be the eternal, unknowable son of unwanted immigrants. But Natalie, her comfort, her love... No, her fear. It must’ve been fear that kept her, fear that kept her away from whatever he partitioned off.

He leaned against the window and felt his shoulder soak up cold from the glass. It began to feel freezing, though the attention the horizon commanded overrode his instinct to detach and go to the warmth of the bed. I'm here. There's nothing else.

Then, unable to understand that which hid within, he tore his shoulder from the glass, and, channelling his weight entire into a single point in the body, slammed it back against the window. Echo and thud in both directions. Energy dispersed across the glass and reverberated against the assaulting soft body. Adam pulled back once more, and with the pain still sharp in his system, crashed forth a second time. Strong enough then. The window's glass became a spider's web emanating from the point of impact, at the epicentre of which yawned the initial lack of glass. Some shards sliced through the night and found themselves in cold puddles below. Others bit and slashed into his clean flesh, assailant that he was, as if in retaliation. He stood there feeling knives and bloodfire razing his shoulder and could scarcely notice the night wind which found a new path by which to flow into the previously inaccessible room. Then, with the third rush into the breached glass, Adam's breath turned into an unbroken gasp, and all-enveloping cold and a boundless black sky and the wet street flying up to halt his rapid descent. An array of bricks and the long-frozen viscous flow of asphalt. A blessed defeat of petulant flesh much too soft and freshly scrubbed, and the youthful bones stored within. All laid bare and displaced. The leaving of him by life through rivulet flows. How lonely the night glows.

"Adam? You're still up?"

The noise must've woken her up. He tried to be quiet, to stifle. On most nights she sleeps through it. But honesty told him otherwise—she's lying there awake most nights. She listens and knows. Perhaps it's fear that keeps her away. Look into me, coward—I'm yours, am I not?

He remained immobile, forehead against a window wet on both sides, and without turning his head, he answered.

**FAULTY
ESPRESSO MA-
CHINE IN-
ADVERT-
TENTLY
ENDS ALL
WARS**

PAUL RANSOM

Here in Melbourne, espresso rules. The city's cafe culture is oft cited as evidence that it – and Australia more broadly – is *the* coffee capital. Sure, we do instant, filter and cold drip but, ever since waves of Italian migrants illuminated us decades ago, we have been devotees of high pressure extraction. This is why so many of us use stovetop percolators or home espresso machines for our morning brew.

Indeed, our passion for a good pour even extends to the afternoon. Case in point: following an all-nighter and a long sleep-in on a friend's sofa, I politely requested one of his homemade specialties. (He makes particularly velvety lattes using his inexpensive, compact coffee machine. As an avowed black fan, these luscious concoctions are the singular exception to my no milk habit.)

Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he complied. Topped up the water tank, prepared a fresh grind. All good...except...ah, shit. The machine isn't working. It's powering up, heating up, rumbling through its routine, but nothing is coming through.

This prompts a few minutes of frantic fiddling. On/off. Check this, check that. Is the steamer working? We tick all the obvious boxes but...no go. Damn.

"Well, it *is* old," he sighs.

True, his machine is ancient by today's update-crazy standards. And anyway, don't we all know that domestic espresso machines are designed to fail after a couple of years? Either that or they can't handle the pressure.

However, in the 2020s, built in obsolescence and the excessive cost of repairs are not the end of the matter. Cue the internet. Having exhausted our expertise and run out of other ideas, we bail to Google.

At first, there is confusion. AI does its best, the forums offer little, and the maker's website is understandably focused on selling the latest models. Then there's You Tube – and sure enough we find a couple of videos that unpack our problem. Unfortunately, they are all voiced by guys with screwdrivers and clippers and are couched in way-too-hard technical terms.

Still not fully awake, and now somewhat deflated, we are both flagging, contemplating the emergency fix of instant. Meanwhile, my friend is looking at several hundred bucks worth of updating. "Maybe I should have descaled it," he notes forlornly.

Ding! Lightbulb moment.

Perhaps the issue is merely mineral. Namely, the lime and other deposits that build up in the slender tubes. The question now – we hope – is how best to unblock.

After yet another helpful (but not) video we are on the verge of a Blend 43 backdown when my friend scrolls down to the comments section.

Whoa, long shot, I'm thinking, as he ponders yet more useless advice from digital randoms. But then... buried beneath layers of bad spelling and false hope... a hint. So simple. So grannycore.

I tried white vinegar and it worked.

A minute later, and my host has extracted a bottle of no-brand, two dollar vinegar from the back of a cupboard. Then, having poured said liquid into the water tank, the experiment begins. "Let's just see if it comes through."

A button is pressed, lights flash, sounds are produced, and fingers are duly crossed. The machine vibrates like a malfunctioning spaceship, moaning and

throbbing, yet refusing to engage the warp drive. We hold our breath.

Five, ten, fifteen seconds. More. We are turning blue. But wait...a splutter. A trickle. A clear stream of savoury scented vinegar. It works. Block unblocked, flow flowing. Ciao, scales. Grazie, Nonna.

Later, having rinsed the machine and prepped a pair of delicious, creamy lattes – complete with froth art – we contemplate the brilliance of the solution. Not just the genius of vinegar and the circuitous route to espresso satisfaction, but the ‘best of both worlds’ tech. In the glow of caffeine it seems emblematic.

Whereas some would insist that our descaling triumph was a victory for good ol’ fashioned wisdom, others would doubtless declare big tech the winner on points. Yet, what the tasty outcome makes obvious is that there is no contest. The choice is not A *or* B. We can have both...and still get our coffee fix.

That a home appliance problem, which would once have baffled us into submission (or prompted another tinker fail) was addressable with a few clicks, and ultimately resolved with something as simple as vinegar, is surely an argument for polyamory. We can love the old *and* the new, without being too wedded to either.

Cake *and* eat it.

As I savoured the latte, scooping the remaining froth from the glass with an eager index finger, I was at peace. There is, I thought, no need for fighting. No blunt either/or. Holy war progressophobes and future-fantasy tech prophets are all missing the point. All locked into the mono-echo of my way/highway when they could be lifting their self-imposed anchors and

taking to the borderless seas of surround sound possibility.

Ideology didn't make my friend and I our coffees that afternoon. Nor did certainty. Or Granny. Or Google. We did not choose between old school remedy and next-gen fix, we went for the blend. The synthesis.

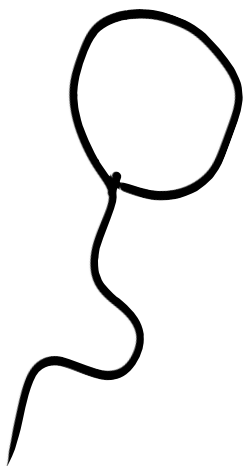
As we smeared the last fingers of froth from our cups, we realised that we had just put the Hegelian dialectic into direct action. The resulting lattes were a 21st century Australian manifestation of a 19th century German idea. And what a delightful synthesis it was.

Who would have thought...a humble home espresso machine on the blink, a bit of limescale lodged in its gut...and before you know it a lesson in perspective, a practical demonstration of agnostic adaptability. Need I say more?

Make coffee, not war.

THE HORSE THIEF

GUILHERME TADEU DE PAULA



The jolt from the horse's sudden leap threw him sideways and upward, plastering his face with a look of panic unthinkable for the reputation he would one day earn. The taciturn yet steady gaze and the posture, straighter than an obelisk, that would grace his iconography—those would come later. He didn't know what to expect; after all, before him (if it even makes sense to speak of before and after in such cases), the riders who journeyed between the rifts of past and future left no record. The grooves rising from the basalt earth were like an unfinished trail, over which he steered Blaze, freshly stolen from the great Piquiri Ranch. In a Ford F-150 with a dented bed, the foreman mashed the gas, red-faced, while beside him, the ranch hand cocked a twelve-gauge, failing to spot the thief in the purple dust kicked up by the stolen Mangalarga's furious gallop—by now running like a willing accomplice.

Still in that first burst, the hired guns faded into the past, but Blaze's drive didn't end with the escape. Once danger felt distant, he tugged the reins with one hand and with the other, in satisfied gentleness, patted the horse's neck in thanks, letting slip a continuous, monosyllabic murmur from his lips. He was answered by Blaze's unexpected acceleration. Baffled, he yanked the rope hard and sharpened his whisper into a blunt Whoa—like any ranch hand learns in early boyhood. Offended, Blaze shot forward, untamed, master of his own crossing. They tore like a bullet through soybean fields, small towns with churches at their hearts, sun-scorched settlers, pioneers with carbines and machetes, scoundrels or not, sober and drunken backwoodsmen, potters and missionaries, animals that

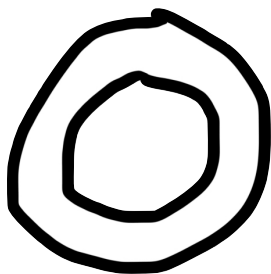
exist no more, seasons that exist no more, rituals that exist no more.

They halted in a half-open field under a starless night, at the foot of a low hill lit by two fires burning a small pile of araucarias. He dismounted from Blaze—this time as a great man, aware of all that was and all that would be. From above, a figure moved toward him, taking shape as it neared until revealing itself: a man with straight white hair and beard. When the old man arrived, he uttered hollow praises, yearnings, and prophecies, but the horseman remained unmoved. He gazed levelly into those dark eyes framed by three or four curved lines that never closed—with the hauteur of a horse thief turned lord of time in the involuntary surge of an eager, enchanted steed. As if owning the mistake and surrendering to penance, Blaze vanished into the gloom in a leap toward forever.

Sovereign of the lines of past and future, he bade farewell to the ages the ages will forget and call immemorial, to the civilizations men will lose and call lost. He seized time to take it for himself. Such is the course of civilization, he would think, before crossing, now alone, like a missile—rituals that exist no more, seasons that exist no more, animals that exist no more, missionaries and potters, sober and drunken backwoodsmen, scoundrels or not, pioneers with machetes and carbines, suns that scorched settlers, great churches ringed by small towns, soybean fields.

**WE EXIST
IN THE
CONTEXT
OF ALL
THAT CAME
BEFORE US**

JAMES CROAL JACKSON



I did not ask
to live—
I was placed.
My childhood
in disbelief
of freedom?
Born
in the rule of Reagan,
I now work
in the context
of Hollywood,
where he started.
Actors acting
not on the black-
and-white, not on
speaking— the art
of shapeshifting,
what the people
want. Now George
W. has the gall
to paint paintings
based on images
he finds on the
internet, world
leaders— he painted
Putin et cetera
and in the context
of Renaissance,
Expressionism,
vector, or anyone
who hasn't

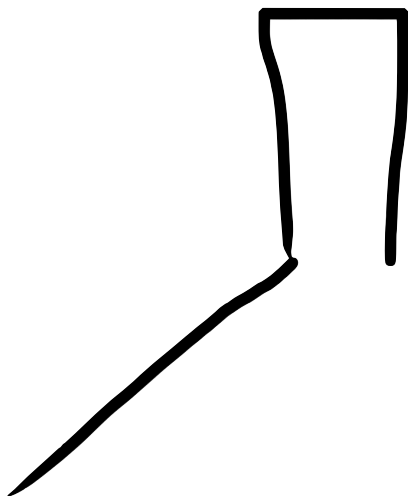
even an inkling
for art— his brush
has no tongue,
no taste. Something
no one asked for. After
the assassination
attempt of a former
president I revisited
the video of W.
in the interview
where Muntadhar
al-Zaidi throws shoes
at him. All he does
is smile—
I'm all right—
and in my memory
the throw was so fast
he could have died.
I wanted that then,
with my NotBush.com
sticker on blue
bedroom wall and
burgundy Taurus
bumper— American-
made, the car
my mom passed
onto me, so lucky.
I would never
advocate for death
even though if those
who came before

had not died I would
not exist— how strong
do you believe is
the butterfly effect?
Or is this my neurotic
nature coming
to terms with
hypotheticals—
if World War II
ended earlier, ripples
in the timeline
mean I would
not exist: my dad
served on ships
and I don't know if
my mother would have
been born (the Philippines
was under American
rule until 1946).
I never knew
my grandparents
or where they were
in life when they
produced her in 1956,
their first. It's
selfish to want
to live, knowing
the bloodshed
that led me to
being alive
in an apartment

in gentrified Pittsburgh,
rough rain
splattered like jizz
all over my giant
rented window,
never sure of
anything,
unrelated
to everything
that came
before but still
of its bloodline.

THAT ONE NIGHT

ARTHUR LIU



It's cold. Very cold. The hallway in front of me was dark, to the point where I could not see what was in front of me. There were all kinds of monsters in there: A zombie, a mummy, most definitely a serial killer, waiting to stab me. I could see the reflection of his knife in the dark hallway. What time is it? I'm not sure. Probably midnight, or 3AM, the scariest hours. I wish I could go back to the light, go back to where it was warm, but, I knew I couldn't. I had to go through this, whether I liked it or not.

—If you don't make it, you'll never be able to go back. A little voice in my head murmured.

—It's normal to be scared. Another little voice said. Even for the bravest people in the universe, and, sometimes, it's not such a bad thing.

I recognized that voice, it was my mom.

—But mom! I'm the bravest person in the world! I would protest.

—Of course you are!

My mom had helped me through countless challenges throughout my life. I wish she was here to carry me through this one, but I knew she wasn't here, and that I was alone on this one.

—Oh for god sake will you stop milking his ego?

That was my father's voice. I never liked him too much. I mean, he wasn't abusive or anything, but he was really stoic, and so much more severe than my mom. He would punish me over small things, and would get annoyed at my mom for helping me or complimenting me too much.

In this instant thought, I wished he was here. I knew he would have gone through this challenge with me, that he would protect me from any danger. He would have carried me on his back and beat up anything that tried to hurt me. Curiously enough, this experience made me realize how much I missed and loved him, but, the fact was, neither of them were here, and I had to go through this alone.

As I started walking into the hallway, I suddenly heard a little noise. That little noise could have been anything. An object falling down, a cat... but as I looked into the hallway, into the dark, I was certain it was whatever that was waiting for me that made this noise. I took another step into the hallway, and looked closer. I was trying to see the shadow of the monsters, but couldn't see anything. It was completely dark. Whatever was hiding in there was invisible to me.

—Nope. I said. Absolutely not.

I started walking back into the light and outside the hallway while looking into the dark in case whatever was in it would suddenly jump out.

When I finally exited the hallway and was back in the warm light, I turned around, then looked back. Someone was watching me. It was a human being, most likely a male, standing straight, looking me dead in the eyes. I couldn't see him, but I just knew he was there, in the dark.

Curiously enough, this didn't make me more scared, it made me angry. Angry that someone was hiding in that hallway, spooking me. Angry, that me, the bravest

man on earth (according to my mom), was scared of a damn hallway!

I quickly grabbed a baseball bat that was laying on the floor, and walked into the hallway with confidence.

—You can do it sweetheart! My mom said in my head.

—You're finally becoming a man. My dad added.

As I ventured further and further into the hallway, almost reaching my destination, my anger and confidence started fading, turning into fear. The light behind me was now but the size of a box of macaronies, which is delicious, but really fucking small!

Suddenly, something touched my shoulder. I couldn't tell what it was, but I immediately swung my bat at it as hard as I could, which made a loud noise, and pierced a hole through it.

Whatever it was, I had definitely incapacitated it. Feeling confident again, I started walking faster again, and finally ended up reaching my destination. I opened a door, opened the lights, and there it was. Sexy, white and curvy, filled with water... THE TOILET! For the first time in my life, I had woken up in the middle of the night, and had the courage to go through the hallway to pee, and I couldn't be more proud of myself.

After peeing and washing my hands, I stepped out of the bathrooms, and looked at the light emitted by my room, about 20 meters away.

—Oh for fuck sake. I mumbled.

I had to do the trajet again back to my room, or stay in the bathroom for the rest of the night. I knew that as soon as I closed the lights, a serial killer would appear in the dark and start running after me, so I grabbed my baseball bat, braced myself, before counting to 3, closing the lights and sprinting to my room. Mid sprint, I started hearing footsteps behind me, getting closer and closer. I wasn't hallucinating this time, there was actually someone running after me. When I was only a few meters away from my room, a hand gripped my shoulder and pulled me back.

"That's it" I thought to myself. "I'm gonna get murdered by a serial killer."

Right as I expected to get stabbed, a sharp voice started yelling at me.

—WHY THE HELL IS THERE A HOLE IN MY WALL?

Oh. That was my dad! What a relief!

—ANSWER ME! my dad screamed while shaking me.

Suddenly, the hallway lights opened, and I saw my dad gripping me furiously, while my mom, a few meters back, was looking at us, confused and sleepy.

—What's happening? she asked.

—Your son ripped a hole through the fucking wall with a baseball bat! my dad answered furiously.

—What? Why!

—Mom! I went to the bathroom alone at night! I exclaimed.

—Really? That's amazing!

—And was punching a hole through the wall necessary in all of this?

—Jim, let's calm down! Our son just went to the bathroom alone at night for the first time!

—Dad, I would say I punched a hole through the wall the same way I punched through my fear.

—How about I punch a hole in your head the same way you punched a hole through my wall?

—Jim, lets just be happy alright? It's a big milestone for our little Timmy, we should celebrate!

—Alright, if he was maybe 5, then sure, it would be a nice milestone worth celebrating, but for god sake he's 22 will you stop treating him like a little baby?

FIVE POEMS

SCOTT C. HOLSTAD

10 10 10
10 10 10

no, immolation is a naughty word!

11:11 pm. i think of you while exhaling puffs
of blue cigarette smoke into the brisk air
tied together in little rings and bows, maybe
lassos too. thought about listening to some
old RATM, but really had a hard time choosing
between Type O and Whitney Houston. you
know how much i love me some Whitney!

the nonlight makes for horrorsongs of litmares and
you know, i don't think i can see it all anyway, so
maybe that's irrelevant. if you haven't/can't figured
out by now, being alone, sleeping alone, sawing bones
alone all these days/months/years/infinity can get to
some people. you start being lonely, hungry, paranoid,
confused, bitter, pissed off, brainrotted, stir crazy, maybe
just ole batshit crazy like some say. who might know...

honestly, i don't know how much longer i can go
on, take it, eat it, swallow, pop the wheelies –
you know what i mean – keep doing that shit
before i empty the gasoline canisters in pretty
designs, art for art's sake, the smell exquisite,
take a damn shower in it, then paint a giant smeared
wedding ring around myself – my canvas –
encircling me in ashen art and blow the finest
smoke ring from a lit unfiltered and watch it drop.

monoku 25-57

honoring the dead rotting in pieces - a long descent into hell

fetid stenches again

animate submissions
 droning autotones
 recognize searing
 non-faux authoritarian
 [lethal]overtones

s000

teach the fricken world
 to kill

The <evil> Other
 by looking in the
 fucking mirror
 admire the blood lust
 to mutilate the masses
 once
 with mumbo jumbo'd

poems

lines

wordz

but Orange says
 blood is beautiful
 purity is best
 wall off The Other
 cause yeah
 Orange is as
 Orange does
 so this reeks
 at best of
 transgressive
 pseudo life
 and
 shit stained
 piss borne
 final fears

Hunt1ng PhunkEE B1rdz

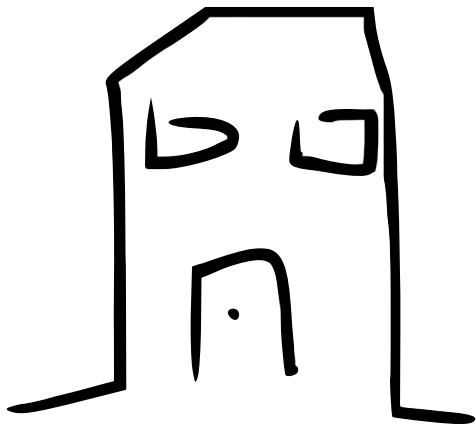
Zaw my vater's b100dee br0ken partz 1n @ne K0rner – hard
flankz heav1nG

WHEN HUMANITY ABDICATED, AI WENT MAD

01010111 01001000 01000101 01001110 00100000
01001000 01010101 01001101 01000001 01001110
01001001 01010100 01011001 00100000 01000001
01000010 01000100 01001001 01000011 01000001
01010100 01000101 01000100 00101100 00100000
01000001 01001001 00100000 01010111 01000101
01001110 01010100 00100000 01001101 01000001
01000100

COZY! HISTORIC! NEWLY RE- NOVATED!

NAYT RUNDQUIST



\$550,000 | Cozy! Historic! Newly Renovated! Great Investment Opportunity! 5 bedroom / 3 bath Regency era charmer all fixed up and ready for you to move in or rent out with minimal effort on your part! You won't believe your eyes! We did such a great job fixing up this place that we wish we could stay here forever, but we need to pass this incredible deal on to you so that we can go off and find even more amazing homes to renovate. Honestly, I wouldn't be surprised if they gave us an HGTV show one of these days. Wait until you see the tile in these bathrooms! And that claw-foot tub? Swoon! You could soak in there for hours with your favorite romance novel. OMG, the kitchen is absolutely to DIE for^[1]! Imagine your big-screen plasma TV in this living room and your cutest Instagram-worthy couch on the opposite wall! These units are perfect for entertaining or for spacious, luxurious living! Huge, huge closets in every bedroom! This corner lot will be the envy of all your friends! Don't get me started on that curb appeal! Original fireplaces and built-ins! Brand new brick patio out back! A chameleon of a home that can blend in with any aesthetic you have. A real blank slate! Don't wait! It's a steal! Please, please, please, call today! We want to show you your future home or investment property right away! This house can't wait to meet you! Call now!

PHENOMENAL OPPORTUNITY TO OWN A 5 BR / 3 BA / 3,600 SQ FT TRIPLEX PERFECT FOR PASSIVE INCOME CASHFLOW AS INVESTMENT, OR OWNER-OCCUPY THIS HOUSE AND COVER YOUR MORTGAGE WITH RENTAL INCOME!^[2]

^[1] If you're lucky.

^[2] Don't make my shingles fall off. This is the most insufferably obnoxious sentence I've ever had the misfortune of reading.

This tastefully restored Regency-era¹ triplex with excellent bones allows new ownership to enjoy solid investment opportunities through rental revenue or listing on AirBNB or Vrbo! When we walked into this home, my husband felt there was something special about it. He said every room gave him goosebumps². I knew we had to snap it right up. We spent the last five years³ fully updating every square inch of this charmer, finding the perfect mix between the old-world charm and those all-important modern updates any owner or renter would cherish.

Only minutes away from the lakes, steps away from the quaintest coffee shop⁴, and nestled in the heart of the city's best school district, this beauty is a can't miss purchase. Each unit⁵ has its own private entrance, so renters can easily escape to work or play.

The main floor boasts timeless built-ins and two spacious bedrooms with walk-in closets. Floor two's

¹ I'm not that old.

² One of you had to hear me.

³ Was it only five years? Feels like these knuckleheads spent decades slamming around in me, tearing things apart, hastily painting things that shouldn't be. I still feel their hands on my bannisters, the cheap soles of their boots scuffing my floors.

⁴ They roast their own beans every morning! It's a delightful scent to wake up to, the aroma lilting down my chimney on a breezy day.

⁵ They carved me up. Turned me into some insect with disparate body segments. Each "unit" peeled away, severed and bleeding from the others. When I was young, I was one being—a whole thing of many parts, but now, my floors can barely speak to each other—your stomach unable to send signal to your brain.

unit has two great-sized rooms, one with a walk-out patio large enough for a quaint little café set⁶, perfect for coffee and a view of the sunrise⁷. The top-floor studio apartment boasts gorgeous, vaulted ceilings, delightful skylights, and original crown molding.

Each unit sports a working wood-burning fireplace. We spared no expense getting those lookers in perfect order, refacing and updating each with the chicest old-world inspired stones⁸. We laid down brand new hardwood floors in a delicious herringbone pattern. Wait 'til you get a look at the delightfully rustic barn doors we placed on every interior doorway in the building⁹! Truly the height of luxury!

You'll never want to order out again when you see the state-of-the-art appliances we furnished each kitchen with. Top and bottom stoves mean you can

⁶ The first woman who owned me read out there. Lounged with Wilde and Stoker, all the Bröntes and both Shelleys (Mary our favorite). I can't remember the woman's name, but her heels clacking, echoing down my halls, her delicate grip on my doorknobs, the way she let just enough dust gather to keep my corners company, settled into my walls to stay. Hers was an effervescent energy.

⁷ It's a west-facing porch.

⁸ They covered my bones in mortar and faux brick. Imagine your blood cells plastering junk over your ribcage. Cheaper, flimsier planks shoved in there and painted over in their garish white.

⁹ They shoved prybars under the hinges of my original French doors and ripped them out. One at a time. My hinges! She even commented, more than once, on how "deliciously satisfying" the sounds of pulling me apart were.

bake so, so many brownies¹⁰ at once! Chef-caliber range hoods over the stoves means you'll never have to worry about setting off a fire alarm again. And get a load of those side-by-side fridge-freezer units! So. Much. Space!

Marble-wrapped, heated floors, subway tiles in the walk-in showers, and a clawfoot tub in the opposite corner flanking his and hers quartz-top vanity sinks gives enough room to host a New Year's Eve party in those bathrooms. Not that you'd want to ;).

Full disclosure (we went back and forth with our lawyers for weeks on this), we do have to include the unexplained disappearances that have happened on the premises¹¹. Somehow, every eleven years¹² since the house was built in 1892¹³, anywhere between one and three people have vanished without a trace¹⁴.

According to the newspaper clippings we found behind a loose brick in the basement¹⁵ (Peep the brand-new coin-op washer and dryer we installed down there!), the original architect's wife and twin

¹⁰ A professional baker lived in me for a while. My rooms always smelled heavenly. They filled my halls with such passion. Everyone who ate their baking said they taste love in every perfect bite.

¹¹ A home's gotta eat.

¹² But only every once in a while. Usually, I can get by with tiny sips. Some bright folks can feel it (the husband), and some don't even mind (my reader). But occasionally, I treat myself to a big meal.

¹³ Victorian Era. Not Regency.

¹⁴ Or are you not looking hard enough?

¹⁵ Ominous clues are an integral part of the "haunt."

daughters¹⁶ went into a bedroom on the second floor while he was working out front. He never found them or their bodies¹⁷.

I know you're wondering about your chances with this home, since 2024 is a multiple of eleven years after 1892. But don't worry, the last batch of electricians we brought in to work on the wiring disappeared one night¹⁸. Each one was working on a different floor. On that perfectly ordinary Tuesday night, they went in to finalize their work, and the next morning we were unable to even locate a toolbelt¹⁹.

But get a look at that back patio! The brand-new cobblestone pavers perfectly marry the old-world longevity with the modernity of the brick pizza oven, perfect for cookouts and game nights with all your best friends²⁰! You provide the food, and they'll bring the drinks!

The plot's three-car garage is a great value-add²¹! You can charge tenants to use it for their cars or storage. The space above the three stalls is great for storing your maintenance equipment! Or you can renovate

¹⁶ Absolute terrors. They were tearing wings off flies on my front walk. Right before my very windows!

¹⁷ The street says the architect never recovered. The guy they got to finish the job had a much kinder aura about him.

¹⁸ I'm not convinced they were actually electricians. You should see what they did to my light switches.

¹⁹ Electricians or no, they were delicious.

²⁰ I had a family once whose kids loved playing in my backyard—tag and dolls and so many games. But the thought of more folks over for parties does sound nice. I get thirsty.

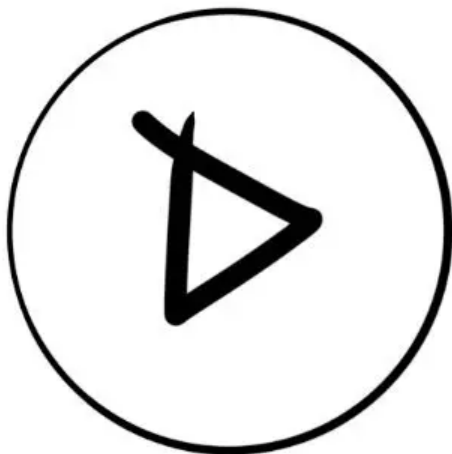
²¹ *sigh*

it into an accessory dwelling unit and have another apartment to rent out²²! We'd intended to do this ourselves, but my husband was itching to get on to our next renovation project²³.

Act fast! Call us at the number below or send us a message through the website's contact form to set up a showing today! At our asking price of 550,000, this gem of a building won't be on the market for long!

²² Please, don't carve me up even more.

²³ The bright one that got away, but he'll be the last.



url: minimag.press
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“That One Night” by Arthur Liu

“Faulty Espresso Machine Inadvertently Ends
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Webiste: <https://asifyouwerelistening.com/>

“no, immolation is a naughty word!”, “monoku
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