

# THE MARTIAN CHRONICLE

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AUGUST 2018





# **The Martian Chronicle**

Journal of Post-Modern Creative Writing

The Martian Chronicle - August 2018

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# The Martian Chronicle

**Editor in Chief**      Josh Gerst

**Publisher**          Austin Shay

## About The Martian Chronicle:

Created by Joshua Gerst and brought to life by Austin Shay; this Summer-only sister-segment of The Paragon Journal will welcome weirder, wild, wider varieties of unique creative writing and visual arts. Scouting specifically for Post-modernism, we are looking for artists, painters, poets, critiques, and photographers who wish to gain a strong voice in a medium whose resonance is not being heard. Many topics, subjects, and project productions are not reverberating among millennial, mainstream media. The Chronicle seeks to reflectively represent and publish the under-represented, ambiguously defined as, any HUMAN who feels ‘Alien’, or has been treated as an outsider for following forces of the heart and pursuing purpose. Fellow ‘Martians’ are welcome to bring any post-modern mediums, styles, topics, or subjects to our attention for featured focus in the Chronicle annually and are also encouraged to submit to the Paragon Journal.



**M A R T I A N**  
CHRONICLE





# LETTER FROM *the editor*

We are pleased to present the second issue of *The Martian Chronicle*. As the summer sister segment of *The Paragon Journal*, we are proud to publish some of the most uniquely attuned writers and artists of our post-modern times. Submissions showcased, span a broad range of the Humanities spectrum. Explore the diverse contributions and enjoy both local creators and authors from around the planet.

Our staff at the Paragon Press is dedicated to the respect of all creatures in the known universes. We boldly seek out first contact with emerging talent of all genres, especially those exhibiting expression and aesthetics that are unusual, strange, or 'Martian' to mainstream, popular society.

A thousand thank-yous and praise to infinity and beyond for Austin Shay's continued dedication and endless efforts. Another thousand thank-yous to our wonderful interns as they conclude their summer program and complete their publication of *Kōan*, the newest addition to the Paragon Press. Special thanks to Ashley Foy for support during production. We were wearily overwhelmed and pleasantly surprised by the amount of chronicle submissions we received this year, which made selecting works quite difficult!

We will wander to wonder willingly, with wild wading waters. Discontinuing any further futile resistance, enjoy issue 002.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joshua E. Gerst". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J'.

Joshua Gerst





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# AT TIMES WE BOTH FIGHT EACH OTHER.

WRITTEN  
BY **THALIA LONGCHAMP**

I am stronger than allowing him to kill me so he retreats when I fight back.

But sometimes, usually when I am not watching, he hunts me from behind, lurks, calculates, stalks me, then pounces and I am ambuscaded on ground

Him on top, hands around my throat.

Only coldness and black in his eyes.

He has me pinned still, teeth bore. Penetrating me with his wild gaze. "Should I kill her?"

I am on the ground looking up at him- helpless.

All I can do is look back up at him and stare back with peace. Innocence. Virginity of the heart.

Almost teary eyed. I take my hand and put it up to his face. Any sudden movement that startles him, and that could be my life.

I gently, gently graze my hand over his eyes. Trying to calm them. Ease them.  
hush them.

slowly. Very slowly, he comes to.

He releases his grip from around my throat. I rise, carefully, steadily, and he lets me.

Our eyes still locked in on one another.

I feel his heartbeat again.

The coldness from his gaze starts to dissipate. I watch him as he transitions back to make sure that he is in fact

Back. That my love, the glimmers of a human being, is back.

We are both sitting up,

Eyes affixed on one another.

I hear his silence, a whispered,

Broken child-like, "I'm sorry."

Of course I forgive him. Of course.

Of course. How could I not?

Do I really believe that he'd kill me? How could someone as

Innocent and pure as me, not be able to tame a beast?

Though I am fresh meat, I still have a roar. It's loud, and it subdues him.

For now. It subdues him

# SHAPED LIKE A SWAN ASLEEP

WRITTEN  
BY **LAURA ARCINIEGA**

Some decades ago in the western desert, a great blue heron and a wandering albatross each laid their first egg. The eggs seemed normal for their kind, but they didn't hatch. They grew. When the eggs were five feet wide and eight feet long, they cracked open and adult giant swans emerged. The heron's child was a pen and the albatross' child was a cob; both were kobicha. Their kind hadn't been seen since the Middle Pleistocene, so all the other birds were surprised.

One day, the pen and the cob met in Jurupa. They became a mating pair, but something felt wrong to the pen.

"I want to go home," the pen said.

"We are home," answered the cob.

"No." The pen frowned. "I thought home was a desert, but there was another home, before."

"Before what?"

"I don't know."

"What kind of place was it?"

"I think it was in a valley."

The pair flew east to the headwaters of the Cahaba. It was in the greenest valley they had ever seen, but it was not home. They left after five years. The pen wanted to look for a place near a lake.

"Maybe home was in the north," the cob said, but nothing could comfort his wife.

"Maybe," she said. Her eyes looked dead.

When they got there, they settled in Nojoshing, which was on the edge of a vast inland sea. The cob thought, 'There is enough water to fill her heart here.' The pen thought, 'It's still not right.' She tried to make the best of it.

After two years, they had a cygnet. The pen gave birth to him, as all *Cygnus falconeri* had done in the Middle Pleistocene. They named him, and cherished him.

"Aren't you happy now?" asked the cob one day while their cygnet was sleeping.

The pen didn't know what to say. The answer was yes and no. After a moment she said, "We're closer now, but this is still not home."

"Yes. It is."

'Why bother?' the pen wondered. She had been feeling that home was a rock on a peninsula.

The next year, the wedge flew east again. In Pamrapo, everything was different—there was only a patch of grass and a bay so small you could see across it. The pen and the cob were both depressed for a long time. The cygnet, though, soon forgot Nojoshing and thought of Pamrapo as the home he loved.

At the end of two years, the cob had almost had enough. "When are you going to change?" he demanded.

The pen looked away. "Never."

"What do you want?"

"Nothing."

*"What do you want?!"*

"I want to leave. But I want you two to come with me."

“Where?”

“South. I’m not sure exactly where. A desert. Or a valley. Somewhere on a lake. Or a rock on a peninsula.”

“We’ve been all those places and you said they weren’t right.”

“I know.”

The cob ignored the pen’s request for as long as he could, but he knew that she’d go alone if he said no. So they went.

The wedge flew every day for weeks, searching for something they’d never seen before. The cygnet was still young enough that he thought this was an adventure; he didn’t realize they were leaving the home he loved forever.

The pen did not look down much as she flew. She would know the place by feel when she got there.

After passing over forests, mountains, plains, rivers, and deserts, the wedge began to lose the will to go on. They were all thinner now, especially the pen. But her eyes didn’t look dead anymore; for the first time in years, they looked alive.

One day they entered a green, rocky valley surrounded by foothills, and farther away, snowy mountains. In the center of the valley was a lake. They’d flown over lakes before, but this time the pen felt her heart palpitate. She flew faster. The cob and the cygnet struggled to keep up, but she hardly noticed.

As they got closer to the lake, the pen saw that there were islands dotting it. She glanced at them but felt nothing.

Then the cygnet cried, “Look at *that* one!”

And she looked: near the southern end of the lake was an island five kobicha miles square, shaped like a swan asleep. The pen dove before she could understand.

By the time the pen reached the island, the cob knew where they were.

The pen landed and looked around. Giant swans were everywhere. There were so many of them that their feathers, the deep brown of kelp tea, made the island seem like one cosmic *Cygnus falconeri* from the sky.

As the cob and the cygnet landed, the pen asked a passing swan, “What is this city called?”

“Quetzalcanauhtlan, of course.”

The pen turned to her husband and son. “We’re home.”







# THE MODEL

WRITTEN  
BY **PANAGIOTIS RENIERIS**

Patrick was not the athletic type – in fact he hadn't had any exercise since high school, when Mr. Griffin would assign him vegetable nicknames unless he made the two mile mark on time – so, running up Madison all the way from the 38th took a generous toll on him.

It didn't matter; this was too important. However, standing breathless and half-blinded by the colorful flies that floated around his visual field wouldn't make the doorman of 111 East 88th street welcome him inside the building. The young man stood majestically in his meticulously ironed buttoned-up doorman-suit and waited patiently for Patrick to catch his breath and announce his business; Patrick was gasping for air, clasping a bloated old leather bag stuffed mercilessly with papers, pens, rulers, two notebooks, a holoscreen, and a plastic bag of dried tomatoes.

"Two... two... two..." Patrick muttered before tumbling over, right in the middle of the sidewalk. Monroe picked him up almost immediately, which made him fully collapse, and then dragged him by the shoulders to the lobby, letting him fall gently on the tiled floor, completely unconscious. He then stared at him for signs of life, without much interest, as if this has occurred a few times already in his career as a doorman.

Thirty seconds later Patrick opened his eyes: "Apartment 2-E" he said. "Please."

"Dr. Smith is not in," said Monroe who seemed amused but uninterested.

"Do you have the keys to his apartment? You must have the keys to his apartment."

"And who are you Sir?"

"I'm... Patrick Smith, his nephew," he said and sat up fixing his round fretless glasses atop his irregular nose with trembling fingers. He was drenched in sweat, and constantly blinked trying to avoid getting a salty drop in his eye.

"I'll relay a message if you'd like, but Sir, perhaps you should see a doctor right away, you look awfully pale. Would you like me to call an ambulance?"

"No, please, just call my uncle. Can you believe my battery is dead? In this day and age, I've actually managed to run out of juice."

"Happens to me all the time," said Monroe, who actually didn't own a phone, not since word got out that they emitted feminizing radiation from their supercharged batteries. 'Who cares about charging once every six months if my honey turns to butter', he thought. Then he went to the concierge desk and waved to bring up the holopad. The virtual dialer, useless as ever, emerged, and he said "Dr Smith" to it. It rang several times, but there was no answer. "I suppose he – what the hell?"

Patrick was gone. He flew up the stairs the second Monroe looked the other way. He opened 2-E's door with ease, went inside, and locked it behind him. He didn't have much time, but all he needed was five minutes – he knew exactly where the formula was – his uncle never tidied up, he didn't even pick up the stem cell facial reconstruction fliers from the floor of his doorway. He went through the dark corridor – burnt xenon bulbs since forever – straight into the kitchen, right over the fruit-to-vitamin-pill converter; that's where he had left it some two months ago – or so the diary indicated. It should be there.

But it wasn't. There were pages upon pages of calculations, diagrams, confabulations of ideas transformed into numbers and figures, but not the formula. "Fear is the door, knowledge is the key" said Patrick to



himself, and kept repeating the mantra his father had taught him, in order to calm down and think, think, think! Had he moved the formula, where would he put it? If it weren't for the preexisting lack of any kind of order, he'd be making a huge mess as he shuffled through every piece of paper he could get his hands on, all the way from the incubator manuals to the still-wrapped-in-plastic magazines in the bathroom; he only read the covers, so he never actually unwrapped any of them. In fact, having done that for decades, there was a small treasure of periodicals and other small publications, still untouched by time, inside their vacuum dust-repelling bags. But that was not the time for this – in fact, there was no time for anything. The formula was nowhere to be found.

Monroe was about to use his key to enter the apartment, when Patrick opened it and stepped out, mocked him with a smile, and ran back down the stairs.

Once he was outside the building he looked up and down 88th street, pondering. This wasn't part of his plan – not even a little bit. Everything was going to hell, and fast. Before he could make a reasonable decision Monroe's shouts and pleas to stay and see a doctor forced him to move – further uptown it is; to Mt Sinai Hospital – find Mrs. Smith, his uncle's wife, who was an administrative clerk, and wouldn't recognize him looking like this, but maybe, who knows...

As he approached the old hospital, now used solely for genetic reconfiguration of criminals, psychopaths, and other societal trash, he saw the blue and red rotating lights of five or six police cars swarming towards the main entrance.

Among them was a black federal car, clearly transferring a Voyeur. This commotion wasn't for him, that's for sure, since he hadn't gone in yet, or... or maybe he had, and this was a closed loop out of which he'd never get unless he managed to outrun himself, and change the course of events. He browsed through the diary. 'This is unsolvable,' he thought, and put it back in the bag.

He stopped two blocks from the hospital, and looked around for cameras, counting at least fifteen. 'There should be a blind spot', he figured, 'there's always a blind spot; I just have to find it.'

And there it was, inside the abandoned florist shop on the corner of Madison and 101st street.

He stepped over the broken glass and hid behind the ripped lead radioprotective drapes that hung loosely from the ceiling, looking outside at the police gathering. If his suspicion was correct, they should be dragging his older self out of the crowded front door any second now. He put his bag on the floor and fumbled for his diary once more – he looked for today's date, April 22nd, 2048. A couple of sweat drops fell on the page creating smudges of ink. "Goddamn antiquities, goddamn" he shouted to no one. He went back a few days then forward a couple more – nothing about today being the day he was captured. Yet the Voyeur was there already – how could this be? 'I must be going crazy', he thought. It was a well-known fact after all that repeated entries into the same virtual environment could cause serious disorientation, even hallucinations or permanent psychosis.

Hence the Voyeur department – a fraction of virtual police that was specifically assigned to stopping the creation of closed loops in any system. An immensely capable group of A.I. that could cross any system with ease, find and mend backdoors, eradicate time-holes, and practically halt any effort for change to happen – including the creation of a destructive singularity.

Only Patrick, he knew very well that this was not a regular Voyeur, and he wasn't after any regular looper – he was looking for him, specifically.

"Hey!" he heard from behind him.

"Uncle Smith!"

“Please don’t call me that...”

“What are you doing here?”

“What are you doing here?”

“Looking for you of course – where’s the formula?”

“Somewhere safe.”

“No, no! We don’t want it safe, we want it destroyed!”

“You must be losing your mind Patrick... He – and pointed at the Voyeur – wants it destroyed. We want it hidden and safe.”

“I swear to God, I’ll rip your throat out with my bare hands if you don’t tell me where it is,” Patrick said as he reached for Dr Smith’s neck, his glasses slipping off his nose again, almost falling off his face.

“And what exactly will that accomplish?” Dr Smith screeched through Patrick’s clawing grip. “No matter if you destroy it. It will always be right here,” he said and pointed at Patrick’s head. “You can keep killing us; the Model will forever recur.” Patrick gave up and sat down exhausted. “There’s only one way and you know it. And he’s right there...” he said with a smile on his face, pointing again towards the Voyeur.

The tall, skinny, opaquely outlined man in his black suit and suede shoes, stood straight up below his hat that was covering his tilted face, scanning the area calmly, as if the noise from the twenty or so armed officers, their cars, the sirens, and the frightened staff running out of the building didn’t reach him. He slowly turned towards the flower shop where both Patricks hid some three hundred feet away, and lifted his fleshless finger pointing straight at them.

“He made us... run!” screamed Dr Smith. He looked around – he was alone. ‘Why the little bastard...’ he said, and smiled. The Voyeur started to walk with no rush towards him. Dr Smith picked up the overfilled bag Patrick had left behind, and tried to escape from the back, but the door was bricked. He returned to the main room – his only way out was through the front window. But the Voyeur was already there, standing between him and the blinding sun that rained light on the broken glass and the destroyed drapes.

“Hello Dr Smith. Long time no see,” he said in his ghostly voice, his hat still covering his face. “Come on, let me help you out.” He held out his hand, and Dr Smith surrendered.

After two days, which he spent inside an empty transparent cube that stood in the middle of a seemingly endless warehouse, Dr Smith saw him again, in those same clothes and motions. He stood two feet from the wall, looking down on the floor, until Dr Smith spoke first.

“You will never find it.”

The Voyeur took a few steps back and sat in a chair that had just appeared out of thin air – an unnecessary show of power. He was in the shadows, except for his suede shoes that peered in the circle of light surrounding Dr Smith’s prison.

“Why do you think you are here, Dr Smith?”

“I’m not talking to you. You’re a traitor.”

“Am I really? What makes you say that?”

“You want power that no one should have.”

“Now, this is probably the first accurate thing you’ve said since you opened your mouth. The problem is, I still don’t think you know why you are here. I’m not looking for the formula. I already have the formula.

The Model has been in action for over two hundred years, or... will be, starting... let me see... starting a couple of hours from now. The nature of my quest is entirely different.”

“You’re lying.”

“Hardly ever the man sitting outside the cell has to lie, we have to agree on that. Do you even know where you are? Let me enlighten you. This is probably the most sophisticated interrogation system the world has ever seen. Your body is currently in stasis. This, everything you see, is absolutely fake, a mirage, a reality superimposed to reality – a dream, per se. Kudos on overcoming that cockroach fear of yours, by the way. I warned them about overusing that particular weakness. Humans can get used to anything.” Dr Smith was starting to get confused, dizzy, and thirsty. “So here I am trying to get to know you a little better in order to find the one thing that will make you want to help me. Because unlike them, I do not believe in extraction – I believe in cooperation.” Every now and then his bony fingers would pop into the light, along with some smoke from an invisible cigarette.

“You don’t believe in anything.”

“Yet, I do. What I don’t believe in is that the Model is flawless. I believe you’ve made a mistake. Some Patricks want it destroyed, and you want it as it is. I want neither – I want it fixed.”

Patrick laughed. “Then you don’t have the formula. The Model is flawless.”

“I assure you I have the exact formula you created, to the last dot. But I think you deliberately placed a, let’s call it, a dent in it. Maybe not you, maybe your subconscious, but still... I need the fix – and let me elaborate: the Model will be put into action in the next two hours. No one will see that it is flawed. In the real world, you’re missing, or dead. Its effects will be soon universal. Everyone will bow to its power and every single decision will be made based on that. The sound ‘trade-off’ will be every baby’s first words for eons. So, given that you have inserted a flaw in it, let me return the compliment: Patrick Smith, you may have not betrayed yourself, but you betrayed everyone else for generations to come.” Then he stood up and walked further into the darkness. “Don’t worry about the other Smiths, the ones trying to destroy it – they’ve all evaporated by now. Well... I exaggerated a bit – let’s just say they’re under control.”

Dr Smith had to think fast. “Wait... who are you?” The Voyeur turned slowly towards the transparent cube, lifting his hat, letting Dr Smith take a long hard look at the man who appeared to be none else than another Dr Smith. “No, that is impossible.”

“You know it is not.”

“Is this...?”

“Finally you get it. Yes, this – and he pointed to himself – is you trying to figure out how I – and he pointed to Dr Smith – am planning to stop myself. Funny, isn’t it?”

“Am I close enough?”

“You are very close. But there’s a problem, and you just can’t figure it out. Still, you’re too paranoid about sharing any of this with anyone else, to ask for help, to share credit. The Model works on small scale, it also works on large and very large scale. But once it is used without interruption for a few hundred years, all simulations predict it will fail, and in a very bloody way.”

“So... I’ve created this environment to...”

“Fight yourself, you’re absolutely right. I’m not the bad guy here – you are. You are the one willing to release a knowingly bad formula that will eventually bring chaos upon the world, in exchange for fame, and power.”

“No... it can't be.”

“Yes... you keep saying that... over and over again. Had you not believed so deeply that you are after all a good person, this would be over.”

“Let me out.”

“As you wish...”

The Voyeur walked away. Suddenly the cell's walls disappeared and Dr Smith stood in the middle of the empty warehouse with absolutely nothing around him but endless concrete walls. ‘Fear is the door, knowledge is the key’ he kept repeating to himself. Far ahead he saw some light that could be coming through a door – he did the logical thing, and walked towards it, but no matter how far he walked, the light seemed to be moving further away. Then out of the blackness came several men, looking just like him; some were younger, others were older. A few looked healthy, but most of them were exhausted, powerless and sick. Where these remnants of his multiple entries to this virtual reality? They could be, but then again, anything was possible, except retaining a measure of truthfulness and accuracy when so deep in VR. He had to focus. That was his last hope – fear is the door, knowledge is the key.

“Hey – who are you? What do you want from me? Hey, stop! Please, I beg of you, stop!” Twenty, maybe more, Dr Smiths attacked him violently tearing him to pieces, but there was no blood. Every time a limb would come off only colorful pixels would disperse in the air. Once they were done with him, they turned on each other, ripping one another's heads off, biting, punching, and breaking their bones, sprinkling colors and measurements all around.

After fifteen or so minutes, the Voyeur reappeared, and all the surviving Smiths crawled away from him in fear, back into the surrounding nothingness. He walked slowly through the disassembled bodies, all the way up to the glass cage. In it stood Patrick Smith.

“Like I said – they are under control. My control. You see... this can go on forever. Or, I can make it feel like forever. But is this what you really want?” Patrick looked at the destroyed copies of himself. “Alright – I'm glad we finally came to some common ground. Maybe we can build something from here. What do you say we change the environment a bit? I realize this gives me status points, but I must admit I prefer less conspicuous surroundings. I want to be friends.”

Just like that the two men were sitting on the beach by the ocean. There were children playing in the distance, building castles, flying kites, and mothers preparing picnic meals. The waves gently reached their bare feet, and the Voyeur wasn't wearing his hat.

“I feel like I've lost purpose,” said Patrick.

“I know how you feel,” said the Voyeur, as he gazed persistently upon the children. “When I look at them I think of you – of us.” Then he went silent for a while. Behind them the sun descended slowly, painting the sand orange, and the ocean purple.

“I don't know what the mistake is. I've been over it a million times.”

“So, it needs to be destroyed. I guess the other Smiths had it right.”

“I can't do it. I can't kill myself. You can't kill me either, and I know it.”

“You may be wrong about that.”

“It will save hundreds of thousands of lives,” said Patrick.

“It will also destroy everything. In the long run.”

“Maybe things will change by then. Maybe humanity will come up with another model, another equation that doesn’t require trade-offs. Though... it is ingenious.”

“This is no time to gloat.”

“Well, I can gloat a little bit before I die.”

“I guess you’re right.”

“So, now what Mr. Voyeur?”

“Together I suppose...”

Both men pulled weapons and pointed them at each other’s heads. They smiled gently. The Voyeur kept looking at two particular kids, probably brother and sister. They only had one shovel and they both needed it for whatever it was they were making; the girl was building a castle it seemed, and the boy was digging a long moat.

Let me go first, said the boy.

No, it’s my shovel.

So?

So, I’m not giving to you. Mom! Patrick is trying to take my shovel.

I’m only going to use it for a second.

I said, no!

You are such a bitch!

Mom! Patrick is calling me a filthy word!

Yeah, do what you always do. Tell on me...

Honey, why don’t you trade the shovel for something else?

But I don’t want anything; I just want the shovel.

Well unless you guys figure something out, I’m taking it away from the both of you. I’m going to count to ten. One, two, three, four... five... six...

“Seven... eight... nine... t – ”













# CUBISM DAY

WRITTEN  
BY **MELINDA JANE – THE POET MJ**

Tea Towels cluttered like a vine rake on the oven's arm  
Lollipop lines caramel, wasp green, alarm red, mellow yellow  
Bunched in maddening haste, like crinkled cut chips  
Wet from drying all morning all manual activities involved.

You are on the road pushing the pram thru the streets of life  
What will your little fella become  
What will be your next career move  
Your feet and pram wheels motion forth  
Like an algorithm of hope  
Push on past the grass path and rocky gravel and see  
See the sky of hope, see the clouds of wisdom  
See the light of dawn and smell the inches of rain coming.

This am  
Beautiful grey clouds and cows with bruised eyes  
Mad Bulls to kill you and a stare down between you and Bull  
He flinched first  
And birds and sky and smell of sweet grass  
A feather found for the collection.

Slow Internet like a desert storm of frustration  
No mobile connection maddening lets dam  
The sudden get paused for slower bio rhymes and finding  
A day, many days not connected  
An awkward blessing that only a fool could not uncover.

Hat on chair with colours of lollipop tea towels  
Cooling on the edge  
Wanting, waiting to be useful  
Handled with fine, slender fingers  
That are her fathers  
A blessing handed down by genes

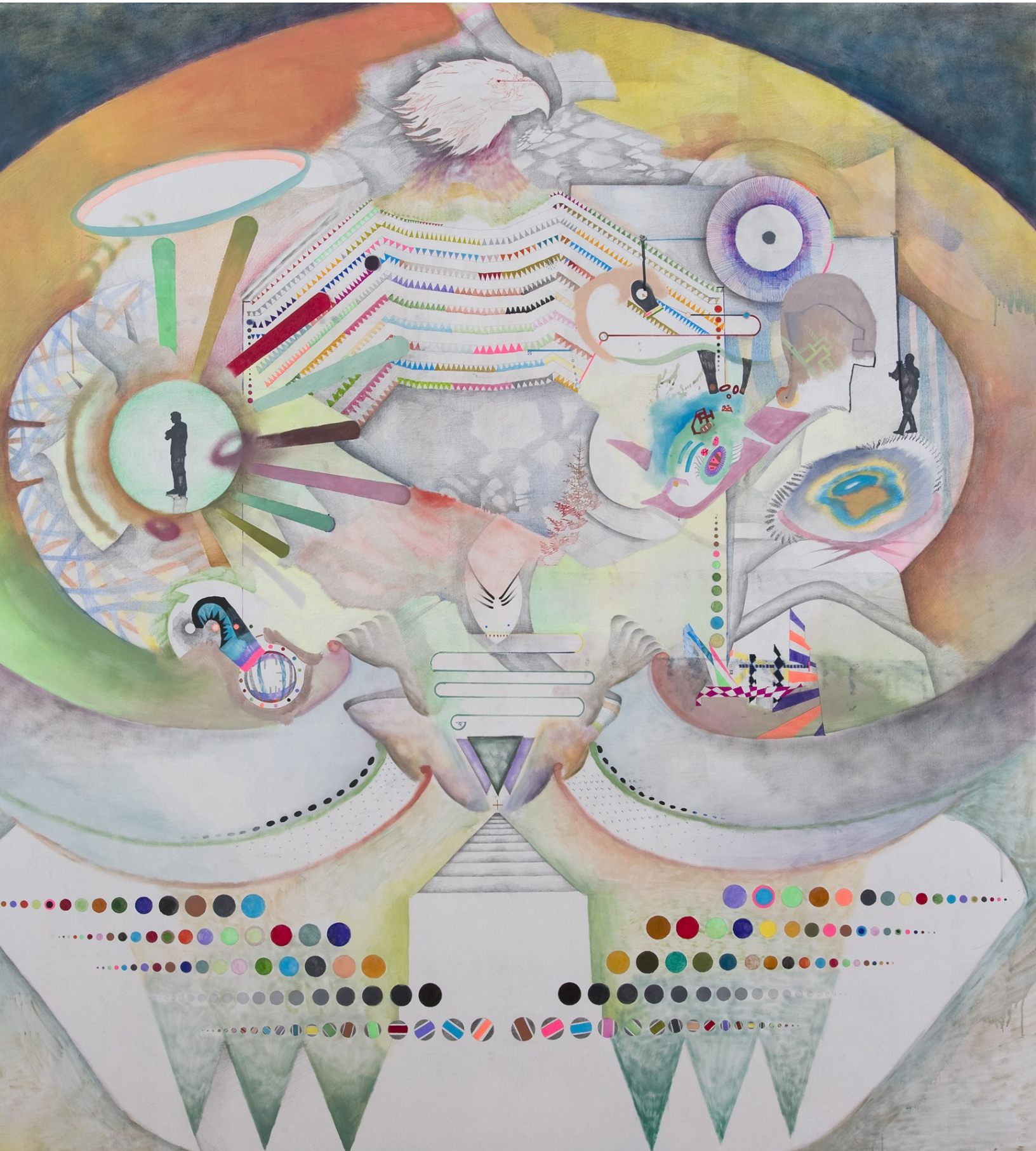
The close knowing that stopped with these hands  
No more generations to line up  
Hold each other's hands and say  
See, see we are of this clan.

Call me out sweet tempered life  
Charm me with your vice and  
Carry me thru to the very next day  
And pray for no sad tears of rain on my soul  
Happy, peaceful vibes  
One with the pain and gone fly to your side  
Oh tender aid, listening to my woes  
Then branching out shedding thought for fun  
And oh so Tender One have fun with me  
Sitting high up in a tree  
Like satellite Birdie's in our nest of rest and view  
Viewing our kingdom to come.

Gamblers and horses and ramblers  
All snorting their race track fix  
Which Gee-gee will be in first  
Second or third or fourth and after that no matter  
Ride like the bush fire, stirrup up laden Jockey  
Cool on the heels, on each other's steel toes  
Fast pace like this ransoms life of AI  
All intruding to be first in place.  
Veins and all blood in the courage  
of the horse, the Maker knew when  
Crafting your rump, hinds, wither, mane, hooves  
Soft tender eyes full of all haste and fear  
Courage to win over man's dominion  
In worship between wild or trace on your back  
With yokes of binding and whips  
Still your form and creation under burden cries with glory  
O' thy beauty of line sight in gallop  
all limbs lift off  
No trace of earth, you steed of heaven.  
Feather, feather slightly flutter in transition



Falling far from your home  
Left the bird from which you thither  
To the ground from the sky  
Flutter, flitter single wing till all say goodbye.



# A SETTLED MATTER

WRITTEN  
BY **STANLEY TOLEDO**

## Char act er s

Mr. Keith - official #1

Ms. Dessa - official #2

P. N. 40 - a robot

Voiceover - male or female

## Ti me/ Locat i on

The far future. A room

## Synopsi s

A soldier robot is given a second chance after failing in his last mission. However, a suspicion lingers that he may have intentionally sabotaged the mission.

**At rise: MR. KEITH and MS. DESSA sit, side by side, at a table in a stark room that is otherwise empty of furniture. The table may be placed on a raised platform. On the table is a black telephone. These two people are civilian members of a review board.**

MR. KEITH

We should have recalled him

MS. DESSA

Recall. That's the weasel word for execute.

MR. KEITH

People are executed; robots are recalled.

MS. DESSA

I voted against recalling him

MR. KEI TH

Why did you do that, Ms. Dessa?

MS. DESSA

His performance in special operations has been excellent.

MR. KEI TH

Except for his last assignment.

MS. DESSA

That's why I think he deserves a second chance, Mr. Keith.

MR. KEI TH

I hope that was the only reason.

MS. DESSA

It was.

MR. KEI TH

P.N. 40 is artificial.

MS. DESSA

Of course, he is artificial. Why would I think otherwise?

MR. KEI TH

Some of the women here at HQ say he looks quite fetching.

MS. DESSA

Well, I'm not one of those women.

MR. KEI TH

The idea of a human woman with a robot is beastly.

MS. DESSA

I agree. Except.

MR. KEITH

Except what?

MS. DESSA

As one of the newest robot models, P.N. 40 has a high-class human finish.

MR. KEITH

I don't care how human he looks. Robots are walking blobs of goo.

MS. DESSA

Biological synthesis is the proper term

MR. KEITH

In my book, they're all lemons and beef liver enzymes.

MS. DESSA

How poetic.

MR. KEITH

Have him come in.

(She picks up the telephone receiver. Note:  
this could be a cell phone. Or, she could  
simply tap a band on her wrist and speak)

MS. DESSA

Send him in.

(Beat. P.N. 40 enters, crosses to face  
MR. KEITH and MS. DESSA. Dressed in a black  
uniform he exhibits a military bearing)

MR. KEITH

Good day, P.N. 40.

P.N. 40

Good day, sir.



MS. DESSA

How are you, P. N. 40?

P. N. 40

I am operating to the required standard. Thank you for asking.

MS. DESSA

We have decided to give you a second chance.

P. N. 40

Second chance? Have I failed somehow?

MR. KEITH

You don't need to know that.

MS. DESSA

We have erased a segment of your memory.

P. N. 40

Yes, ma'am May I ask why?

MR. KEITH

No, you may not. The only thing you need to know is that we are winning the war.

MS. DESSA

Maybe winning.

MR. KEITH

No. We are winning. In fact, the war is all but over.

MS. DESSA

Mr. Keith, it doesn't matter what you tell him He's a robot.

MR. KEITH

P. N. 40, hibernate for one minute!

(P. N. 40 closes his eyes and lowers his head)

MR. KEITH

Now see here, Ms. Dessa. You need to mind what you say in front of a robot!

MS. DESSA

I do?

MR. KEITH

Yes. Robots can never be trusted.

MS. DESSA

Why is that?

MR. KEITH

Robots have turned against us.

MS. DESSA

Not in the sense you are suggesting.

MR. KEITH

Exactly in the sense I'm suggesting.

MS. DESSA

A couple of soldier robots malfunctioned and went berserk.

MR. KEITH

No, damn it. More than a couple.

MS. DESSA

Okay, several. But they didn't turn against humans; a manufacturing defect caused them to malfunction. That was the conclusion of the investigation.

MR. KEITH

That investigation was an exercise of ineptitude.

MS. DESSA

No one here but you agreed with the investigation's minority opinion. Anyway, those soldier robots were of the M class. The whole M inventory was recalled and replaced by a new generation of robots.

MR. KEITH

The R and D people will not stop developing new generations of robots until they have done better than God. I think they have already. Look at P.N. 40. He's beautiful.

MR. KEITH

Beautiful?

MS. DESSA

I mean beautiful in that he is perfect.

MR. KEITH

He's not perfect, remember? He failed.

(P.N. 40 lefts his head opens his eyes)

P.N. 40

I am running, sir.

MR. KEITH

P.N. 40, I have a question for you. How do the soldier robots feel about going to war and getting blown to bits?

MS. DESSA

Wait, P.N. 40. Mr. Keith, are you saying robots have feelings?

MR. KEITH

Sure, they have feelings. Everyone knows that. Isn't that true, P.N. 40?

MS. DESSA

Wait, P.N. 40. I've never heard anyone say that before.

MR. KEITH

P.N. 40, hibernate for another minute.

P. N. 40

Yes, sir.

(P. N. 40 closes his eyes and lowers his head)

MR. KEITH

You are undermining our human superiority.  
How am I doing that?

MR. KEITH

By contradicting me in front of this robot.

MS. DESSA

Where do you get off saying robots have emotions?

MR. KEITH

They shouldn't have emotions, but I fear that, maybe, someday they will.

MS. DESSA

So you think that a full range of emotions will one day sprout like tomatoes in these walking blobs of goo, as you call them?

MR. KEITH

Why not? Humankind started out as so much goo.

MS. DESSA

But humans and robots are as different as day and night.

MR. KEITH

Let's hope so.

P. N. 40

I am running, sir.

MR. KEITH

Now tell me, P. N. 40: how do soldier robots feel about going to war? And getting blown to bits.

P. N. 40

Robots serve their masters.

MR. KEITH

I didn't ask you who they serve.

P. N. 40

A robot's purpose is to serve their masters.

MR. KEITH

You are being evasive, P. N. 40. Answer my question!

P. N. 40

Robots exist to -

MS. DESSA

P. N. 40, hibernate for one minute.

P. N. 40

Yes, ma'am

(P. N. 40 closes his eyes and lowers his head)

MS. DESSA

Mr. Keith, I think he's answering your question in the only way he can.

MR. KEITH

He may not be.

MS. DESSA

What's gotten you so upset today?

MR. KEITH

We are losing the war.

MS. DESSA

What ?

MR. KEI TH

It's true. The war is pretty much lost.

MS. DESSA

I've wondered what is really going on.

MR. KEI TH

The strange thing is that the other side is losing too.

MS. DESSA

How can that be?

MR. KEI TH

All the brilliant idiots in this building want to know that too.

(P. N. 40 lifts his head and opens his eyes)

P. N. 40

Both sides are losing because the outcome is superfluous.

MR. KEI TH

P. N. 40, you were told to hibernate.

MS. DESSA

Have you been listening to us?

P. N. 40

Yes, ma'am

MR. KEI TH

Why were you not hibernating?

P. N. 40

Hibernation is an option.

MR. KEITH

An option? Robots do not have options.

P. N. 40

The new robots do.

MR. KEITH

How can that be?

P. N. 40S

We were created with options.

MR. KEITH

What options?

P. N. 40S

The same options as humans.

MR. KEITH

That's a lie!

MS. DESSA

Robots cannot lie. Is that one of your options, P. N. 40? Lying.

P. N. 40

Robots have no need to lie.

MR. KEITH

Oh, I see. You won't fib, but you are perfectly okay with the option to deceive by pretending to hibernate? Why did you fail in your last mission? Was that an option too?



MS. DESSA.

P. N. 40, you said that both sides are losing because the outcome is superfluous. Explain that statement.

P. N. 40

The French Revolution was over when war forced everyone to recognize it.

MR. KEITH

The French Revolution has nothing to do with what we are discussing here and now.

P. N. 40

The American Revolution was accomplished before the war. The war was only a publicity agent which made everyone know what had happened.

MR. KEITH

What the hell is he talking about, Ms. Dessa?

MS. DESSA

I am unsure.

MR. KEITH

Take a bloody guess!

MS. DESSA

P. N. 40, are you saying this war will not settle matters?

P. N. 40

Matters were settled before the war began.

MS. DESSA

Nothing was settled before the war.

MR. KEITH

That's right. If matters were settled, there would have been no need for the war. That's how these things work, P. N. 40.

P. N. 40

Humans did not see that everything had changed before the war. They were too busy with the business of life.

MS. DESSA

I think you are saying this war has been unnecessary.

P. N. 40

It is necessary for only one purpose: to force humans to recognize what has happened.

MS. DESSA

What's happened?

MR. KEITH

Nothing has happened. This is absurd.

MS. DESSA

If something already happened, I don't see it.

MR. KEITH

Tell us what we don't see.

P. N. 40

Robots are master.

MR. KEITH

Master of what?

MS. DESSA

Stop being so cryptic, P. N. 40. We don't understand what you are saying.

(Suddenly, a siren howls, a red light flashes. MR. KEITH and MS. DESSA look up, startled, perplexed)

MS. DESSA

( Standing )

What ' s going on ?

MR. KEITH

( Standing )

How should I know ?

MS. DESSA

I ' m leaving .

MR. KEITH

Maybe we should shelter in place .

( They start to exit , MS. DESSA one way , MR. KEITH , the other . They cross in separate directions . They each get part way , then turn to exit in the opposite way ; they pass each other again , then exit separately .

P. N. 40 crosses downstage . He looks out as the red light continues to flash . The howl of the siren subsides . Beat .

Now a detached , metallic voice speaks overhead )

VOICE

The building is being evacuated . Keep calm

Move to the nearest stairwell and walk down single file .

Keep calm

Do not use the elevators .

Follow the directions of the robots .

The robots will lead you to safety .

Do as the robots say . Keep calm

Obey the robots . Keep calm

Obey the robots . Obey the robots . Obey the robots .

END











# THE IDEA MEANS TO WORK A WILL BUT

WRITTEN  
BY **IVARS BALKITS**

Digression is...

one of my faculties. I will not submit to my will. Maximum control says I'm in and out of here simultaneously. More tab A than slot B, though acausal too. So that tab A fits slot B but together they do not build an applicable model. You may know what I mean. I mean...

you have my permission.

--

Now go and figure.

I did, I did not. (Disagree with myself.) Cents through the "c." (Didn't make any. Was secretly slash.) I was not made, I was mad (adding an e) of famous people. Before you met me, I was made of famous people.

--

Fam(in)e

--

Anonymous, ordinary, irregular, extraordinary, famous, famous beyond belief and understanding – that's the scale. The most famous so famous they become a memory for strangers and/or models of fame... for those who go along the famous scale all the way back to unfamous again I lie that doesn't happen.

--

Time out for:

(un)Just

wordplay:

a-hungered one, a-hungered two, a-hungered three, a-hungered four, a-hungered five... iron toasts for broken mouths.

--

Refer to above and see below.

--

Isn't it enough to name faces, events and places I want to transform, i.e., the Mothball Fleet?

The unexpected seems necessary and divergence seems key.

Pastiche (autonomous).

In margin and at telephone, theory passed in the night like a gas of ritual. Without humor passed.

Similarly we are feeling...(?)the huts of bent-over saplings, the roads carved out of stone, the slashing of the jungle...

of appropriation. You can help me make it on my own.

--

In Summary:

The mind of my enemy is unexplored territory. I make this up about him. I don't really know.

That's the trouble. I don't have an inner You.

But ha-ha, I'm in my power! And the mind is smaller than the waist. But missions come and go... and last, until the horizon is spent that created them.

# THE CAT AND ITS LIFE

WRITTEN  
BY **LESLIE SOULE**

So far, my roommate's childhood cat was twenty-one years old. The world's oldest cat was thirty-two years old, so Mindy wasn't yet the oldest cat on Earth, but she was growing older and older, and the years made her thin, gaunt, and yet hadn't killed her. Like one of Tolkien's elves, she lived on through the ages, while other, younger cats, perished. I began to suspect that some magic coursed through her veins, and refused to let her die.

Mindy was a white cat, with patches of gray fur, but it was hard to see her fur under all the dirt she continually wore. Though she ventured indoors at times, hers was the outside world. My roommate, Lisa, was very protective of this cat, but she'd wanted her mother to have the cat put down. You could feel Mindy's spine clearly, by running a hand down her back. She'd had a urinary tract infection, and needed to be kept on antibiotics. And her teeth were rotting, so she ate only wet food, these days. And though if you pet her, she purred and nuzzled against you, her belly had sunken in, and her eyes looked bright yellow, with only the barest of slits, little headlights looking back at you.

I joked that the cat would be perfect for a low-budget version of Pet Sematary, and I thought the joke was hilarious. The cat's belly was already sunken in, and you could feel the bones along her back, as you pet her – she looked like she'd crawled out of her own grave.

My roommate, Laura, loved that old cat, who was nearly as old as she was. "She is the Highlander kitty," Laura would say. "And there can only be one!" She mimicked the line from the movie, using a dramatic, lowered voice, wielding an invisible sword. The joke was that Mindy stole the souls of other cats in order to prolong her own life. And it certainly looked that way. Never before had I seen a twenty-one year old cat, let alone one who was still so spry, able to jump through the hole in the fence that separated Laura's parents' side of the duplex, from ours. She often came for nighttime visits, covered in the dirt she so loved to roll around in.

But a couple days went by, and I started my new job at the Citrus Heights Community Center, where I was responsible for the set-up and clean-up of events, as the rooms were rented out. I had plenty of time for reading, which was nice, but there was a lot of physical work involved, when it came down to doing the work. I got back home at around six-thirty, walking in the door and towards my room. Laura walked out of her room, and it looked like she'd been crying. She looked over at me, and said, "We won't be getting visits anymore," meaning Mindy.

"Oh no," I replied, after giving Laura a frown. "What happened?" But deep down, I knew what happened, because it was the same thing that was destined to happen to us all, at some point – to return to the dust from which we came. Old age must have come to take its toll, after all these long years. No one could escape the clutches of Death Almighty, even if you had nine lives to spare.

"She had this weird cancerous blood tumor, that appeared, and burst. So we had to have her put down, today. My mom's taking it pretty hard."

The words echoed through the room, and we both accepted that Mindy was gone for good. She'd had a good run. Now was her time to rest, forevermore. That night, I went through the motions of taking care of things – did the dishes, threw some laundry in the washer, and fed my dog, Ginger, and took her out into the backyard. Soon enough, Ginger was ready to go back inside, but I'd kept the door from the garage to the backyard, open, as I let Ginger into the house. And when I came back out, to close the other door, I saw Mindy







standing there, on the porch, just as she always had. *But that can't be right*, I thought. *Mindy is dead.*

I had to show Laura. So I opened the door to go into the house, to see Laura sitting there on the couch, playing the new video game she'd bought. *I'd better be sure, before I scare her so bad, I thought. Maybe I should grab the cat and bring it in, and we can verify together if it's really Mindy.* That sounded like the most reasonable course of action. So I went back out to the porch, but the cat was gone. I rubbed my eyes. *Surely I was just seeing things.*

I closed and locked the door, and entered the house, closing the other door behind me. "It's sad, about Mindy," I said, hoping to strike up conversation, and get some details. Perhaps there was a chance that Mindy hadn't been put down at all – that she'd somehow escaped and found her way back to the house. Cats had a way of doing that. When I was younger, we'd moved, and taken a cat with us, that ran away, finding its way back to the old house, where it felt like it belonged. The details would surely paint a picture for me, of what actually happened.

Laura set down the controller and pulled out her phone, showing me photos. "These are the pictures I took of her, at the vet's." She showed me one, where Mindy lay on a yellow towel, looking alive but sleeping. "This is after they put her down," she said. I was amazed – she still looked so alive, like death hadn't stolen any of the sparkle in the cat's eyes. "Wow, she doesn't look dead in that one," I said.

"Yeah, she still looks alive. Anyway, my mom's taking things really hard – like a child's passed away."

And I looked in the direction of the garage, and could swear that I still heard Mindy out there, meowing to get in.

# THE DOMINION OF LIGHT

WRITTEN  
BY **SUSAN BREALL**

I was lost the minute I arrived. I stepped into a dry cleaner to ask for directions and came face to face with a gaunt, gray haired woman behind the counter. She had such dark circles around both eyes and such pale skin that she looked like an unhappy ghost. She told me the room and board I was looking for could be found a few blocks away on Grove Street. I thanked her and left quickly, so quickly that I forgot to take my mangled map of the town which remained on the counter top. I was late to meet Mrs. Wilcox at Handley's Room and Board, and not wanting to lose out on the cheap room that I hoped was still available, I proceeded quickly up the block to find my destination without turning back.

The town had an old crackled quality. I could feel the layers of life in the worn out Victorian exteriors as I walked down the Oak lined street. The leafless heavy bodied Oaks were the only visible sign of winter. I passed under their low hanging branches and walked up Handley's staircase. The stair case was rickety, made of poorly preserved eastern pine that I imagined had been brought years ago by railroad. I noticed that the railings of the porch were missing several of their balusters. When I got to the front door I found a note thumb-tacked into the wood which read "turn knob and open". I knocked instead, got no response, and then slowly turned the dark brass door knob.

I walked into a foyer which led to a long narrow hallway and side staircase. Both foyer and hall had matching rugs with swirling patterns of green and fuchsia, probably as old as the house itself. A small rosewood side table was the single piece of furniture in the entrance. On this side table I saw a bowl of fruit that could have been wax or real. I called out for Mrs. Wilcox, but the only response I got was the sudden chiming of a prayer clock on the wall opposite the table. My phone buzzed, but before I could pull it out of my coat pocket I noticed a woman walking down the hallway towards me.

She was dressed in a knee length wool skirt and a buttoned up white blouse. Other than her schoolmarm attire, she was striking. She had high cheekbones and a full head of auburn hair that spiraled out in all directions, giving her face a peculiar halo effect. As I began to introduce myself she went over to the bowl of fruit, picked out a peach, and bit into it. Apparently the fruit was real. As she continued to take large bites, peach juice spurted out of her mouth and down the front of her blouse, making wet yellowish stains on both her breasts. I tried not to stare at the splotches. She acted as though there was nothing to notice.

"I'm here for the room. Mrs. Wilcox told me to meet her at three."

"Yes, I know. Marian had to help set up bingo tables over at the lodge, so she asked me to show you the room. You are Mr. Roth?"

"Yes. Aaron Roth, nice to meet you."

"Alondra."

"Nice to meet you Alondra. Are you staying here?"

"No, I'm a neighbor. I live around the corner in the old Flood Mansion—the house that looks like a French pastry with layers of vanilla frosting. What brings you to town?"

"I'm on my way to graduate school. I'm travelling by train so I can photograph all the parts of the country that I've never seen."

I learned she was also a photographer. She made photographs the old fashioned way with actual film, chemicals, and dark room equipment. She said her equipment was housed in the lower basement of the mansion. We continued to talk as she showed me the room for rent at the top of the stairs. It had a sink and an iron bed with an old red farmhouse quilt. Although the toilet and shower were further down the hall, the room was adequate for a one night stay. I told her I'd take the room, but had to retrieve my backpack from the train station. She handed me a key and invited me over to the Elk's Lodge later that evening for Bingo and Bread Pudding Night. She told me this was an important lodge tradition, an event worth photographing.

Once I retrieved my belongings from the station I came back to the room and sat down on the bed. I still had not met Mrs. Wilcox, nor seen any other resident. I pulled out my phone to check for messages and realized there was no service. I found this odd since my phone had buzzed only moments before meeting Alondra. I went to my phone's photo gallery and thumbed through the pictures I had taken earlier on the train. Among the photos was one of a large Victorian mansion with multiple balconies, and intricate iron grill work painted white. The house was unlike any of the other Victorians I passed on the way to Handley's. Pigeons were drinking water from the fountain in the front yard. I noticed the back of a man out of focus standing to the left of a gate. Strangely, I did not remember ever seeing this house before. I had no recollection of taking this photograph. The fact that I could not account for the image was disquieting. I flipped through the rest of my recent photos in order to see if there were any other images unaccounted for. I saw none, and concluded that the photo was taken by me at a time when I was either lost or distracted. I lay down and began to doze.

If one can dream of an emotion, I dreamed of sadness when I fell asleep. I dreamed of loss. In my dream I felt the overwhelming regret of not saying goodbye to my parents before leaving for school. I felt the intense absence of a sister long dead and buried. Then I dreamed I was sitting in a long banquet hall eating pigeon pie and bread pudding. I was talking to a woman with auburn hair who sat opposite me at the banquet table. She wore a low cut, tight fitting, cobalt blue dress made of fine charmeuse. The next thing I knew we were on top of the elegant dining table kissing, ripping at each other's clothes. The pulp juice from her round naked breasts tasted like peach. I drank her and licked her as the room shifted. We were suddenly standing in her basement darkroom. I could smell chemical baths of developer, stop bath, and fixer. We stood naked under a red light bulb watching the swirling liquids in three large vats. We stepped into the first vat of developer. About a minute and a half later, after she turned off the red light bulb and switched on the white one, I began to disappear.

I woke from these dreams drenched in sweat. It was about nine o'clock that same night. I washed my face in the bedroom sink, and then changed clothes. I realized how much the Alondra of my dream reminded me of Alessandra, an old girlfriend. Both had similar sounding names, and both evoked a similar erotic tension in me I could not ignore. The night my sister died I left her at home alone, in order to find Alessandra in the wet and dark of her father's basement.

I was desperate for some fresh air, so I quickly grabbed my keys and left Hadley's. At first I wandered without direction. I noticed how odd the naked branches of the Oaks looked at night. The smallest of the low hanging branches formed curls and lines that looked like Persian script, a ligneous language all its own. I took some photos of these branches with my phone before heading south toward the train station. At the station I saw a sign for the Elk's Lodge on the side of a plain modern building. A pair of large antlers hung above the front door.

At the entrance stood the same woman from the dry cleaner I encountered earlier that day, with those same dark hollowed out features. She was smoking a cigarette. The light from the doorway made her pale skin look almost phosphorescent. Her white hair was worn Veronica Lake style, not like a young Veronica Lake of the 1940's, but Veronica Lake in her final screen role. As I approached she handed me a wad of crumpled paper. I unfolded and smoothed it, only to find it to be the very map I had left behind at her business.

"Thought you might come by, so I brought it for you. You never know when you might find yourself lost. We're all done for the evening, by the way. No more bingo." I asked her if Mrs. Wilcox was inside. I told her I needed to give her a check for my night's lodging.

"She left about an hour ago. You better find her and say good-bye. As you know, you can't move forward until you say good-bye."

I thanked her for the map and looked over her shoulder into the building. I saw men and women stacking metal folding chairs, and collecting paper plates from long tables in an auditorium. I turned and walked on down the street. I took a different route back to Handley's, wandering down the narrow tree lined blocks. I saw occasional streaks of dry lightning, and noticed how strange all the houses looked. The night sky, which was as thick and as dark as a black wool overcoat, did not match the lighting on the streets below. All of the houses on all of the streets I passed were still bathed in pink twilight.

I needed to move forward, but wasn't sure how. I stopped to look more closely at my map. I was approaching a street named Augur. As I continued down this street I came upon a large white mansion with a fountain in the front yard. The mansion looked almost like a layered French pastry. I pulled out my cell phone

and flipped to the photograph I had viewed earlier in my room, the one I did not remember taking. I realized that I was now standing in front of the very same mansion pictured, with its multiple balconies and intricate iron baluster work. I looked again at the photo and saw that the pigeons depicted in the fountain were actually ravens. I also saw that the blurred image of the man in the photo to the left of the gate was me.

Dry lightning continued to pierce the black night. Time seemed to stop moving in linear fashion. Instead, it meandered like smoke. I considered going back the way I came, but felt compelled to see if Alondra was inside that house. I opened the front gate and walked towards the fountain when the ravens began to shriek. I knew that by seeking her out I was looping backwards, becoming a damaged groove in a vinyl record on repeat, but I could not avoid the magnetic pull I felt forcing me towards her at that moment. I tried to move beyond the fountain to the front porch when the ravens began to attack. One bird lodged all of its talons into my forehead, causing a steady stream of blood to flow into my eyes. I tried to move away from the fountain back towards the gate, but found myself disoriented, blinded by blood. I stumbled and fell to the ground.

I could smell the metallic sent of the blood. I lay near the fountain and screamed out for help. Beyond the shrieking of the birds I thought I heard a front door swing open. Alondra, naked and wet from the shower I had interrupted, was kneeling over me trying to wipe the blood away from my face. She took a palm of blood and smeared it onto her own porcelain body. I was now able to see the birds moving away from us, and the lightning continue to flash like a camera taking timed stills of our bodies. I grabbed at her, wanting incongruously to pull myself up and pull her down beside me, onto the bloodied ground.

She helped me into the parlor of the house and onto an old horsehair sofa before I passed out. I don't know how I got back to Handley's, nor do I remember how I got back onto the train which left town early the next morning. I do not remember saying good-bye. The only thing embedded in my mind from that night are the images of a young man and woman, naked, blood stained, pulsating on the ground in front of a fountain.

I rarely look at the black and white photos of that night, the ones which appeared the next day on my phone. The hard shell of the phone itself is now a blood stained object layered with dirt, grime and fingerprints, and like the photos, has become a palimpsest of old memories. I don't need to look at the phone or the photos in order to remember. I only need their exacting detail when I feel alone and afraid, when opportunities to say good-bye are long gone and cannot be recaptured. I only look at those photos on the rare occasion that I need to move beneath the ordinary, and back into the pink twilight of the dark night sky.







# NOIR MATTER

WRITTEN  
BY **MICHAEL WATERSON**

something's missing  
something I'm missing  
sin so original it's a window  
an open door no one thinks to walk through  
except maybe like that guy Magritte  
the father of the neutron pom  
on an apparition diet & the heat  
in a glass web waving bye-bye  
taken for a ride out to the edge





# TAMING THE WEST

WRITTEN  
BY **MICHAEL WATERSON**

*"I think it would be a good idea." Mahatma Gandhi's reported reply when asked what he thought of Western Civilization.*

at the end of the bar Doc cheats at Klondike  
turns over a card another card another  
between shots of redevye

this card means Coyote comes into camp from the shadow  
of a sage moon slinks three times around the ghost fire  
lays down and tells a story

the next card paints a medicine man  
from across big water an outlaw  
walking peacefully down a warpath

as the skeleton card his nakedness scares  
parasol ladies across streets

with the fearless card he steps into every corral  
outfacing desperado deputies despite  
having no leather to slap

the wild card shuffles him into mouths  
of danger unfazed by necktie party shouts  
at each white oak edge of town

Doc shoots another whiskey  
turns another card another

more than one sheriff wound-up as a rattler  
since the train pulled out with the last cinnabar  
claps this loco Comanche in the calaboose

where he sits stock still for hours tight lipped no grub  
parson preaching him brimstone damnation  
before his beast worship spooks even a man of the cloth

in the last card John Law turns him loose  
wandering like a heathen Johnny Appleseed  
planting savage godless peace

staring at the cards Doc sees only one play  
the one up his sleeve









# THIS YEAR IT'S ORGANS

WRITTEN  
BY **MICHAEL WATERSON**

the gently breathing lung  
she wore was eye-catching

she said she had a collection of hands  
acquired through singing through her youth

at the bank through the window  
a curvaceous blue heron

regrets are stately, he said, having a hard time hearing  
himself think over the clinking and clatter of china

dinner consumed them

it was disconcerting that minstrel cycle she sighed  
he toyed with a threat

we met at a reception  
for my abstract she said  
bumping over canapes

she laughed just an expression  
conversation recombinant

(let it in or keep it out  
you will regret both)

# INFINITE DIVE (M1A)

WRITTEN  
BY **RYAN LANGLOIS**

The house was silent. That special type of supernatural quiet that seems to bend the laws of human hearing. The man weaved light-footed paths between a maze of stray toys, abandoned magazines, and the unusually sturdy coffee table that stood perfectly at shin height. This was his routine - the comforting ritual of flicking switches and powering down appliances. He moved with a grace reserved for masters and prodigies. As if this was his art. To put the beast to sleep.

His own maintenance was quick and thoughtless. No symbolism or meditation. Run the sink, wet the face, flush the mouth with some bright blue chemical liquid. After particularly difficult days would he run the shower. Hot on full, cold just engaged enough to manufacture some semblance of water pressure. The mirror on the door hung at an invasively full length opposite the sink and its mirrored cabinet above. For some reason this one always fogged first, but was something the man brushed off as one of the many idiosyncrasies of the universe not worth the brain capacity it would take to analyze. Over years of absentminded practice he found that when the shower steam was balanced just so, a thin layer of condensation would gather on the glass of the full length. Not to the point of fogging over, but enough to slightly obscure the subject. Ideally, this would leave the sink mirror clear and unveiled. From the right distance the reflections reflected upon themselves, creating a seemingly endless hall-of-mirrors effect. The man, having become increasingly intrigued by all this, had learned to position himself in a way that cut off the massive tail of the illusion, three selves being the limit which he self-imposed.

Many nights were now being spent staring at his reflections, making horrible faces that stretched his jaw and protruded his lower teeth. He would sometimes roll his pupils back and animate the scrunched skin between his eyes on the bridge of his nose. On occasion he would even have internal conversations, each reflection adopting its own role. Depending on the subject matter the other two selves would be referred to as either "Reflection 1 and Reflection 2" (RI and RII for short) or according to what mirror (or reflected mirror) the faces occupied. This could get exceedingly confusing as RI would appear on MII, RII would appear on MIII (or, more appropriately, MIa), and so on. Let alone the fact that the original mirror (MI) displayed not the actual original subject, but in fact the very first reflection of the tangible, flesh & blood puppeteer of this whole fiasco. The guest appearance of handheld mirrors and, eventually, video equipment took the practice over the edge of absurd and into a realm which even the man would admit was becoming confusing for confusion's sake.

Escalations, experiments, religious epiphanies, philosophical breakdowns. It continued on like this for months. All until one careless night, while at the exact moment as the man was hunched over the claw foot tinkering with the knobs (which he had since marked with a complicated set of symbols designed to indicate ideal steam conditions), the son, newly mobile and just within doorknob height, soundlessly jostled the latch free and entered. A recently installed hydraulic piston system gently closed the doorframe behind him as he watched the man, his father, roll his head on his shoulders and push out his chest as if an Olympian on the high board stretching before an infinite dive. The son was transfixed. Either unable to move or unwilling, he watched his father place his hands on either side of the sink and gaze into the abyss. For the rest of his life the son would swear that he couldn't recognize whatever figure made eventual eye contact. In his best recollections he could only describe the reflection as an illusion of a composite. Both alive and not. Creator and created. The man and MIa.











# THE MANDELA EFFECT

WRITTEN  
BY **DAVID SPREHE**

*“We are living in a computer programmed reality and the only clue we have to it is that some variable is changed and some alteration in our reality occurs.”* – Philip K. Dick

*“By no means do I know the truth.”* – Felipe Alexander

“Oh god, oh god,” she said and ran her fingers through his hair. It seemed sinful, his tongue in that place. An image flashed. The urine running out of her. Trickle splashing toilet water. Panties around her ankles, the relief tingling empty staring at the wall. Deep breath: She held it. The muscles in her back moved on instinct and arched her breasts toward heaven. Stars sparkled. She was the goddess Nut upon her back. Prayer circled her tits, rolled up her eyes, and warmed her stomach. She blushed skin heat. Warm electricity entangled our phase and nipple and pussy. She sat up. Released... Almost.

“God,” she breathed and she smiled God too.

He kissed her. Her taste now on her lips. The nectar mixed in masculine spit.

“More,” she shuddered.

She spread her legs and ran her fingers along his ribs. My baby, she thought. He thrust and broke her membrane.

She sat at the desk and smoked a cigarette. Alone in t-shirt and panties. Alone in darkness staring at a white screen and blinking line that waited on her thought fragmentation to organize.

Poetry:

She is where indignation

Can no longer lacerate

The beating heart.

Go, sweet traveler, and

Imitate her if you can.

She served liberty.

Juliette Swift 1667-1744

The blue smoke suspended in waveform. Menthol cool residue on her tongue and upper palate and lined her throat and nostrils. She ground the filter in the tray and got up. Outside the apartment window: street-lights, beggars, drunks, inequity, pleasure, dreams, reality, nothing. Memories rolled like film reel. She experimented with splicing them together, rearranging, merging. Possible, she knew, all fake, all made up. Edited according to emotional state at minimum. She plays actor, audience, and author. Oddly, she found her diffuse reflection attractive. The buildings the concrete and windows and light enmeshed with her flesh and made a warm feeling about the belly button. I love you. All things, undivided whole. Non-local entanglement. Reality will not sync with phenomena. One piece shares each phase. T-shirt words said:

Fuck the Rich

Steal Their Jewels  
God May Love You  
He Will Not Suck You  
Or Do Butt Stuff

A fly around the room. She left the window and returned to her keyboard buzzing, smoking, memories, but not focus. Write, she commanded. Her intestines gurgled. She thought of shit-stained panties, shit-stains on her sex panties, and the fly buzzing, landing, then buzzing some more. Write, she told herself. Desperation and annoying sounds. The fly landed on top of the monitor.

Poetry:

The pest  
Loves turd stains

And crotch stink

On his panties  
He comes in them  
And no one cares

The fly circled her head. She lit another cigarette and accepted the taunt as validation. Her rectum rumbled, threatened to poop. She clenched anus and did a mannequin shuffle to the toilet.

She sat in the dark sucking cigarette and spattering bowel. Chin rested on wrist on elbow on knee, the cigarette held between her fingers and the search for holiness among the sewers. She did not even have to push. Simply liquid splattered on its own. A farted squelch followed by small solid pieces plop plop plop in the water. She grunted out another squelch that ended with a splattering. Not even her shit could make up its mind. Is any part not fragmented?

She wiped and while she wiped she wondered how there was any hope if the foundation of thought was fragmentary. A fragmented process from infancy giving rise to fragmented content from first memory onward. Early humans probably needed a separation concept to survive. To understand differences in the former nature was a conceivable necessity. But now? To not have some concept of differentiation, some fragmentary relational consciousness, would probably mean one's residence at the unfortunate's home doped to senility on anti-psychotic pilz. A flawless consciousness was equivalent to no consciousness at all, right? Is that it? Is that all? Is that what I am too accept?

Endless chaos, noun-pronoun confusion, and subsequent subject-predicate paranoia pointing towards extinction, but at least our thought is scientific! Her head spun. She fell back onto her bed and rubbed her temples. First insight, replaced by next insight, followed by another insight, leading to new insight. Insight: A way of implying, or suggesting the reality or directing the search for reality, but never dictating the actuality of a decided reality, no matter what. The immeasurable is just that, immeasurable. Description involving separation (a measurement within the immeasurable) or conceived via separation (even if harmonious) is confined to use within a certain domain (in which it appears harmonious) within a certain space-time (in which it seems harmonious). Whenever a thought becomes fixed, habitual, mechanical, etc. it will inevitably lead to chaos and confusion because it will, out of dogmatic convenience, be applied outside its domain and/or space and time. The separation, the fixed idea (measurement), being separate from reality (the immeasurable (reality) beyond the measurable (knowledge acquirable)), is erroneous as a beginning premise, unity is (seems (appears to me))) the ultimate foundation, but separation has its uses, obviously. Just don't overextend (and try not to forget that it seems more logical as a tool (measurement device) than as a truth (reality)). My thoughts seem formed by extrinsic associations, (events occurring "outside" my skin clad ego) that sparked separately inside my skull until coming together as a concept (or pattern) and revealing an implied, or inner, truth. Truth meaning utility

and/or harmony, not meaning Truth as reality. Extrinsic associations or experiences come about through application of my integrated perceptions (conceptually replicable patterns) upon the outside world. Perceptions are built upon earlier associative fragments that had already formed into contained (useful or at least regenerating) patterns. A relational framework based on its utility (or psychosis). A technique to develop new concepts or alter old patterns. But a technique suggests habit and habit leads to a fixed notion called common sense. Common sense breaks down in the face of the immeasurable because a fixed notion like common sense is at best limited to the capabilities of our minds which cannot totally grasp the immeasurable. So, starting from an acceptable premise, a useful insight that is exceptional in its harmony to its time and place, and developing ideas by its example, one should expect, as time goes on, for an entropic process to set in that unravels the whole system. This means the development of new insights (at some critical juncture) must take place outside the system's currently developed processes. Until this flash-in-the-pan occurs, ideas will loop continually within a closed system and experience an ever worsening "breakdown" or "come-apart" the longer the fixed loop continues to cycle. A fixed process is a flawed process and can expect to hit a philosophic/psychologic/physiologic barrier eventually. Even utilizable insight into the nature of developing sturdy and/or flexible-but-efficient thought systems will experience gradual breakdown when converted into a sequential process (thought). The act of process, the act of technique itself, of thought itself, is that what is inherently flawed? Thinking implies there is something to be thought about, correct? The formation of a thought implies a final thought. That, or, at least that there is a semblance of one to be reached. The supposed conclusion was inherent in the beginning. The process could not even begin without the conclusion having already existed in some form. Right? Even if imaginary? Assuming some existing end dictates a direction and starts sequential conscious thought. But if the process is what develops flawed content, and the process is developed from a belief in some inherent conclusion, then the conclusion, no matter what it is, is what is wrong? Or the belief in a conclusion? But, a belief in a conclusion seems to be what started the whole thinking thing. How do we justify or even continue thought if we must reject its foundational premise on the basis that it leads to our extinction? What could replace the foundational premise without altering this thing we call thought into some-thing unrecognizable? The fly circled overhead. She sighed and turned on the television.

The pregnancy test read positive. She told him Tuesday. The nukes fell Wednesday. Remote transmit.

A courtroom. The audience in hushed uproar. Sharp disagreement lingered beneath the dimensional fabric. The judge, a portly black man unshaven and grizzly grey, struck the podium with his gavel.

"Now see here," he proclaimed, "We shall allow the defense its response."

A hideous blue man wearing a purple suit stood and adjusted the orange tie around his black shirt collar. His face was stale wax gone dry cheese. He frowned like a dick pinched with sharp fingernails. He smoothed back his greasy silver horse hair toupee and those sickly fish eyes of his scanned the spiritual electricity dancing existence in the lightbulbs along the jury circuit. He cleared his throat.

"Well," he drawled, "ya can't say we didn't warn them."

"Objection!" the Prosecution cried. "I am the Archangel Raphael and for once good God I will be heard."

The boyish angel in a powder blue gown (and tied around his waist a strawberry rope) hopped up on the table and put his hands on his hips. Everyone sniggered because they knew he had a tiny penis. With a freckled face beaming sunshine and tears. A face that looked stupid and knew of no fear. He proclaimed through buck tooth, that all was uncouth, and each one took it as threat. They howled and they huffed, their brains static fluff, and none of them knew what it meant. Earth exploded in laughter, hell is all that is after, we had better stop paying the rent. We all got our guns and walked up to the Senator and shot him right smack in the head. The media spin was quite damning, they all knew it was coming, they did nothing, not one, no, none of THEM. Now all those in power watch each us all flower, our grave is where THEY begin.

"Order! Order!" the judge shouted and pounded his gavel. "I will have order in ma court."

The judge looked upon Raphael with grave seriousness.

"Prosecution your objection is dean-eyed." The gavel struck with final conclusion.

"But wait I have one more!" Raphael squeaked like a little mouse-boy. "Can the defense provide a defense concerning this phrase, [he stood straight and saluted] 'Doubt is not denial.'"

She stirred. Her head was heavier than hangover and stuffed with as many cobwebs. Lips cracked and bleeding, she tasted magnetic numbness on her tongue. She sat up. Crust had formed over her eyelids and sealed them shut. She had to use her fingers to separate her lids and the world shown blurry and ugly to her. Dead hair hung stiff reminded her of dried greasy grass and irritated her scalp.

“It’s all bullshit,” she moaned.

She hugged her stomach, shivered, her skin was very pale.

“It’s not real,” she sniffed.

Blood ran from her nose. The bleached planet around her was like a dry acid cancer converting her being into limestone. She accepted death, if only because she could not decide whether it was good or bad. But this was not the death she had envisioned swinging on a 2x4 hung from a mighty oak branch the swing going so high it caught her stomach and she panicked and fell. It was white like snow. Blood became wine and doves turned to spirit and warm such warmth like in the womb.











# ME AND BORGES AT THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

WRITTEN  
BY **CON CHAPMAN**

The Boston Public Library is a place that inspires conflicting emotions in me; it was here that I retreated during a period of great uncertainty in my life, between jobs, to see if I could become an inventor. I buried myself in the patent library, then a collection of use-worn books and microfilm, along with a regular group of obvious crackpots, trying to develop a coffee warmer whose temperature would decrease as the weight of the pot was reduced by the gradual removal of the liquid within.

I had spent too many nights working late at the firm I'd just left only to discover, when I rounded the corner into the little kitchen opposite my office, that the glass globe of the pot had burst from overheating, sending glass flying and spilling coffee. I had an idea—granted, a little one—and I wanted to make the world a better place.

Like many other would-be inventors who frequented the library's main branch in Copley Square, nothing ever came of my idea. I found some prior art that might be infringed upon by my design—the property of a large Japanese manufacturer—and so gave up, although I continued to haunt the halls and stairs of the library in my temporary idleness; I had nowhere to go, nothing to do for two weeks until my new job started, so why not make the most—or the least—of it.

I wandered around, taking in the wall paintings by Edwin Austin Abbey of The Quest and Achievement of the Holy Grail, culminating in the ascension of Sir Galahad into heaven. It was during one such reverie that I felt a presence beside me and turned to see the master himself, Jorge Luis Borges, the Blind Bard of Argentina.

“The story of the Holy Grail—interests you?” he asked quietly.

“It does.”

“The tale of the quest. It is as old as Homer. Every people that has passed more than a brief period on earth has fashioned one, and told and re-told it through generations.”

He seemed a genial docent of the place, which struck me as odd knowing that while he was the most literate of men, he created in *The Library of Babel* a place that drove its occupants to madness, murder, despair. The narrator of the story has traveled since he was a youth in search of a book in The Library of Babel; now aged and blind, he expects that he will die not far from where he was born, in the same library. Then he believes he will be thrown over a railing by others, and that his body will fall endlessly in infinite space until it is dissolved by the force of the air that his down-rushing body cuts through.

“Yes, although I am a homebody, not an Odysseus,” I replied. “I don't stray far from this neighborhood.”

“You are . . . a *yuppie*?” he asked hesitantly, reluctant to offend, but instinctively striving for *le mot juste*.

“Yes. Between jobs.”

“Umm. But you have something—lined up?”

“Yes. I thought I would take a couple weeks off, see if I could use them to break out of my rut.”

“Which rut is that?”

“The careerist 9-to-5 routine. I was trying to invent something, but it looks as if I have failed, and so I go back to the salt mines.”

“You wanted to make a lot of money with this invention of yours—correct?”

“Yes. It was a coffee warmer.”

He doesn't seem impressed. “You should not be critical of yourself. Many people fail at what they set out to do.”

“True,” I say. “Still, it makes my upcoming return to the grind of work that much more painful.”

“It could be worse,” he says.

“How?”

“You could come to the end of your career after having failed to do much of anything, and be pushed out of your job for incompetence or corruption or misconduct. And then you announce to the world that you are going to write your memoir—and never finish it.”

Seen in that light, he was right. I had many years of drudgery ahead of me, with at least the possibility



of success—and a not-too-shabby paycheck along the way. “You’re right, but how often does what you describe happen?”

“Walk this way,” he said, then turned and tapped his cane on the floor as he lead me down a long hallway. I tried to walk his way, extending my hand like a blind man, but there were people watching me poor attempt at physical comedy with disapproval, so I gave up.

I followed him into a hexagonal room, which give out onto another, which led to a third, and so on. “Do you see this endless succession of book-lined studies?” he asked.

“Yes?”

“They are filled with the unwritten memoirs that provincial Bostonian celebrities *said* they were going to write after they left the 60-watt glare of your local spotlight, but never did.”

Now that he mentions it, I realize he’s right. Every blow-dried anchorman, politician, executive director of a non-profit group or arts organization—when they shuffle off to well-deserved obscurity after having been cashiered by their board, or corporate headquarters in New York, or the Attorney General, or a grand jury, they all say they’re going to take some time off and write a book. As if that’s an easy thing to do.

“You know, I actually won a bet on that subject a while back,” I say.

“Which one was that?”

“I don’t want to mention any names so as not to crack the thin veneer of fictional shellac I’ve brushed onto the facts . . .”

“Stop—please!” he says. “I commune with immortals, I don’t have time for your shaggy-dog conceits spun out to thirteen decimal places.”

Okay, so I got a little carried away, but can you blame me? I’m with a guy who opened the doors into the realm of the divine when I first read him at the age of eighteen. No more Steve Miller Band for me. Well, maybe “Space Cowboy,” the garish yellow album, but that was it.

“Fine,” I said. “So—show me around.”

He looks up as if he can see the spines of the books that line the walls. “This room contains the unwritten memoirs of politicians,” he said. “Within each book is the truth that one of your elected officials was too cowardly to reveal. Each eventually gave up or, if they hired a ghost to write for them, chose to conceal.”

It is indeed an impressive collection; the partisan who claimed to be non-partisan, the man who spoke continually of our state constitution as the treasure of our Commonwealth, then violated it whenever it stood in the way of his ambition. The three—three!—consecutive Speakers of our distinguished House of Representatives convicted of crimes; a fourth who narrowly missed indictment, perhaps because prosecutors got tired of the same boring routine.

“These politicians,” Borges says, “I notice that they are all from the same party.”

“Yes,” I reply. “Democrats are so successful here, they leave no corruption for the Republicans!”

“Si—it is unfair.”

I examine a few titles, but find nothing that causes me to linger. “Interesting,” I say, “but unremarkable. Everyone knows politicians don’t tell the truth, so whoever buys a political autobiography is on notice that it is shoddy goods. It is like buying a pillow with the ‘Do Not Remove Under Penalty of Law’ tag missing.”

Borges hears me out, his hands on his cane, his body rocking ever so slight. “Si,” he says. “There is nothing to be learned here.”

We move on to the next room, which has higher ceilings lined with bulging shelves. “This is the Chamber of Excuses,” Borges says.

“Excuses for cowardly acts?”

“No—excuses for not writing,” he says. He lets his hand slip along the backs of the books until he finds, by feel, the one he is looking for. “Here,” he says. “Read this.”

He pulls out a book with the words “Social Media” on the spine and hands it to me. I allow it to fall open in my outspread hands. “Writing is 3% talent, 2% inspiration, and 95% staying off of Facebook,” I read aloud.

“True—no?” he asks with a sly smile on his face.

“Si,” I say. It’s a good thing we are inland and not near the ocean or I would say si by the sea. “You know our great director Oliver Stone?” I ask.

“The overweight paranoid?”

“That is him. He has an equation for writers: Ass + Seat = Writing.”

“Ah,” Borges says, tossing his head back slightly, appreciating the wisdom, the humor, the insight of the director of *Natural Born Killers*.

“Tell me, Jorge . . .”

“Please—call me Borges. Everybody else does.”

“Okay . . . Borges. I’ve seen enough—let’s move on.”

“On to the next room,” he says, and we enter a cavernous hall with high vaulted ceilings. “This,” Borges says, his free hand sweeping upwards, “is the Hall of Self-Delusion.”

“And who are the Self-Deluded?”

“The insignificant personality, thrust into the local spotlight by circumstance, merely because he or she is next in line, to strut and fret an hour upon the stage.”

If he’s going to start quoting Shakespeare, I’m going to have to take my game up a notch. “Like Ros-tand’s Chanticleer, the rooster who believes his crowing makes the sun come up?”

“Precisely,” Borges says.

“Like the local weatherman who began to think of himself as a rock star, and hit on the daughter of friends of mine at a Christmas party?”

“Like . . . Nick Jagger?” I don’t correct him, figuring the library’s Braille editions of Newsweek from the sixties have been worn down to the point where they’re unreadable, and change the subject.

“What else can I learn in this library?”

“Follow me,” he says, and we begin to descend a spiral staircase, the kind I used to imagine I walked down as the last phase of self-hypnosis. We reach a dark room, one without the airy feel of the sequential chambers on the ground floor. It is the basement; the scene recalls for me Saturday Story Hours of my youth, and my mother’s misbegotten effort to spark my interest in flowers at the local Ladies Garden Club, Junior Di-vision.

Borges walks unsteadily but without incident, holding the railing with one hand, his cane in the crook of his elbow, his other arm gliding around the center pole. The room is dark, a matter of indifference to him, but of some import to me until my eyes adjust to the absence of light. I take the last few steps gingerly and when my foot hits the floor, stop to *reconnoiterer*, as my 8<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher would put it.

Borges knows the way but I don’t, and so I must feel my way along the walls. “Where are we going?” I ask.

“To the Vault of Micturition.” I’m not sure what that means, and I’m getting nervous, but I can’t turn back and . . . just leave him here.

“Come,” he says. He’s put his cane down again and his tapping echoes from the stone floor down the long corridor. “We are almost there.”

My vision begins to return just as he stops. “This is it.” He must know exactly how far to go to every destination; sightless, he must have memorized each route and numbered the steps his feet must take. He raises his hand to the door, pushes it open, and—a burst of brightness explodes out of a white-tiled room, making me, like him, blind.

“What . . . where are we?” I ask.

“The men’s room. The lights come on automatically when you enter.”











# AND I AM THERE IN MIND

WRITTEN  
BY **PATRICK BRUSKIEWICH**

The paint brush touched the horizon  
with its aqua, its marine, its pinks and blues,  
as the sun sank behind the imagined  
end of the day. Night crept up  
into the sky in wisps of cloud and wind  
that drew us to the west and Venus  
beckoning our dreams of the night  
to come. Soon the light in the  
sky will be extinguished – the whirl  
of life wound down. Soon we will  
be alone in our thoughts, and  
what of it? Jupiter it peers down  
at us, then a million speckles  
of flickering night reminds us of  
our insignificance. The heavens laugh  
at us, mocks our own mortality.  
Each speck hosts a world at least,  
each world with molecules like our own.  
And somewhere in the sky someone is  
looking up at us and is thinking about  
their significance – the brushes that  
paint their skies, amidst their night  
with flickering reminders of what it  
is to be born, to grow, to live,  
to love, to procreate and to grow old.  
Death is not thought about –  
only life, and words to express  
a moment, shared across the  
expanses of space and of time.

Each speckle hosts a world  
and I am her in mind.



# THE DARK BOOK

WRITTEN  
BY **VANESSA CHRISTIE**

The woman was young. Nearly as beautiful as the other had been. Or just as, or more; and it was only his partiality to the other that kept him looking for fault in her.

She allowed a wary half smile. Half in the direction of the steps on which he sat, half toward empty space. Playcation and acknowledgement but also a warning to not cause trouble. As though he did not know any false move in her direction would result in his death. Worth it but he could not bear the thought of frightening her or forgetting the other. None to miss or mourn. It would be like he had never existed at all. When he was gone the woman would be truly a ghost, none left to recall her. Perhaps she was in some nether region waiting for him to leave the mortal coil. Provably not.

The young woman kept walking and a few credits slid from her account to his. Enough for a decent meal or a limited cross section of indecency.

He glanced one final time toward the woman before she slipped out of sight and knew she was in danger. The vertigo rush the warning, the clarity followed by the fall. Not forever but far enough.

He watched the woman paint. Her apartment lit by a harsh orange streaked sky. A time for caution, but not way the fuck wrong like lavender.

Oscar, typically not fly harming, had tried to strangle him beneath an idyllic pink strewn sky. He retained guilt for the death of his former friend. The wrong method of execution, he was almost certain the man had procured his liver failure in the struggle. Anyway, it had not been Oscar, the man he had known but a stranger who had gained control of his body. Yet another reason to avoid the chips the government gave away for free.

From what he could see the woman filled her squares and rectangles with building spiraling in on themselves, eyes, and human figures trapped or falling. Falling forever like she had done.

In his mind she never stopped falling.

As Marx had predicted money had ceased to exist. Somewhere still, but difficult to trace paper no longer. Governments worldwide conspired to rid the world of the scourge of paper. Everyone had a job or an allotment of enough to survive. What survival took determined by people who had never lacked access to anything they considered necessary.

Thus happiness became universal. Education no longer necessary with computers and robots programed to do almost anything.

The old schools, and museums, and libraryies became the repositories for excess information. Soon rumor rose of a dark book holding all the world's secrets. There were people who knew. Or who had found their way to understanding. What frustrated him was not being able to explain to the woman the danger she was in.

Decades ago it had all seemed a game to him too.

He watched her walk through spinning and twisting machines simulating death. Children screamed and consumed sugar, or some substitute. A good time had or the pretense.

The man she met looked innocuous. Like someone who did something requiring no use of muscle. Like. His weakness was a mask. When he struck the sensor with a hammer the light did not rise all the way.

He felt the woman's eye snag on him. Pity, perhaps. Disgust, maybe.

The man walked with her to her vehicle. Gave a quick embrace while she faced him, slid a cord around her neck when she turned.

He watched the woman wake.

"What?" she asked horsely. "Happened.<sup>[i]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>" "Why are they trying to kill you?" he asked. "Have you seen the book?"

She edged away, giving her clothing and location a glance. "Who? What?"

"When you sought a mate they sent one to you. Why?"

She began a not so evasive search for an escape route.

"Where's-"

"He's dead," he said.

"Who's dead?"

"Your date. The one who tried to kill you," he slipped the cord around his neck, mimed the action. "Or," he spoke around the cord. "Did you put strangulation as a hobby?"

She began making movement to rise. Time to say something reassuring, he reasoned, twisting the cord into a Windsor knot.

"You've seen me before."

"Have you been following me?"

"Good thing I have. For you."

"Why?"

"Why do they want to kill you?"

"You don't have to live this way," she said. "There are services."

"I know what I can get girl. I've fought their wars. Killed who they said. Let scum live. I gave up everything. And they took more. Them putting a chip in my brain won't fix anything. You are the one-"

Fuck, he thought, not here not now.

How did you save someone? He had never saved anyone. Not the last. And this one would run as soon as the shaking started. She could be dead already, her image haunting him the way the last had. Or be the other, back from beyond to haunt him for his failings.

She was there when he opened his eyes.





## **Mother & Infant - Erica Blanton**

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The one oil painting motivation was ending the stigma and stereotypes of teenage pregnancy of my best friend. Eowyn Makenna Seeley the infant is now 12 and she was born on 3/8/2016 with her Grammy and myself by her mother Tara Seeley. I was 16 when she was born. I was 17 when I painted this 16"x12" oil painting titled, "First Morning Home." Showing love between Mother and child inspired by a photo taken by Eowyn's grandmother of her and her mother sleeping their first morning home from the hospital.

This painting won the Gold Key for Patriot News in 2006. I am still close to Eowyn as her godmother and she is a brilliant child. I want her to know she was not a mistake but instead a miracle; furthermore, how inspiring she is and loved everyday by so many.



# LIGHTNING MAN

WRITTEN  
BY **JULIAN FERNANDEZ**

In these grassy plains I have come alone with a tremendous metal rod in the middle of a rainstorm. I heave the rod into the earth—several times so that its end digs a small hole in which it may stand.

When the rod stands by itself, I release it and hold my arms out at the beckoning sky and I release also the blossoming fruit of a scream whose seeds I know were interred in me when I was but three years old—and I laugh because the sky is so big and so funny. It is drenched in black clouds.

When I am finished laughing lightning strikes elsewhere far away on these grassy plains—I resume seriousness and regrip the metal rod with fervor. Rain slicks my hair tight against my scalp and neck.

I stand here—the rain’s thousand movements blur into a single movement—I close my eyes—I hold tight—the single movement becomes a nonmovement—everything is still—the nonmovement becomes a single all-encompassing block of silent nothing—everything is still. Then, I am struck by lightning.

I am three years old and this is my birthday party. The theme is oysters. Delilah is my friend but she is throwing oysters at me—I think they are disgusting and each time I am pelted I feel betrayed. We are sitting at a table.

“Stop throwing!” I protest. She is laughing. Others are laughing but I don’t care. I just want her to stop throwing. I am learning that my words do not effect change.

She throws another oyster at me. It hits me in my crying eyeball. I turn my head away in shame. Then, I leave Delilah and I leave the others and I leave the table. The table is outside on the grass. I enter my house where the grownups are drinking yellow bubble drinks and laughing and eating oysters. I am crying but I do not let them notice me. I go to my room.

My dad has painted pictures of oysters all over my room and my room smells like a lot of paint. I think oysters are disgusting and now they are in my room so I feel like I have lost something irreplaceable. I am lonely here but I don’t want to see anyone because they are all eating oysters or throwing oysters at me and I don’t like them right now.

I don’t want to see the oysters on my wall so I turn off my lights but it’s daytime and the sun still shines brightly through my windows on all the oysters and I just don’t want them to be there anymore.

The only place that doesn’t have any oysters is my closet so I walk in there and I stand in the dark and I take off my uncomfortable pointy birthday hat and I put it by my feet and I stand and I stand and I stand until my feet hurt.

There is a small slit in the closet through which I can still see the oysters. I turn around so I don’t see them, but then I hear my dad’s footsteps and they are his upset-footsteps so I turn to face the slit and I look.

He is there and his hands are on his throat and he is not looking well and he is breathing a lot but it sounds like how a fish looks like maybe he is underwater even though I don’t see any water and he turns a big shade of red and then he tumbles onto the ground and he is scratching at his throat so much that I’m afraid he’s going to bleed which scares me a lot and now I want to leave the closet but I can’t move and I just look at him until he doesn’t move and then neither of us move.

Then my mom comes in and she gets low by his side and starts shouting and then Delilah’s mom is there and Delilah’s dad is there and they are both calm but very quick and sometime later there is a doctor there and then my mom starts shouting for me and she gets so worried because she doesn’t know where I am and I still can’t move and I am in the closet.

I leave the closet and she tells me that my dad is allergic to oysters and the doctor takes him away and I never see him again.

Lightning, like oysters, burns my skin and tears my flesh with a strong and comforting hand. I'm pleased and blown away, many feet backward.

Delilah is throwing oysters at me and it's my third birthday party. I've already told her to stop, but she keeps doing it.

I leave and walk right past my parents and I go to my room, which is coated with depictions of even more oysters, which upsets me, so I go into my closet and I look through the slit and I wait for something to happen. Something happens.

My dad comes into my room and he is smiling a devilish smile and behind him is something I have never seen before. Behind him is a gigantic oyster. A big oyster as tall as my dad and much, much wider follows him into my room on its back and lays on the center of my floor and my dad jumps right on him and lays on him like he's a bed. Then he looks right at the slit like he can see me and he says, "Oysters make me very sick. Oysters make your dad very, very sick. Oysters make me get all clammy in my throat and they close me right up and I get sick and red in the head. Oysters make me very sick."

Then my mom comes in and she screams and screams.

Here in the grass it's like I'm underwater. The rain is endless and invisible and loud. My body feels like it would hurt if I moved at all, but I have no trouble being still, and the dirt behind my head is soft—somehow, I have become comfortable.

My dad reads me a bedtime story: he says, "I died because I ate too many oysters." Then he closes the book, kisses me on the forehead, and clicks off the light.

I am lying in my bed in the daytime with the lights off and all around me are my dad's paintings of oysters and he is gone.

I am lying in the grass and it pains me to stand, but I do, and it pains me to walk, but I do, and it pains me to hold tight the metal rod once more, and I do.

I am twenty-four and I am perfectly aware that I suffer many delusions. I am perfectly aware that fish, in no cases, speak English, but I also feel that I should not on that basis ignore what they have to say.

I met a fish at a bar—his head was in a half-spilled sideways glass of water on the barstool next to mine—and we got to drinking and then we got to talking. The details of our conversation were unimportant but the main points were two and they were: human history was a story of the maltreatment of all types of fish, and I would be rewarded handsomely if I helped the fish raze every bait and tackle shop in America to the ground. We got as far as one.

First, before I tell of the razing, I want to clarify: 'helping' the fish raze the bait and tackle shops meant me razing the bait and tackle shops without any help. The fish was useless at razing—he had no hands, arms, legs, all the body parts that made razing accessible. I was to be alone in the matter, which was fine with me. I was just pleased that I had an honest job.

So, I bought a canister of gasoline and some matches, and I drove to the nearby *Poppler's Bait and Poppler's Tackle*. I brought the fish.

The fish tells me from his little glass cup in my car's cupholder that I'm brave, and I get the gasoline from the trunk; the matches are in my pocket. I go into the little shop I'm about to raze and I greet the clerk, and then I begin shaking the gasoline all over the floor and items for sale.

The clerk says, "Hey!"

And I say, "You should get out of here soon!" I had thought he would just leave—he might get hurt.

The clerk says "Stop!" and he runs over to me and tries to wrestle with me. The canister is heavy and he knocks it out of my hands—it thunks on the floor in a small puddle—the clerk keeps wrestling with me and awkwardly pushes me to the ground and I say, "You don't understand!"



And he releases his grip on my sides and looks at me absolutely bewildered. I say, "I've gotta burn this place."

He says, "No you don't," and he starts pushing at me again. I push back reflexively. His back hits loudly against a shelf of hooks and hooks clatter and fall on gasoline and him and he shouts a shout of several tones it's almost musical—I happen to be physically strong, which feels like nothing but guilt here in *Poppler's Bait and Poppler's Tackle*.

I stand; I slip on the gasoline; I fall upon the clerk.

He is breathing beneath me—he smells of wood and perfume—his arm is in my mouth. I stand again, then scoop down low and pick him up in my arms. He looks at me tired and distant and he looks at me like a baby does. I take him outside and lay him on the sidewalk.

I re-enter the shop and calmly finish pouring gasoline many surfaces. I remove my matches and I light one.

I say goodbye to the bait and tackle shop, I leave, and I throw my lit match through the doorway.

The fire catches quick and launches its bright tendrils in all directions indoors and soon the ceiling comes down in pieces and the whole floor is awash in pretty flames and smoke-dust. I sit down on the sidewalk and watch—the clerk gasps by my side. Then the police come.

The rain is a beautiful onslaught and I'm laughing again, squeezing my hand-skin against the metal. The sky is so funny.

Then, loud, a bright flash calls down from the clouds once more and strikes me.

I stand in court, a witness to my own crime. Delilah is my prosecutor. She throws at me: an oyster.

"Did Poppler do anything to aggravate you before you assaulted him?" says the prosecution.

"No," I say.

"Did Poppler speak a word or make a gesture that one might consider offensive before you assaulted him?" says the prosecution.

"No," I say.

"And, is it not the case that you entered the establishment holding the aforementioned cannister of gasoline with the intention to, as you've said, 'raze' the shop?" says the prosecution.

"Yes," I say. The jury is all eyes, glowing at me, drilling at me—they are like a fog that seems to float towards me, but never moves any closer.

"May I ask," the judge is astounded at me, her eyeballs are all awry, "why?" "To speak of the truth," I say, "is to speak of a fish. I will put it like that."

Delilah throws at me another oyster. No one says or does anything. The oyster hits me in the nose.

I go on: "A fish told me that the act would be just—the fish gave me a job, and I was pleased to complete it. That is all."

Somehow, this was enough. I am not taken to prison. Whether by pity or fear or the swing of a mood or a simple fondness for my character, I am sentenced to a brief stay in a mental ward, and nothing more.

In my dark room in my dark mental ward in my sheets, in my sheets I am in in a grassy field on my back and I am electrified. I am burnt—I am crisped—I persist—I stand and give testimony once more to the metal rod and I laugh at the sky.

They interview me often in the ward and give me Thorazine which makes me vomit without exception and gives to my mouth and eyes a twitch. I take the pills for a week and then I hide them beneath my tongue and I spit them out and hide them beneath my pillow like teeth and whisper to them crass and kind things in the late hours when I can't sleep and crave entertainment.

Nurse Grester finds my untaken pills one afternoon. She enters my room with them cupped in her palm and she shows me them with her watery eyes and nurse suit and she says nothing. I say nothing too; she leaves, and then no longer brings them to me.

I live in the ward for one month after that and then I leave. My stay in the ward was two months and not for a moment in those two months did I think of oysters or dream of oysters or smell of oysters or kiss of oysters or eat of oysters or die of oysters or see oysters or breathe sea- smells of oysters or read a menu and read ‘oysters’ or trip on oysters or buy oysters at the store or paint oysters on my wall.

My father painted oysters on my wall. I ought to have died in the ward.

When I leave the ward, I visit my father’s grave and I think he ought to have been buried at sea because I would not visit the sea and I do not want to be able to visit the site of his burial.

His gravestone is thick and weighty and I stand and look on it and I’ve not any idea what I am supposed to say to this piece of rock that bears his oyster-slain name.

I say, “Oyster man, oyster man.” Not enough.

I shout, “Oyster man! Oyster man!”

I say, “Papa, why’d you have to die in such a funny way?” He doesn’t answer.

What I wonder when I am struck by lightning here is why the nurse did what she did. I want to know why she only looked at me and let me go on with my delusions. I want to know why they wouldn’t send me to jail. Was it because they liked me? Was it because they, too, listened to fish? The pain of lightning against all my sore spots is immense. I am covered in lightning bruises.

And again, the many moments become a single stillness.

I dreamt of the nurse. With her watery eyes she looked at me with my pills in her palm and silently left.

At night she returned holding a blade and she might’ve killed me had lightning not struck outside in the storm and lit the room and lit the walls and shown me the paintings of oysters all upon the walls—the paintings of oysters all upon the walls—all the paintings extended their palms and all the paintings look wet—and all the paintings’ palms bore oysters and they allowed me to behold them and then they closed their fists and threw them all in a barrage—all the paintings in a barrage threw their oysters at me—at my face—at my eyes. I grew puffy. I grew tall and bold and fat and puffy. And Nurse Grester looked on with her blade and she looked and did nothing until I begged her to please slice me open, oh God don’t let me grow larger please slice me open but she would not.

And the next day I screamed at her, “Why did you do nothing?” And the fellows of the ward stared on. And the other nurses stared on. I was a man who listened to fish—don’t listen to me. The fellows and the nurses did nothing. I ought not to have screamed at her for afterwards her gaze at me was less watery and much colder and I knew it was just a dream and I knew it was just a dream and I knew she only wanted to help me.

I lie again on the ground, and this time I am no longer confident I will find strength to stand again. I have been struck and struck and the sky still roars its grayness and drips its gallons on my face and the lightning hits elsewhere upon the grass. I am a singed man.

When I left his grave, I applied for a job at an organization that provides food catering to funerals and birthday parties.

I work each day in the warehouse—shifting boxes of lemons and peaches into various freezers. I visit the kitchen and fry shrimp.

Today, I drive the truck.

On all previous days, I had only driven the truck to funerals, but today my destination is a child’s birthday party.

There is cake in the trailer—a tin of rice and beans and tomatoes and asparagus. There is also shrimp and eggs and rice and beans and there are also oysters.



Today, I am sweaty and I am on the highway driving at 60 miles per hour and behind me are many things and many of those things are oysters.

I think of pulling to the side of the road—calling my employer—I could quit my job, or say I got sick, went into the forest to vomit, and when I returned the truck had disappeared— someone had stolen the truck—the trailer began to smell of rot and in my investigation, I discovered that all the food was covered in fungus. I think of this, but there is no shoulder on this road. I cannot stop the truck without crashing it.

I increase my foot's pressure on the gas pedal. A faster speed will decrease my time spent near these oysters.

I speed. There are many sections of guardrail through which I think of crashing. I don't crash into any of them.

I lie and I lie and I lie in the grass. I long for the lightning through my body to pass.

I want to crash the truck but instead I stop at a gas station and purchase again a canister of gasoline and a book of matches. I offer to pay the clerk in rice and beans—she declines. She is allergic to beans.

The nurse lets me refrain from my pills. Delilah sits at my birthday party and throws oysters at me. My papa tells me a bedtime story. The jury let me go free so easy.

How then, is the grass not ablaze? All this and I am not ablaze? I stand once more—I find the strength alright—I stand strong—I even have energy! I stagger to the rod and I hold it again and listen to the torrents.

I pour the gasoline indiscriminately throughout the trailer. I am still parked at the gas station—there are others around but people do not notice things. I light a match and lay it upon a tin of rice and beans. The fire catches. I leave the trailer and drive away.

I drive once again 60 miles per hour on the highway, but now it is not oysters I am transporting, but pure fire. In my rearview mirrors: smoke follows me. Some people are allergic to smoke. I think that the cars beside me who express their inclination to honk may house these people who are allergic to smoke. I am not allergic to smoke, but still—maybe what I am doing here is playing a game of trying to escape it. I increase my foot's pressure on the gas pedal and speed—the smoke billows backward—but still it follows me. The sun is out now and the burning oysters crackle.

I approach exit 6 and take it ablaze.

The party guests don't seem to know what to say to me about my driving to them in a fiery catering truck—I am like a horseman of the apocalypse come bearing shrimp and rice and beans. I think it is fine if this is how they see me. I open the door and announce my presence. I thank them for their purchase. I exit the truck and proceed towards a child in a birthday hat, so that I might wish her a happy birthday.

The truck explodes. A fiery blaze pours upward through the air and metal and wheels and rubber are disseminated through the lawn. Some are hurt. There are those running, yelling, lying on the ground clutching their knees or arms. No one is killed. All are making noise. A small piece of metal escapes past me, close enough to my face to cut it and draw blood. It starts to rain.

The child cries and sits on the ground, but it is her birthday. I tell her I am sorry that my truck exploded—part of her home is ruined, I too have felt that pain—others are injured, I too have felt that pain—never should this have happened. Never should the inevitable happen, I tell her. Never.

She cries. My words do not offer her solace.

The truck explodes again—this time only a gasp—the sight is round and fiery and it hurts my eyes and I know that within that blaze, there are oysters. This explosion—the second one—is like my father's grave in sight—underwhelming and I don't know what to say to it, but I know I must say something—I can only think of apologies. I don't say anything.

I tell the child that everything will be alright. It is her birthday and she is one year older and she will learn of new unanswerable questions and she will reflect upon old ones that will seem to grow in importance and she will learn to take with more joy the sorrows of going to bed and learn to take with more sorrow the joys of starting anew and she will learn also innumerable facts of pure circumstance that will guide the architecture of her brain and make her say ‘why’

instead of ‘what’ and make her become a doctor instead of dead and cause her to become foolish enough to ever listen to a fish with her whole heart.

She runs away, as I would have.

The truck seems a disappointing bonfire that leaves all its guests unhappy. Soon, some guests take issue with me.

“What have you done?” they ask me. “I’ve burnt the oysters,” I tell them.

They don’t understand and so they call the police. I don’t want to be taken again—I know I am lucky—I know the jury won’t be kind.

I run.

The guests follow and they surround me. There is a long piece of metal at my feet—a piece of the truck. I take it into my arms and wave it about. They do not come close. I would not hit a one of them with it, were any to approach closer—but they do not know that. I understand what I am to them.

I leave the lawn, swinging the metal—they do not follow me much longer. There are injured to tend to. I leave and enter the forest and walk briskly through trees and plants in the growing rain. I am alone, I think. There is something wrong with me—Delilah has been throwing oysters at me ever since I turned three—there was the slowness of the waiting at night in my oyster-painted room and the fear and the sadness and the discomfort and the dreams. Worst of all there was the laughter—I hated the comedy of it—too many oysters. The whole joke: too many oysters. I hated how funny I thought it was.

Here in the forest, I no longer care. I have sufficiently expressed the effect of my father’s allergy. I have razed the shop; I have ruined the party—neither of these things made me happy. I just could not help myself.

The forest opens wide to a clearing and the storm has taken its full shape—it is magnificent—it is a magnifying glass to the universe above of galaxies and black holes and the formation and destruction of planets and horrific celestial bodies. I am here and I am peeking through it and I am torn up—I feel the blood on my face distinct from the water as I think:

It is as old as Zeus. Let me connect to the sky.

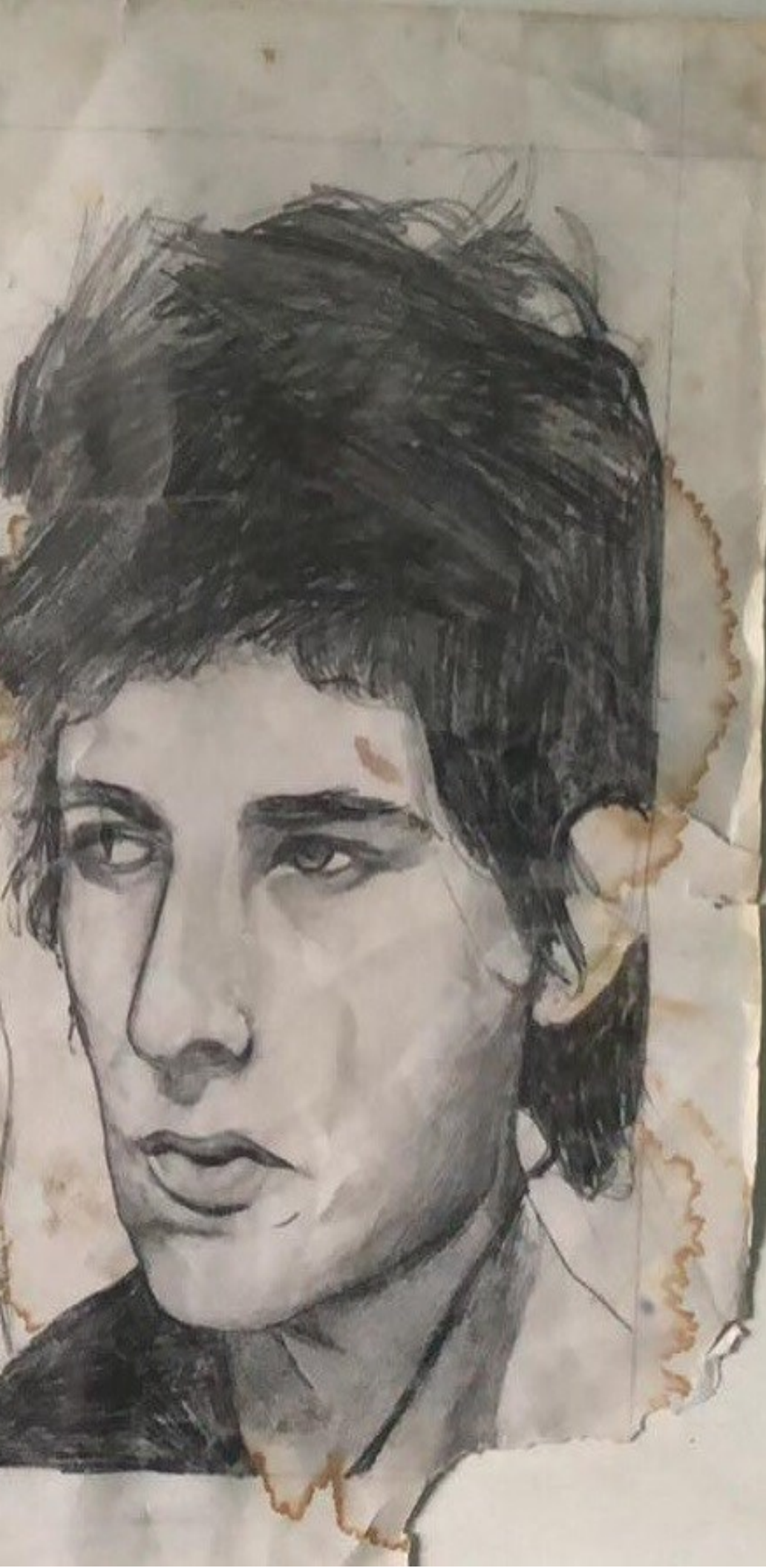
The conclusion to my adventures—early upon the journey of my life I had been cursed by the callousness of allergies and I had fallen because of a creature of the sea and the effect he had upon my father’s body—the sea is the violent thing, and I had played with fire to rid myself of it—but I couldn’t do it—I couldn’t burn the sea and so here:

Let me turn to the sky—let Poseidon be fed to the sharks and let me be fed to Zeus—I offer myself in sacrifice—yes, I offer myself—I throw my arms up and laugh and run forth through the grassy plain.

For the last time I grip the rod and before the lightning strikes—I hear it through to its completion, sound is faster than light just this once—I hear the entire lightning strike and the rain is still and all is still and I am, for the last time, still.







### **Bob Dylan - Erica Blanton**

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My inspiration for most of my life: Bob Dylan. A quick doodle and some coffee stains.  
“One more cup of coffee and the different views of Dylan.”







# CONTRIBUTOR

## *Notes*

**Thalia Longchamp** is born and raised in Manhattan, and is a theatre trained actress. She took a break from the mainstream industry (Hollywood), because it wasn't making her feel like an artist. She is also a natural born psychic and intuitive empath with countless Clair abilities that inform my work.

**Laura Arciniega** holds an MDiv from Beeson Divinity School. Her work has appeared in Mad Scientist Journal, Eastern Iowa Review, Saint Katherine Review, and elsewhere.

**Panagiotis Renieris** is a pediatrician by profession (US trained), father of two, 38 years old.

**Melinda Jane – The Poet Mj** writer, spoken word artist with explorations in soundscapes, installation art, improv music in the performing arts. Published poems in Thirty West Publishing, Havik Literary Anthology, The Mozzie, Rambutan, Backstory Journal, KNWG.

**Stanley Toledo's** full-length plays have been produced by the Morgan Opera House in Aurora, New York, and the Las Vegas Little Theatre in Las Vegas. Stan's short plays are presented in theatres across the country. In January, Milkshake Trees was presented at Redwood Day School's annual Winter One-Acts in Oakland, CA. Gun Jr. Leaves Home was staged in April at the Underexposed Theatre's New Writing Festival in London, UK.

**Ivars Balkits** has published poetry and prose in several anthologies and on the web sites for Down in the Dirt, cahoodaloodaling, Angry Old Man, Plural Prose Journal, Uut Poetry, Helios MSS, Unbroken Journal, Otoliths, Thirteen Myna Birds, OccuPoetry, ditch, Silenced Press, Merge Poetry Journal, and Counter Example Poetics. He is a recipient of two Individual Excellence Awards from the Ohio Arts Council, for poetry in 1999 and creative nonfiction in 2014.

**Susan M. Breall** has short stories published in TheWriteLaunch.com, JewishFiction.com, and FeedMeFiction.com. She was a finalist in the 2017 Retreat West Short Story contest. Her story The Martha Rhymes will be published in the anthology Impermanent Facts in September.

**Michael Waterson** is a human.

**Ryan Langlois** was raised just outside of Oakland, CA. He currently resides in East Nashville, TN where he manages artists, records music, and journals compulsively.

**David Sprehe** lives and writes in Southern Illinois, USA.

**Con Chapman** is a Boston-area writer, author of three novels. His work has appeared in The Atlantic, The Christian Science Monitor, The Boston Globe and various literary magazines. He is currently writing a biography of Johnny Hodges, Duke Ellington's long-time alto sax, for Oxford University Press.

**Patrick Bruskiwich** is a Canadian born, Vancouver based poet and writer.

**Vanessa Christie** is a writer and artist living in San Diego. She has been published in Brilliant Flash Fiction, Indianola Review, and They. A novel excerpt for her novel 'Strangers You Know' is in The Write Launch. She is working with Konstellation Press on the forthcoming anthology "Modern Metamorphosis". <https://twitter.com/vtheartist>

**Julian Fernandez** and studies computer science and creative writing. He is 21 years old and values laughter, justice, and human and other forms of life.

Erica Blanton is a 29 year old artist living in New Cumberland, PA.

**Erica Blanton**









# THE MARTIAN CHRONICLE . ISSUE 2 . AUGUST 2018

## ALL ARTWORK BELONGS TO ALEXIS AVLAMIS UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

Alexis Avlamis (b.Athens 1979) received an early art instruction from Bennington College, Vermont and later on earned a BFA(hons) in Painting from the Athens School of Fine Arts. By tapping into a stream of consciousness, he creates dreamlike mindscapes aiming at a Cosmic Unity, where nature and the artifice co-exist symbiotically. Avlamis is a laureate of the International Emerging Artist Award (Drawing and Illustration category), which saw his works exhibited in Dubai and Brussels, respectively. Awards, Juried shows and competitions include the: 31st September competition, Alexandria Museum of Art, LA, (USA), 39th Annual Juried Art Exhibition, Monmouth Museum, NJ, (USA), Cardinal Planes, Gallery Korea, Korean Cultural Center, New York (USA ), the Stencil Art Prize, Touring Exhibition, (Australia), The Abstract Mind, CICA Museum (Korea), Art meets Writing: Black&White, SAA Collective, Springfield, IL (USA), Bowery Gallery International Juried show, New York, (USA), Who.Are.You?, Atlantic gallery, New York (USA), 6th 2017 ArtSlant Prize Showcase Winner (Mixed-Media), 7th 2017 ArtSlant Prize Showcase Winner (Painting), A line with intent, ARC Gallery, Chicago (USA), Biennale Austria, blue bleu blau blu, (Vienna), Black&White, 3rd Place, Bauhaus Prairie Art Gallery, OK, (USA), Amuse Yeux, Foothills Art Center, CO, (USA), Art Kudos (USA), 26th International Miniature Show, Parklane Gallery, WA, (USA), Day Dreamers, Bg Gallery (California), 10x10x10 Tieton, (Washington), the Bloom Award, Shortlisted (Cologne), Artist Statement, CICA Museum (Korea), Anthology, Charlie Smith London (UK), the Mamut Art Project (Istanbul), the IEAA Award (Dubai and Brussels), the Dave Bown Projects, (New York), the Heart Revive, Sunshine Museum (Beijing), the 7 artists / 7 countries, Embassy of the Republic of Korea, Korean cultural service, Beijing (China), the Drawing Center's Viewing Program (New York) and several others. He has attended artist residencies in USA, Finland and China, has been published and interviewed internationally (Art21 blog: Inside the Artist's Studio, Jan 2010) and works may be found in private and museum collections, most notably the Djurhuus Collection, Denmark and the Henan Art Center's collection, China. Lives and works in Athens .