



Nabu

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The Nabu Review

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Table of Contents

In order of appearance

My Wonderful Youth • Philip Wendt

Carefree Calls • Dick Bentley

... oh, boy ... • William Vlach

The Following Answer • Keith Raymond

Twigs • Sarah Estime

She Puts the Handcuffs Back On • Kendra M. Genereux

Counting the Ways • Alan Gartenhaus

The Kiss of Life • Sara Hailstone

When there's no sun on Jupiter and you're afraid of the dark • Ruby Simoneau

Broken State • Nicolas D. Sampson

My Wonderful Youth • Philip Wendt

I don't remember ever wanting it, it was always a need. From the day we were introduced it consumed my mind and body, leaving me painfully oblivious to the life I was only recently given. I didn't care that my mother never fed me. I never minded being alone. I wasn't bothered that I couldn't move around or see well. My focus, what got me, was the craving. I would fidget and twitch for days. I was taught anguish, and agony. I was a superb student. My mother shared my misery, and it ended for us only when she was able. She gave me no hint, it was always the odor. When I caught its scent I knew what followed. First mother, then me, into my bloodstream. I was in bliss some times for only minutes, and other times close to an hour, but never more. The process then repeated itself. This was the first nine months of my life. I remember it all as clearly as you remember yesterday. How? I have no clue. I was born two pounds thirteen ounces and I spent six months in an incubator. Needless to say, when I left the womb I was forced to abandon the addiction I never wanted to start. My mom however, kept going. The crack cocaine killed her before I was old enough to walk. I remember nothing about her.

Broken State • Nicolas D. Sampson

Athens, Greece: Day One of what became known as the Age of Wrath. Thugs and extremists attacked a camp of illegal immigrants near Syntagma Square in the late hours of the morning, chanting mottoes like 'Our taxes! Our healthcare!' They beat people with wooden clubs and iron rods and planks stitched with nails. Forty-eight immigrants – ten of them women, and a child – and five social workers ended up in hospital, nineteen of them in critical condition.

Outrage ensued. The story made the news, the news made a mess of it, a surprising number of panelists coming to the support of the extremists, claiming that a broken state could no longer afford a welfare system for its citizens, let alone for those not contributing to its funding and maintenance.

The minority of panelists and journalists, pundits and viewers protested, standing up for common sense, decency and the rule of law, but they offered no realistic solution as to how to fund the healthcare system, which had run out of money.

The country fell in disarray. Dependent on back-to-back loans offered by a number of international organizations in exchange for reform that had yet to materialize, the Greek state was frayed and collapsing. To engage in reform was seen as weakness. Debate was deemed a waste of time, and calls for calm and level-headedness were ridiculed and taken advantage of.

Things heated up rapidly. A prominent politician on live TV announced that the only way to be rid of the problem was to stomp it out. Many in the studio audience cheered, others booed. The man shook his finger at the anchor.

'If they don't make themselves scarce, we'll crack open a few skulls and leave them in plain sight for others to see, in the ditch, where they can die like dogs.'

The comment alluded to the fact that some of the injured illegals had ended up in the hospital, putting the country's tax euros to use, irony that only exacerbated the toxic debate.

Encouraged by the comment, or irked by it – some claimed it had been voiced sarcastically and with no intention to instigate violence; others argued that words such as these were malicious, cold and calculated, their supporters perfectly aware of what they were setting up – whatever the case, armed thugs stormed the hospital and dragged the patients in question out on the street and dowsed them in red paint and glitter.

The police didn't intervene. The TV crews came rushing in, a wave of flashlights and microphones, vans screeching down the streets, helicopters roaring, a scramble for media posterity.

The image that traveled the world was caught after dark. A hooded man was spotted dragging a patient by his blue hospital gown to a deserted side street. The cameraperson shone his spotlight down the alley and in the gleam of primetime TV the hooded man raised his foot. The heavy boot sparkled darkly in the camera light, his bull-sized body casting a long, street-wide shadow down the alley. The raised foot hovered above the hospital patient's head who, lying on his back, his face swollen and purple and bloodied, stared at the bottom of that boot, at the cleats protruding from its front end, at the metal-plated tip, at the compressed rubber heel with its sharp, edgy corners – the patient stared, eyes narrow in the flood of the camera light, trying to discern what was happening, unaware of what was happening until he saw the foot come down. He screamed but his scream was cut short as the heel rammed into his mouth, smashing the front row of his teeth, drowning him in a sputter of blood, the boot rising and falling until all that remained was a pile of meat, hair, and teeth in a pool of blood.

All around the globe the stations broadcasted the heinous execution and the social media went insane, and the world climaxed in guilty horror, screaming bloody murder, unable to turn its eyes away. Many protested, asking for a censored version, but that would only cover up the problem. According to an unnamed source, 'only by not flinching from this image will we understand how Orwellian our reality has become.'

The day after, the EU placed a moratorium on its loan installments to Greece, pending an international investigation. No money would be released until the guilty were brought to justice, according to an EU spokesman.

This put further strain on the system. Organizations such as the Hellenic Ministry of Finance and the

Guild of Commerce protested, arguing that to punish a crime with added hardship would lead to more crime.

Things got complicated when a government probe identified agent provocateurs who, as the Greek government spokeswoman claimed, had been working for the Opposition. These provocateurs, the spokeswoman announced to the press, sought to undermine the government by creating an international incident that would halt EU payments, maybe even provoke a revolution.

The Opposition dismissed the accusations as 'hogwash.' They claimed that the thugs in question were government stooges under orders to stoke up trouble and make the Opposition look bad.

By noon on the following day there were clashes on the streets between anarchists and fascists. Random protesters were drawn into the fighting and groups of likeminded people often mistook each other for rivals.

A week later, Athens was a cauldron of unrest, round-the-clock riots and looting. Police forces were unable to contain the mayhem and the countryside followed suit. Small towns across the country flared up. Factions established strongholds – the rightwing in Attica and the Peloponnese, the leftwing on the isles. A mixed bag everywhere else. Villages saw an upsurge in gun crime as people dug out their WWII weaponry. People who'd known each other for years accused each other of treason. People were beaten to death, others shot in their homes, or dragged in the street and executed in a manner that brought back memories of the Military Junta, the Civil War, and the Nazis before that. Martial law was declared and the streets echoed with boots and armored vehicles, and checkpoints were thrown up in major boulevards, highways and country roads from the Peloponnese to Thrace.

In response, the EU extended its moratorium, demanding that the military be 'withdrawn from all civilian areas.'

The Greek government spokeswoman demanded that Brussels stop taking advantage of the situation and 'pay the hell up.' She tore up her notes and walked up to the camera, screaming:

'The blood of innocent people is on your hands, fellow Europeans. All this – take a look! – is care of the EU! Want to stop the carnage? Resume the loan installments immediately! Without the funds, matters will get worse. We'll have a tragedy on our hands, and so will you! This regional fire will spread to your houses!'

The EU's response was an extension of the moratorium on additional emergency funds for the Greek banking sector. So-called 'Emergency Liquidity Assistance' would be halted until the situation stabilized.

There were some in the international community who argued for a reinstatement of the ELA, but their reservations were dismissed. Even in Greece there was resistance to it. While some government officials demanded the ELA funding, others said it would simply inflate the tally.

'Good riddance! Emergency funding is a con. The rates cost an arm and two legs. Loan sharks! Vultures!'

A few days later the EU announced that no further ELA would be provided under any circumstances, not until the military stepped down.

The Greek government responded by seizing three tankers and a number of merchant ships sailing under EU flags. There was also an assault on the European Union cultural center by a group of 'unidentified hooligans.' Two aides were flung off a building and suffered severe injuries. One of them died two days later.

When the president of the European Commission described the event as 'an act of savagery,' a wave of demonstrators clad in blue shawls with blood-red stars surrounded the hospital where the surviving aide was being treated. It was rumored that the stars were dyed with pigs' blood, but that was quickly discredited as propaganda.

The demonstration was peaceful, at least it started out that way, but the situation degenerated. Three civilians ended up shot dead by army personnel. Live ammunition had been used.

The next day millions of people took to the streets in a series of protests that saw people clash en masse, and every building turned into an emergency hospital, every street into a morgue. The air reeked of gunpowder, burnt rubber, pulverized concrete and metal. The government declared war on domestic enemies, and then an obscure Army Colonel decided it would be a great idea to declare war on the EU itself, and just like that fighting broke out among factions of the Greek military near the straits of Salamis, and up in Thessaly and Macedonia. In the mountains of Olympus, a British radar installation was raided by irregulars, who posted pictures of their exploits on social media. A fleet of British and French warships was deployed to the region with hours. The borders were shut down and the country was ring-fenced.

November 2014. This is a developing story. Please stay tuned ...

Carefree Calls • Dick Bentley

She wasn't a girlfriend. She was a member of the "Sexy Seven," those thirteen-year-olds who were *everybody's* girlfriends.

"The Sexy Seven" --- that's what they called themselves. They would drive around the streets of Lake Forest in Sol Smith's convertible. They wore red cloche hats, which they would wave at everyone as they passed.

Karen proudly claimed that she was the only member of the group who wasn't sexy.

She said she would never marry. She preferred horses to boys. She had a temperament that excluded love affairs but encouraged friendship. She was an only child, and she lived with her parents in a remodeled farmhouse that had once been part of a vast estate. She kept a couple of horses, and I would ride beside her, galloping over fields and splashing through ponds.

Years passed, and the Sexy Seven married or moved away. But Karen stayed in the Chicago area. One afternoon, after a good ride together, I sat with her on the top rail of a fence that overlooked the pasture behind her house. We were in our twenties by now, and we talked about our lives. She was no longer a teenager who threw erasers at her teacher. After college at Vassar, she herself became a teacher of young children. She wondered how, besides the reading and arithmetic, she could help them find meaning in their lives.

"What's the point of education, the reading and writing, all that adding and subtracting? What does it all," she sighed, "add up to?"

After this talk, I could see she was trying to make sense of her life. A few weeks after that conversation, I went east to visit some friends, two of whom had once been members of the "Sexy Seven." They had found important husbands, important careers, and had sired important children. They were glad to see me, they said.

When I returned home, I found that Karen had gone to Silver Hill, a psychiatric hospital in Connecticut. I was bewildered. I was especially upset because of our talk on the top rail of the fence that overlooked the pasture. I visited her. We walked the grounds together, but I never asked her why she was there. She gave no information, and the fact that she was in a mental hospital seemed to have no meaning for her. She was casual, but she seemed strong. I knew that at last it was time to fall in love with her. She had given her life meaning and could possibly help me do the same.

But a job change moved me away from Chicago. Karen married and moved to Arizona.

Soon, the Christmas calls began. Every year around Christmas, she would call me or I would call her. The years passed. I told her about my marriage and the birth of my children.

She talked about her marriage and her divorce and her mother's move to Arizona after her father died. I now lived in New England, and I told her about our family's Christmas drives through the mountains—the Taconics, the Berkshires, the Holyoke range, the ski areas. I told Karen that after Chicago, you could be nostalgic for a new place, even if you had just arrived there.

She laughed, and said she felt the same way about Arizona. She said she was moving to Carefree to be closer to her mother.

"There's a town in Arizona called Carefree? Could someone like you ever be happy in a place called Carefree?"

"It's nostalgic," she said. "Your word. I ride my horse through the Ponderosa. I take care of people who need help."

Over the next few years, she told me about her second marriage and the birth of her daughter. She told me casually about the brief trip to Silver Hill. It had been her decision, she said. She had been feeling depressed, but after the visit, the depression went away. That was all. Now it was over. She looked forward to many things in her life.

One year the Christmas calls stopped. I tried to reach her a few times. At first, the phone didn't answer. Then I found it had been disconnected.

She had disappeared.

The searches began.

A few months later, the police found her body in the hot desert. She had been taped inside a cardboard moving box. The killer had assaulted her, broken her ribs, gagged her.

Choked her, and placed a bag over her head to suffocate her.

The killer and his wife worked as day laborers. They were helping Karen move to a new house. According to the police, they killed her because they didn't want her to find out that they had stolen some of her jewelry—earrings, a necklace, some rings. They pawned the jewelry then went off to Las Vegas for some gambling.

Even though the case has been solved, the facts refuse to reduce themselves to any kind of meaning.

Karen suffered alone in the desert. She was untouched, like many of us, by God, by grace, or by purpose.

There are moments in Scripture when we hear that God delights his creation and in his people. It is difficult to find any evidence.

... oh, boy... • William Vlach

Doc, I guess it started on the last day of vacation. I think I slept wrong, you know, with my hand in a fist, under the pillow, resting my head on it all night. I felt a sort of numbness on my right hand. It tingled. The night before I had opened my phone up just before I went to sleep, and decided to catch up on the news. When I got back home the next symptom was my left hand. Same thing. A tingling numbness. Odd, huh? No, I hadn't slept on it. Came on suddenly when I was reading the morning paper. There was this picture of all these people in my neighborhood at a meeting arguing about the homeless, or something like that. Then, damn it, my right leg went out, almost paralyzed. I could walk over to the grocery store, but, Lordy, I sure had to limp. I had checked out the morning TV news, and there was picture of a father and daughter, face down in the river. That was when I decided to call you. I suffered through it until this morning. And then, sitting in your lovely waiting room, I flipped through one of your magazines. And there were these photos of men and women sleeping on cement in some sort of camp. My left leg started that weird tingling numb feeling. I just stared at the photos, and I noticed that the numbness rose from my legs and spread from my arms into my trunk. Thank you for coming out here to see me. There is no way I could have stood up and walked into your consulting room. And I should tell you that the numbness is spreading toward my chest. After I stopped looking at those magazine photos, I opened my phone and there was a picture of a child drinking out of a toilet, and another child's clothes being pulled off by a man in uniform and the numbness is attacking my lungs and my heart and



The Following Answer • Keith Raymond

Theophilus carefully put down the antiquated quill and blew gently on his final document. He felt an arthritic hand on his shoulder, the ever present love of his life, Gladiola. He gazed at the dust motes floating in the air as the sunlight slanted through the porthole. The ship barely rolled on the waves. It was the only safe place remaining on Earth for them.

Their followers were legion. His words, her thoughts, had made all the difference. He was public enemy number one. The most wanted man in all the world. To his believers he was a savior. To everyone else, a scourge on all humanity.

Theophilus reflected on how it all started, brushing his long gray hair back with his fingers. His daughter came home with glad tidings. She was pregnant. It was back when he was Ted. It was back when humans were supposedly in their last generation. All were sterile.

'Ironic really,' Gladiola thought at the same time, 'that humanity's end was because of the dinosaurs.' Some claimed it was a meteor that killed the dinosaurs. However, further studies proved it was the contents of the meteor that really brought their end. Genetic material from the stars. It was that material combined with the wheel of evolution that made their extinction permanent. One kingdom gave rise to another.

The dinosaurs indeed had the last laugh. As they rendered their bodies and bones into oil, humanity elected to plunder their remains to drive their cars and carry plastic bags. The plastic once micro-sized permeated our blood and bones, slowly making us infertile.

Ted stared at Violet's protuberant abdomen in horror. Not the response Violet was expecting. Gladys, her mother, came from the kitchen wiping her hands. She gushed and placed her hand over her mouth self-consciously. Violet had waited until she was showing before she brought them the good news.

Violet and her husband had applied and were accepted for the procedure. Dr. Victor Behram, a clinical gynecologist devised the procedure. Behram was no longer an obstetrician, as obstetrics ceased to exist since the day the last baby was born twenty years before. He had stumbled on the cure for infertility purely by accident.

The doctor who saved the world, started out only wanting to save his daughter. Molly had eaten from a plastic bowl that his wife was soaking with the usual household enzymatic solution prior to disposal. It had sat overnight.

The bacterial broth was designed to digest plastic and was required, according to law, to treat the plastic on being recycled. Victor found his four-year-old daughter with a mouthful of cereal and liquefying plastic one morning in their kitchen. Terrified for her life, he called poison control and their answer was to send a hearse.

By then, the enzymes and bacteria had entered her bloodstream and her liver was failing. Victor watched the whites of his daughter's eyes turn bright yellow in the time it took him to make the call. Panicked, he placed an intravenous line and gave her an anti-sepsis cocktail he devised on the spot, made from antibiotics, steroids, and enzyme binders. A futile act made from sheer desperation. Molly survived from what was in his doctor's bag.

Ten years later, she refused breakfast and was vomiting. After several days of this, Behram took a test strip he found at the bottom of his old doctor's bag, kept mostly out of nostalgia, and was shocked to see Molly was pregnant.

Not believing the result, he drew her blood, and sent it for testing. The hospital lab had left over human chorionic gonadotropin monoclonal antibody reagent, and the test came back positive. They repeated it three more times to be sure. The results were unequivocal.

Dr. Behram then performed the first obstetrical ultrasound in a quarter century and found a viable embryo growing in Molly. The news of her pregnancy rocked the planet. New hope for the continuation of humankind was once more in our hands. Joy had replaced despair.

He still doubted her pregnancy was anything but a fluke. To refute this, he collected some of her other eggs to study. There was a clear absence of the destructive micro-sized plastic that had led to the global infertility. The plastic that had damaged all other women's oocytes was not in evidence.

Victor wracked his brain trying to remember the anti-sepsis cocktail he made that saved her life. He stared at his crew cut in the mirror. He shook the stiff brown hair on his head trying to clear the cobwebs. He searched through his medical bag several times. His blue eyes finally sparkled as the memory returned.

Several clinical trials and massive funding later, Behram's work led to a refinement of the procedure known as the Molly Plication. He called it that as the girls and young women who underwent the procedure entered the 'fertile fold' once more. Women proudly displayed their fertility pins in public thereafter, not to mention their protuberant bellies.

The selection process for the Molly Plication required genetic and psychological testing of both parents. Riots broke out as couples fought to be tested and brought into the fold. The requirements were rigorous, and favoritism was often decried.

Ultimately, they had to use exclusion criteria to limit selection, but allowed testing for anyone that wanted it. This kept humanity from a third world war. Urologists administered the Molly Plication to men scheduled to reproduce, after their mate had successfully completed the procedure. This maximized the couple's potential for fertility and impregnation.

"Abomination!" Ted screamed.

"Who gave you the right?!" Gladys chimed in.

"Mom, Dad, I thought you'd be happy!" Violet cried out. "I only wanted to please you."

"You know our beliefs. You know that nature must take its course. If Allah wanted us to continue to reproduce, she would have kept us fertile! What were you thinking?!" yelled Ted.

Gladys turned to her husband. "You know what we must do."

"I can't."

"We must. It is Her will."

Violet went pale. She spun on her heels and raced for the door, but her mother was already there, blocking her escape. Ted found, in that moment, a religious fervor he had never known. He had been chosen. As mother and daughter struggled, Ted rose from behind his desk and lifted his letter opener. His grip was firm, unyielding, his nerves steady. He had no doubts.

By then, Gladys had pinioned Violet's arms. She thrust her knee into her daughter's back. The bulging bump extended toward her husband. A sacrifice had to be made.

"Your hand, Allah's arm," Gladys uttered through gritted teeth as Violet struggled.

Ted's eyes flared red, pupils narrowed to pinpoints. He lifted the knife high and struck down with such force the tip scraped her spine as he sliced through Violet's belly. Emerging only after he had dug deep into her pelvis and scraped her pubic bone on the way out.

His daughter cried out, "Pappa!" The look of shock faded as she slumped to the floor and died.

Gladys released her and clapped her hands together. She wiped the invisible filth of pregnancy away, disgusted. She shook in horror at what they had done and the power of vindication.

Ted raised his bloody arm, still white knuckling the knife. He declared to the heavens, "Allah! I have cleansed your creation of this abomination! I swear here and now to end this plague of human fertility. Allah, let me lead the way! As you have demanded our obedience and surrender, we will show them the true path. Thy will be done!"

"Thy will be done!" Gladys echoed and bowed her head in reverence.

That Sunday, Ted, became Theophilus. He took to the pulpit in his hometown church and preached the gospel. He fairly shoved the pastor aside and made his voice heard. His beard swept back and forth before the congregation. It enthralled them. From that first sermon came his first followers.

As his wife passed the hat, one woman uttered, "Look, she's as beautiful as a flower. The daughter of Allah. A gladiola in the fields of Her grace."

With those first contributions, Theophilus and Gladiola used the money to buy local television time. They intended to announce their mission and invite those that wished to join them to meet on Sunday in a tent off Richfield Highway. To their surprise and delight, the unsanctioned meeting drew thousands. So many they had to

s strike the tent so that all might witness the coming of the Answer.

“... And Allah spoke! Her words to your ears. The time of humanity is over. She has asked us to lie down and let other life take our place. We hear and abide. In so doing there will be a place for us in heaven. Gladiola and I are One in the Answer, and we invite you to join us. Let us celebrate the end of days together!

“Soon, we shall put forth the new Gospel, and we ask you to embrace it and spread the word. We will not allow it to defile Her creation with the filth of artificial fecundity! If you see the fertile fold, strike them down! Stone their clinics, their edifices, and hunt down their children. They are Abominations!”

“Abomination, Abomination...” the congregation chanted.

Theophilus railed on, turning listeners into believers, and believers into Allah’s warriors. The money they collected that day sufficed to begin their televangelism broadcast on social and all other media every Sunday. The sermons rang throughout the world, translated into every language, rallying even more to their cause.

The followers of the Answer came from all walks of life. Some were believers only because the clinics had refused them the procedure. The Molly Plication remained exclusive. Others became believers because the Answer replaced their despair with a new vision.

Once the Gospel of the Answer was published, it became a best seller overnight, surpassing even the Triangulus Bible. Soon it was given away on corners. Preachers roamed the streets spreading the Answer. Those who did not believe were branded infidels, and the fertile fold were hunted down and stoned.

Pregnant women avoided going outside for fear of death. They burned Plication clinics to the ground. Hospitals required military guards to protect maternity wards. Global governments struggled to control the Answer followers in an effort to curb the violence.

The followers with technical and engineer training commandeered LED streetlights to spread the Gospel’s message, embedding the Answer in 5G broadband signals. The pervasiveness of mind control was such that even police carried stones. Stones they would use against the fold.

In response, the fertile fold moved into gated communities. They offered Plication vacation packages so that pregnant couples could live in peace. The communities raised their fences ever higher to block out the signals and stones. Some offered armed militia to repulse zealots.

They even established their own power grids to live separate from the outside world. These enclaves often fell, besieged by the followers of the Answer. Brought low by the bare fists of the righteous. They eviscerated the occupants and left them to rot in the sun.

The government crackdown was severe and fierce. Making examples of those who followed the Gospel. Their response was to plead guilty in court, knowing they had acted intentionally and with malice. To accept punishment was a required part of their duty and penitence.

Then a believer stepped forward and spoke her peace. Defending herself before the judge and a jury of her peers, her defense changed everything. Chartreuse Devereaux was proud. Her words were stolen out of the courthouse by a follower, the court reporter on the case. Those words are excerpted here:

“If it please the Court, the Answer is a following that comes from all races, creeds, and religions. I myself am an agnostic, but I believe in the will of Nature. The courts have determined that health care is a privilege not a right. Food similarly is a privilege and not a right. If it were, then millions would not starve to death every day.

“Now consider the Constitution: religion is a freedom, and a guaranteed right. It follows that one’s rights supersedes another’s privilege. I was well within my right to torch a clinic that sold the cure for infertility. Artificial fertility is an act perpetrated by humans to ignore the will of Nature. She has called all of us to our end. Therefore, allowing Nature to take its course is not a crime. It is the natural order of things.

“In fact, it is a crime for this court to interfere, and therefore, I am not guilty. For indeed, I have committed no crime. I have simply acted on behalf of the natural world.” T

he silence that followed her defense was telling. The ‘not guilty’ verdict of the jury was an affirmation and set a precedence. Chartreuse’s argument was not just sound, but would serve as a defense henceforth. This defense, however, did not justify murder of physicians nor the stoning of pregnant families. Those offenses were crimes, and the law was clear. Prosecution continued.

Government investigation ultimately led to the indictment of Theophilus and Gladiola Answer. To avoid

a rest, they went into seclusion. Their followers moved the couple from ship to ship to avoid Interpol. Theophilus continued to deliver the Gospel of the Answer on Sunday mornings via pirate broadcast. Their following only grew.

“Good day to you all. I am Dr. Victor Behram, the inventor of the Molly Plication,” he said to the camera. “My family and I are here to request your kindness and understanding.”

Televisions and internet streams across the world were broadcasting the message. Victor, his wife, Naomi, Molly and her husband, along with their daughter, sat on a davenport dressed formally to address the global population. It looked like a family portrait, a family from the past.

“We have heard the message of the following Answer. We are not here to represent Governments, security, nor our successful clinics. Instead, we come to you as a family and ask your forgiveness.”

Molly spoke up, “My father acted when I was a toddler to save my life. It was that simple act, my father’s love for me, that led to his discovery. It was an opportunity to save the world. To give us a choice for our future. The future of humanity.”

Victor’s wife, Naomi, went next, “My husband offered hope in the face of despair. That is all. It was not his intention to thwart Allah’s will. To ignore Nature’s call. To make us less than. He wanted for us, for all of us, to be more.”

“So we ask you,” Molly’s husband Jack, chimed in, “to leave us in peace. To end the violence and destruction. To give us the freedom to live in our beliefs, just as we allow you to live in yours.”

“From the Behram family,” Molly’s daughter, Eve, said, “we thank you. Our hearts are open. We hope yours are too.”

The response to their broadcast was almost immediate. Violence against pregnant women ceased. Clinics were no longer fire bombed. Yet the numbers applying for the Molly Plication had fallen to near zero. To keep the doors open, they lowered the stringency of the criteria. Eventually making the procedure available to everyone.

Even when the procedure was offered for free, there were few takers. The Answer’s campaign was so successful, not only because of the mind control techniques, but due to a willingness of humankind to welcome the end. The reproductive drive had simply vanished. Even after its brief flicker and reawakening through the fertile fold.

People looked at the world in a new way. Not just because of all the other messages in the Answer gospel. These renewed a sense of fellowship and goodwill in the end of days. Folks also were freed from the pressure of greed and success. The need to look forward to plan for the future was gone.

Suicide had joined the death march of the elderly. Not out of despair, but people felt relieved. They wanted to contribute in their own way to the fall of humanity. They did not want to burden their family with a delayed death.

It is ironic that the biggest influence on the economy came from the health care sector. The massive amount of money and resources spent during the last six months of people’s lives were no longer used. That money went back to the remaining families. As the population dwindled the quality of life for those still living continued to improve.

Humanity experienced a prosperity it had never known. The arts and sciences flourished. Folks realized that what they left behind might be of value to the next species. Still, they had no idea who would inherit the Earth. Biological research sought to identify the next apex predator. They put candidates forth, but like humanity, many of them folded because of the infertility driven by the micro-sized plastic humankind had made.

As industries closed, pollution decreased. The air and water was cleaner. Climate change slowed. Crime decreased rather than increased as had been predicted. Neither the Behrams’ nor the Answers’ lived long enough to see these last glorious days of our species.

In the end, the last of humanity found the promised land. Paradise and abundance combined with gentleness and kindness. It was a true utopia. A return to the garden. Ironic really, that Eve was one of the last humans to die, after her lover Adam had died before her.



Twigs • Sarah Estime

Peter scrolled through the dark webpage wondering why he just enjoyed the emotional carrion made savory by his hormones. The sock in his palm plopped and stuck to the edge of his polyester pop-up hamper, which tipped over spilling the other conglomerated socks onto the floor. He groaned. He shut his eyes and shut his computer.

When he completed his degree in biology, he imagined a lifestyle surrounded by sleek alloys and sterile syringes; panels making faint beeping sounds; himself in a white lab coat ordering some verbose order. He wanted the confoundedness of an app he wished he'd thought of and the humble genius of Tyrone Hayes.

As Facebook climbed into common household vocabulary, the textbook nerd was no longer the outcast and the structure of standard cliques collapsed. Outcasts still existed. They were instead the kids whose parents dare not chuck their roller backpacks; roller backpacks and department store brand sneakers.

According to that criteria, Peter was still an outcast.

But he found a Belle unwell enough to partake in the bestiality that was their unlikely love. Unfortunately, with no remedy to his fatal codependence, he wilted. And Sansame was a heartless wench who wouldn't take him back.

Peter had, for a moment, the sleek life with Sansame. Her sycophantic giggling by his side fawning over his best Stephen Hawking. He was not at all near carpooling with Jeff from HR—his more recent path—which made his near-accomplishments all the more pathetic.

He heard everyone's business every morning. He saw the screenshots. He heard Jeff's impressions. He fiddled with his phone when he was presented with the evidence.

He waved the secret audio recordings away although secretly roused by the turn-taking mood of tense, criminal conversation.

In reality, Jeff's escalations were mostly divagations that he monotonously sifted through, pausing sporadically to pull Peter into context he thought was provocative.

Jeff's presence reminded him of the solemnity of solitude, that reminder gradually climaxing into bitterness before hopefully plummeting to its death of half-heartedness. He'd revel in the kind of torpor that made him stronger—wise. Otherwise Jeff would evolve into that classic antagonist with a backstory that warrants some sympathy.

The week following Valentine's Day, Jeff was pleased with only having to address seven legitimate complaints—a resident fraternizing, two transient relationships, a custodian who felt uncomfortable by a surgeon staring down her cleavage, an actual relationship blessed with conception, porn or a mis-Google on the company network, and another visual undresser.

"The huggers are lucky this year. I've decided to just send out a memo. That'll cure their social cue retardation." Jeff cackled. "Fucking porn on the company computer. And a janitor altering her uniform?"

Peter fanned the inside of his shirt with his collar. He pressed the back of his fingertips to his neck.

"Why did they watch porn on the company computer?"

"Probably took it home. Got it mixed up." Jeff twisted the heat dial counterclockwise and buzzed the window down. "Cost him his job," he said glancing at his pal.

"Man.." Peter sympathized.

"He's lucky I didn't find any kiddie stuff."

"He's probably not into that."

Peter raised the heat and put Jeff's window back up. Jeff glared at him from the corner of his eyes.

"What kind of porn do you watch, man?"

"Normal," Peter answered.

But the question was an invitation to Jeff's own personal cravings.

"Come on. No horseplay? No object affection?"

"It's called objectophilia."

“See I knew it!” Jeff brayed. “If it makes you feel any better, I cannot get enough of Indians getting rammed from behind. You should see my history. Mia Khalifa cumshots. Asshole blooming. The whole nine.”

“I don’t want to see your history, man.”

Peter swallowed his dry throat hard.

“Ever since Bilaruh left and took the kid, I get a kick out of watching her *obey!*”

Peter admittedly enjoyed a little bit of bondage but not a lot. That happiness was fleeting. That kind of happiness was a tease. Peter more enjoyed the kind of material that got him “there”— physical contact over sexing; if not, the kind of sex he actually felt over fantasy.

“So you don’t punish your ex over porn, dude?”

**

Peter returned all of Sansame’s belongings but not the countless bobby pins creeping out of nooks unknown. There were bobby pins all over. He started collections in the nearest corners whenever a bunch caught in between his toes, stuck in his back, clogged his sink. He could start a dispensary.

Simultaneous to social media pulls falling among the ranks of phone-tapping thereby placing an eerie cover over Facebook and Twitter and the not-so-ethereal-during-high-profile-trials Snapchat, hints of a friendship forming between a biology company and a social media company began. The sharpness of digital age users began sprinkling the idea of cloning into the air like hashtags polluting the emotions of the weak-minded yearning to cling to a cause. Society caught on and, like the investigative clairvoyants the internet made users to be, the users were right.

Peter retrieved an at-home kit from the first cloning manufacturing laboratory— Antro-Apparatus later renamed Twigs later renamed Faceplace after being bought out by Facebook. In Peter’s opinion, television shows and films dodging copyright infringement made any Face compound word sound lame. He couldn’t get used to the name. But his opinion was an approximate one of one.

The program was popular much like a new iPhone. Disposal was as easy too. Class encouraged users to not traumatize themselves with violent launch day product smashing.

He pulled a single brown strand of hair from one of the metal pieces tangled in other metal pieces in the bathroom, and he dipped it in the activating solution—the manufactured egg cell—settling in a petri dish.

The strand of hair merged with the solution making for a coalescent cream he wouldn’t recognize on its own.

At first, he thought the cell was developing right away but he was wrong. He checked the following day and the day after that noticing slight growth that excited him about what he was doing. The growth was so small, however, that he was disappointed with the plodding progress he was becoming clung to.

He put the program in the back of his mind. His responsibility was but a droplet of a panacea tincture nourishing the embryo. Eventually, that bit of nourishment was fed by a tube feeding into the basement. A large tube housed around the plate forming something like a display case. His morning routine became so secondhand that he had forgotten all about the progress of the program in all.

Class taught completion would be no less than eight weeks so, in the meantime, he imagined all the different ways his eager adrenaline would exhaust itself. Sorority hazing, gangbangs, hair pulling, hitting. Rearing her until his blood circulated feverishly vehement no more.

One morning, rumbling around the gas tanks prompted Peter to grab his aluminum baseball bat. He crept down the stairs debating his decision to enter into the uncertain predicament without the lights on. The lights would have startled the supposed intruder but so would his heavy steps down the fiberboard stairs. He regretted not turning the lights on when he reached the bottom.

The rumbling stopped. And then shocked still brown eyes. Peter admired them in the very little light cancelling the darkness out through a geometric window.

She was barren with moist tan skin. Her fingertips were pinned around her triceps, the indentations a deeper luster than the rest of her sheeny body.

She had something in her mouth. A cotton ball of some sort; a gag. Peter made a sound. He cleared his throat, testing to see if she’d have a response. She opened her mouth, her tongue rolling out onto her lips, and at her feet laid a small white mouse.

“I’m Sansame. Are you my friend?”

“We better get you back on your plate,” he rushed.

He started for upstairs thinking immediately to cover her.

“No— please, no. I couldn’t say anything before but I’ve got to see everything now. Please don’t make me go back in my tube. Please. My tummy is grumbling.”

His tongue was caught by the mouser of unexpectation. A strong scent of liquid iron wafted in his direction. He thought pancakes. His mother’s ginger pancakes always stuffed him beyond capacity. And the ginger would ease her immune-adolescent body. He was in the mood for pancakes as well.

“Is there anything else you’d like?” he asked her.

She was wrapped around a dustcover itching her bust doggedly.

“They hurt,” she wined. “Will you take a look?”

He covered his face upon her offer. “No!”

She frowned.

“I mean.. you’re a lady. You can’t just be.. exposing yourself like that.”

She frowned.

He had to leave for work. He instructed her not to explore his locked bedroom. Class promised the an-throapp would oblige but she was a human being existing in his kitchen so he had his doubts.

And his doubts manifested itself.

He found his work tablet clumsily hidden in a saucepan, the screen dashed with a digital discolored crack. He asked her about it. She expressed fervent apology over and over. He accepted at her first plea, her eyes welling up.

“It’s not a big deal,” he told her. “They’ll give me another one. Look..”

He walked the tablet to the garbage demonstrating tossing it out. He smiled at her, testing to see if she’d do the same. He motioned the tablet down the sink. She looked confused. He turned the garbage disposal on, gesturing like he was shoving the electronic down the drain. She smirked. He pretended to toss the thing out the window. She got it. She smiled, wiping her sadness away.

“It’s not a big deal,” he told her. “Relax,” he sang, rubbing her back.

She looked at the ground still feeling like a disappointment. He pulled away quickly and went into another room.

**

He questioned when such a sweet girl could have transitioned to the soulless vagary she had become.

She waited under the door pane of his room, obliging this time.

“I was looking for a blanket,” she said.

Peter paced, looking at the ground.

“Oh yeah, I know. The building is always freezing. The air conditioning is broken. I’m always freezing even by the time I get to my autodrive.”

He handed her the quilt on his bed feeling guilty about the stains she’d have to overlook. Surely, she didn’t know what they were. He handed the quilt to her from a cracked door with his back turned, not wanting doubly face her.

**

Months went by and her irritation did not cease. He Googled the duration of female puberty and then the possibility of Tanner stage II skipping right into Tanner stage V— a growth spurt.

Class warned him about interrupting the program by halting at or altering an undesired age, which also cost more time and money. Customer service wouldn’t even provide a hint to whether or not the program could enter into adulthood from adolescence—late adulthood if possible; legal if not.

He battled this within himself, the sovereign male biology betraying him.

He fought with his inner self often. As a man, he faced the same tribulations that made him question why boys were engineered the way they were, his teenage torment resurfacing and just as inflamed. He thought it an unjust—men and even women reaping the disadvantage of their biology reacting to things they were involuntarily intrigued by.

Peter desired a dull life because the legal and scientific study that was invested into a convict's inadvertent pleasures, especially when the convict was rabid, was not as illustrious to the convict sitting all alone in his cell.

Sansame was a rational brute at best. Fortunately, even in her dangerously fleshy anthropomorphic body, she did not do things by the book. Peter thought this behavior was deliberate, intended to "shake things up;" shake him up. He resented her for taking him out of his comfort zone yet again, this time emotionally exhausting and completely dependent.

That made disposal easy.

But he was starting to understand that she was not antagonizing but instead grasping at control over her own emotions. He learned that she learned her balance from somewhere. Perhaps her defense to her parents, society, her tenth grade History teacher Mr. Nolan because in the twenty weeks that went by, the anthropomorphic was not as extreme as her original. He learned that Sansame was euthymic by nature. By condition, she could have either been too hangdog or too merciless. She chose to be merciless and survival.

And his perspective on her lack of mercy was redefining. His desire to control her was replaced by his sympathy; her adolescent malleability and the clear knowledge that she was helpless.

But still, they were not made to coexist. He did not like the preyed upon version of her as much as he did not like the predator version of her—the version that, as an adult, at first broke his depression and stowed it away, the representation of stimuli transforming into ongoing adrenaline. That adrenaline responding negatively to her effortless laughing in his face, her cutthroat trout as destructive as her victimhood.

He purchased a size eight frills dress. She gagged at the tulle. He made her wear it anyway. It was the one thing he made her do. She motioned slamming the item onto the ground, regurgitating his sense of humor. He thought she looked pretty. He enjoyed that last bit of her pliant nature through her rueful apology double-checking that the joke was appropriate.

They clumped down a feathery hill southward. He was behind with his hands in his pockets, his eyes low behind his company-issued baseball cap. The tide was pulled all the way back by a lamenting full moon. Just before the water were rotting beams of iron and steel taking the beating of a hundred tons. Peter shook the scenic sight away. The horizon, a body of water below them, and industrialization atop a barriered, fatal drop-down.

Initially, he felt sorry but he held onto her body language; her poor self-esteem; her lack of understanding of what was even going on.

She skipped ahead of him into a calm breeze that mixed her short brown locks into each other. And then the train arrived to no stop.

The brakes screeched to a dragged halt two miles from where her body was left. As she twitched to the last pulses of her life, he awakened, the smell of her blood dissolving in the upwind, the strong scent of liquid iron wafting in his direction.

She Puts the Handcuffs Back On • Kendra M. Genereux

Mia sat with her back firmly against the concrete wall behind her. She relished the feeling of cold stone seeping through her stiff cotton shirt. The weight of cuffs around her small wrists dug into her skin comfortably. The thick door opposite her was made of steel, and she watched the doorknob in an intense contest of wills. She was looking for a jiggle of the small keyhole, a clicking of shoes, anything that could warn of people coming into her small, secluded world.

Once a day she would be dragged out of her haven. A group of white coats would try to run tests. She went along with it for the promise of going back to her cell.

Today was different though when she saw the metal knob twist and the door glide open it wasn't the usual security guard and doctors. It was a man in an olive suit covered in twenty or so small metal buttons. Being in the compound for the last few months, Mia was used to the sight of the gun holstered right below his armpit. His hand hovered over it, he knew why she was in here.

"Mia Thorton. You have a visitor."

Mia felt her palms slicken and she moved sideways against the wall. She tried to get farther away, towards the corner of her small painted white cell. The foot of the bed might have gotten in the way for a normal person.

Mia just passed through it, like water through a sieve. At least that's how the doctors described the way her cells would split and pass through. She couldn't feel anything as the metal frame passed through her chest followed by the hard mattress.

The man immediately reached for his gun. He cursed and fumbled with the strap. This was a normal reaction for Mia. She wasn't scared of a *bullet*.

"Who is it?" she asked, hearing the break in her voice. She swallowed hard hoping it would go away. A familiar face danced behind her eyelids, taunting her.

The officer now with his gun firmly in his hands but he still responded, "a reporter. He wants to ask some questions. Your parents signed off on it."

"They aren't here right?"

He looked confused, "no." Before he could finish, she was walking right at him. She was passing through him and into the hallway as he was trying to futilely move out of her way. He took in a deep breath eyes wide in horror. He grasped at his stomach prodding the area with the butt of his gun. Mia waited in the hall for him to come around.

She had gone along with every test, everything they asked of her. Not because she couldn't get out but because she didn't want to leave. What was one more interview?

He guided her down the hall never really putting his gun back in its holster. Getting a closer look, she noticed his breast badge said, "Gen. Richard Amos." Mia felt a little shocked at his importance as he grabbed the chains holding her wrists together and dragged her behind him.

He brought her to a long room one side covered in a shiny mirror. A man sat at the table with a tape recorder set in front of him. Behind him stood a small crew holding boom mics and cameras.

When Mia walked in, he stood and waved her over to the seat opposite him.

"Hi Mia, my name is John. I was hoping to ask you some questions would that be alright?" he said in a loud slow voice.

Behind him, a cameraman was focusing the shot, and Mia could hear the almost whisper-like purr of the zoom focusing in and out. She looked directly in his eyes, and she could tell he didn't believe. He probably thought she was some poor sad girl suffering from schizophrenia. That she was a danger to herself.

"This is John Griggs, and I am speaking with Mia Thorton. Mia, do you know why I'm here?" he asked "Because people are scared of me," she replied.

She wasn't wrong. There were a lot of people he interviewed in preparation for this segment. After her

stepfather reported her to the news station, ranting about how the devil was deep inside her. His face was plastered across the local channels with the headline 'Crazy Man is Convinced Step Daughter is the Devil.' Maybe that would have been the end of it if she had been more careful. After she accidentally walked through the postman in broad daylight, she found out she had been caught on an iPhone. The news crews took to following her around. She was a spectacle.

It wasn't until a government research committee decided the massive media attention was worth looking into.

Mia willingly left, and her parents let her go. Her stepfather was yelling about how she was a liar and a whore the whole way. Fear makes people do crazy things.

She didn't even think about it after the first "incident." It was like breathing. More often than not, she had to purposefully think about touching someone. Her mother would go to brush the hair from her eyes and meet nothing but air. Her stepfather would try to grab at her shoulder and fall forward.

"Would you mind showing the camera, and all of the people at home, why people are scared of you?"

"Sure," she said and reached out her hand, letting the handcuff fall to the table with a clang. The camera-man jolted a bit before re-centering the camera. John trembled slightly as he touched his fingers to hers except instead of meeting the tepid warmth of her skin he passed right through.

"Incredible" he murmured, in awe at the feeling of empty air where her hand should have been.

The many scientists that tested her daily had no clue why or how she could do this. One had speculated that this could have been a gene mutation activating under extreme circumstances. The principle was the same a clownfish switching genders to preserve the colony. They never asked what that trauma could have been. They just stabbed cold shift needles in her arm and drew blood samples.

The military cared less only thinking about the threat she posed. They thought of ways Opening lines he could be weaponized both for and against the country. The hypotheticals were endless. Could she master completely non-invasive heart surgery or would she be able to torture POW by removing organs without even touching the skin? Would she spy on our enemies or pass our own security protocols and assassinate the president?

As if a 13-year-old girl would have such lofty goals.

Sure, if she chose she could probably rob every bank in America and they would never be able to stop her. It was a constant debate between warring factions; does the possibility of crime mean she should be locked up?

They never really considered that they still hadn't found a way to contain her.

"Mia, can I touch you?" he asked again. She hesitated, it was easier for her to let things pass and it had been a long time since she had touched someone who wasn't holding a blood collection kit. It was her choice, but she still had to swallow down her fear. This time when she brushed up against his hand, he could feel her warm soft fingers. He sighed and dropped her hand when it was clear she wasn't tricking him.

"I have to ask. How did this happen? What were you doing when this all started?" She had ripped from her home her family and friends and been locked in this jail for days. No one had ever thought to ask why? She could walk through those walls and be out of here in ten minutes, but she chose to stay. Because the only place waiting outside was the last place she wanted to be.

She thought back to that dark room. Her stepfathers face floating over her. The way his nails dug into her wrists as she struggled. Pain and sadness made bile rise in her throat but she swallowed it again. Carefully she put the handcuffs back on letting the frigid metal sit across the scars on her wrists. It was a comforting weight.

"I just wanted him to stop touching me." It spilled out before she could stop herself. Unconsciously she covered her chest. This was going to be a long interview.



Counting the Ways • Alan Gartenhaus

The thud sent me racing to look out windows closed tightly against frosty north winds. Abandoning my homework, I bolted into the evening's dark without stopping for a coat. Tire tracks in a fresh dusting of snow led to a car smashed against an oak tree on our neighbor's lawn, its front end crumpled. Inside a woman lay motionless; the back of her seat had collapsed.

Since the driver's door had jammed, I crawled in the passenger side. I waved my hand in front of the woman's face. She did not respond. In the soft glow of the car's dim interior light, and to my twelve-year-old eyes, the lady looked beautiful and quite possibly dead. When I hesitantly touched her shoulder, she moaned. "Stay still," I told her, working to project a calm I did not feel. "I'm going to get help."

Unaware that the neighbor whose tree she'd hit was standing directly behind me, I was startled when he said, "Already called. They're on their way." I turned toward him. He shook his head. "I've been expecting something like this to happen. People take that curve way too fast."

The woman moaned again and tried to sit up but only managed to lift her shoulders and tilt her head back a bit. As she did, I saw blood seep out from a gash under her chin. I pulled off my shirt, wadded it up, and held it against her wound, hoping to stop the bleeding. "Don't think you should touch her," my neighbor said. "You could get in trouble."

Drawn by the woman's vulnerability, I leaned over and kissed her forehead as my parents had done to me when I'd been sick. I whispered, "They'll be here soon." She smiled slightly. Her hand found my arm.

Once the ambulance arrived, someone pulled me from the car and deposited me on the curb, draping a blanket over my shoulders. Everything from then on happened fast. What I remember best is shivering in the icy darkness as two men in blue uniforms removed the woman from the car and placed her on a gurney. They slid her into the ambulance and drove away with the siren blaring while I sat with my arms wrapped around my chest, desperate for my parents to return home from their early dinner out.

My father explained to the nurse behind the emergency room desk that I had helped the woman in a one-car accident who was brought in a few hours earlier. The nurse nodded, humming her acknowledgment. "Sorry, but I'm unable to tell you anything about that person without authorization." My father had warned me that the hospital might not be allowed to tell us anything. Defeated, I dropped down onto one of the waiting room's sticky vinyl chairs.

"Wait here," Dad said. "No sense in both of us freezing. I'll get the car. Look for me in a few minutes."

After he left, the nurse walked out from behind her desk and took the seat next to me. She leaned near and, in a low voice, said, "You did the right thing, putting pressure on her wound." The nurse held out a small pad of paper and a pencil. "Write down your name and phone number. I'm sure she will want to thank you when she's feeling better."

Weeks passed. We'd received no word. The fate of the woman in the accident haunted me. Thoughts of her distracted me from my schoolwork. She woke me up at night. I dreamt of her modest smile, of her holding my arm, and of her frightful injury. Had I actually helped her or done something to worsen her outcome? Exhausted by the fixation, I went to my father, who was sitting in his den. "Can I ask you a question?" He removed his eyeglasses and pointed to the chair across from him. I cleared my throat. I could feel my cheeks flush. "How do you know if you've fallen in love with someone?"

I could tell that he hadn't expected that question. "Is this about a girl at school?"

I shook my head. "It's about the lady in the car wreck. I can't stop thinking about her. She's on my mind all the time. Does that mean I'm in love with her?"

My father closed his book. He began to chuckle but stopped when he saw how serious I was. "Caring about an injured stranger is called compassion." He nodded. "It's a good thing to feel. It's the kind of concern that a doctor has for his patients." He cocked his head. "Maybe you should think about a career in medicine."

“But what about being in love?”

My father pushed himself back in his chair and sat straighter. “I guess compassion could be thought of as a kind of love. There are many kinds.” Before I could say anything, he continued, “You love Maxwell, don’t you?” Maxwell was our black Labrador retriever. “And you love your mother. Two different kinds of love. See?” He walked over and rubbed the top of my head. “And there’s a big difference between having love for someone and being in love with that person.” He returned to his chair and picked up his book. I nodded thoughtfully, trying to appear as though I’d understood, but his explanation hadn’t chased away my confusion nor did it diminish recurring thoughts of her.

When told to report to the vice-principal’s office, I assumed that my lack of attentiveness in class had at last landed me in trouble. Since the accident I was often distracted. Mr. Morton, the school disciplinarian, was famous for making students wait in the hallway before seeing him. He referred to it as “stewing time.” While I was stewing, it occurred to me that I might be here because the woman in the accident had died. My next thought was that I had been responsible.

I walked into Mr. Morton’s office, my stomach knotted and my mouth dry. A big man, Mr. Morton’s presence dominated the room. He wore dark-framed glasses and spoke in a deep, gravelly voice. He barely glanced at me before pointing at one of the two chairs in front of his large, mahogany desk. I sat silently, avoiding eye contact by staring at his framed photographs, intercom equipment, and black telephone, which he picked up. “Have her come in.”

A woman with pulled-back hair and plain features walked in. She sat in the other chair. Assuming that she was a counselor or psychologist, I returned her smile and braced myself for bad news. “Kenny, I imagine you’re glad to see this lady again,” Mr. Morton said. I had no idea what he was talking about. Besides wanting everyone to call me Ken and not Kenny any longer, simply hearing him say my name filled me with dread. When I didn’t respond, he seemed confused. “Ms. Blackburn is the lady who had the accident across from your house.”

Now *I* was confused. This lady looked far older and not nearly as beautiful as the woman I remembered.

“Ms. Blackburn still has some trouble talking because of her injuries, but she very much wished to speak with you.”

“Hi, Kenny,” she said, her voice a breathy rasp. She lifted her head and pointed to a raw and reddish, raised scar that wrapped around the front of her neck. “They said that this is where I hit the steering wheel.” She traced the scar with her finger. “I don’t remember much of what happened, but I heard that you had helped me. I wanted to thank you.”

The wound confirmed her as the person in the accident. I felt pride and relief but also disappointment.

After that meeting life snapped back into place. Thoughts of Ms. Blackburn dwindled to few, eclipsed by homework, math and history tests, running cross-country, and a request from my English teacher that I audition for a part in our school play. I’d never considered acting before, and while her faith in me was flattering, it was also intimidating. The part was not the lead, but it was an important one, with quite a few lines of dialogue.

In the audition scene my character proposes to his girlfriend and kisses her. Laura Stadtler, who was in the class ahead of me, had already been cast in the part of the girlfriend. While waiting for the audition to begin, I confessed to her that I didn’t know anything about acting. She told me to believe what that character says and to try to feel what the character is feeling. Okay, I thought, amused, this is the girl I want to marry.

Reciting the lines went well. We both spoke with conviction of our devotion to each other and of spending our lives together. But when it was time to kiss, I froze. I’d had little experience. I closed my eyes, hardened my lips, and puckered, the way I had when kissing my grandmother. I wasn’t sure how else to do this, especially with others watching.

Laura set her hands on my shoulders and gently pulled me closer. She kissed me, though the script had called for me to kiss her. Unlike how I held my lips, hers were relaxed and soft and her mouth opened slightly. As we kissed, my whole body responded. “Wow,” was all I could say, although the script did not call for that either.

After the audition, I gathered my belongings and walked out of the gymnasium. “Wait,” Laura called, jogging to catch up with me. “I didn’t get to thank you for taking care of my mother.”

“Your mother?”

She nodded. “When she hit that tree near your house.”

“That was your mother? I thought the lady’s name was Blackburn.”

“Her maiden name. She uses it.” Laura leaned forward and kissed me again, this time on the cheek. “I can’t tell you how much my family and I appreciate what you did.”

My heart hit against my chest. As I looked into Laura’s brown eyes, I again wondered, was *this* love?

The Kiss of Life • Sara Hailstone

He'd gotten ahead of himself again.

The rage engulfed him too deeply this night.

The chaotic filmstrip of their shouting-drawling-voices, the crazed tipping and funneling, their liquid drowning -another party- set the lethal drumbeat that coursed through him and dropped him into a severe back pedal. The other youth were oblivious to the tight coil of control within him, a lifetime of internal-warring he'd never been pushed against the entirety of himself before, no, pushed down inside the grim cavity of his perceived-ugly-humanity that shadowed him. Once the bottles were popped, the bowls rimmed, and the whiskey flowing, they became oblivious and awkwardly aware of each other. A brutal-dangerous-teeter, he only needed that infinitely unnerving weekend-binge-catalyst, the perfect recipe after trekking yet another battlefield -Youth Catastrophe- and his wire would snap.

He exploded into the moonless dark gripping the untamed crazed back of a black stallion that plundered and shot against the fragility of his simple mortality.

He'd gotten ahead of himself again

gotten ahead of himself again

ahead of himself again

of himself again

himself

again,

again.

There was an approaching roar and violent crashing, the rocks and brush glowed unnaturally red at the searing light. He flew past the trunks of trees, a blur of grey bodies and weeping faces, he roared and plummeted forwards, as the stallion flared and hissed through the rising summer steam, it happened so fast.

He saw red, only red. He heard red, only red.

The screech and crack instantly stilled the forest and it waited for the final settling to move again. Hot angry vibrations echoed from the wooden gnash and the treacherous stallion coughed, a voracious bone-crushing-heap, to 'it,' this fall a momentary rest.

He felt black.

He felt cold.

He saw nothing.

He heard nothing.

The form was curved and frighteningly inert against the cooling earth.

No moonlight shone this night to illuminate the carnage, only rain, to soak the sorrow and display the most rhetoric burn of Pathetic Fallacy.

He clutched air and exhaled violently. Rising, he tore earth and blood from his eyes and rotated frantically in the black-black-air. The intensity of loss shot through him. He hung his head, a low siren rose within him and he broke open suddenly in an eternal gut-retching-shriek recognizing his own human-face.

There is a scream approaching. Its' cruel breath rides the back of a crippling banshee wind that will scatter their bodies and cast them into collective oblivion. It ropes like the blackest and most feared satanic snake and will wring their

quaking necks in the face of thunder and lightning. For a time, they will be lost, away, ruined and wrecked, outcast and isolated from the thriving ones and this acknowledgement of those gripping fears and weaknesses will pull them further and further from themselves. They die this way, those little ones.



There is a scream approaching and it is going to rock them into the flames of an Earthbound-Hades and they will suffer the harrowing no-mans-land of a youthful purgatory. Rotating and shifting, their mouths will gape wide and swallow their aching cavities backwards from the emblazed eyes of retrospect. It was a painful reckoning when the young-country-boxer lost his fight, some knew then that the scream had arrived within their delicately imbalanced world and had already begun the high-pitched societal regurgitation. Fearful of becoming deflated balloons ground through the cogs of unfeeling generational machinery, they fled to a palette of barbed wire.

She pushed her face hard into the wet grass and tasted dirt. She shuddered around a searing wail lodged tight in her throat and pounded the ground with skinned-knuckled-fists. Clumps of grass and dirt flew around her shaking hands. Her teeth clicked in a grotesque-broken-melody as the recollection of the whirlwind and violent blur of the past four hours exploded within her and she collapsed: because she is voiceless, she has learned and imitated from childhood the language of fear. She knows that if she does nothing but weep and pound the grass at least then she cannot cause any pain, she cannot be the source of their pain and that idea unhinges her reserve from the surviving morsels of sanity she's protected from childhood. She has always feared the Monster huddled on feral haunches inside of her, 'it' is capable of any treachery, and 'it' cannot be shocked into remission. This Monster controls her and dictates her thunderous reactions to their passive-aggressive-oppression. There is an immense dark wedge 'it carries like a hammer in 'its' iron fist and she knows the burning cold of that wedge against her neck; her Monster builds walls and prison chambers inside of her mind with that immense-wedge-hammer that isolates her from him, and herself. She's broken.

She simply wants to love.

Anger and fear churn bitterly in her guts, and despite the regurgitation, she's accustomed to bile and that throat-eroding-taste. The pitch of a moan pushes hard from her lips and she forces her bloody fist into the hollows of her mouth, biting down hard to silence it. Her eyes watered and she kicked her toes against the edge of pavement in a fit of fury. Rocking back onto her heels she lunges forward awkwardly into a heaving battered child's pose, a fallen mermaid.

She fears that she controls their rain and their thunder and she weeps with compassion for him and how he suffers from her flaws, that impairing-learned-insecurity. She has turned him Monster too. But, the lightning

bolt shot straight through this time and she can hear them telling her he must go, that this love is polluted now and worth nothing.

Move on! You deserve better! He is not good enough...not good enough... good enough...

Enough!

She hums and rocks: there is a swallow; she fears the laughter.

She is a prisoner in her own body and she resents them for maintaining an environment of fear and anger that pulls her down. She is aware of her society and how it is difficult for positive reinforcement to thrive there, a fear-based-shaping, and her only relief, negative reinforcement, a taking away of something aversive. She is tired of taking herself away. She moans and cradles her stomach. There is a quiet but sturdy thought in her that forces her to open slightly and she looks at her crossed wrists: despite the chaos and drudgery lapping against her, she can control the definitions inside, she has every right to, love can exist there, for them.

A scream forces from her and she pinches herself further into herself at a pathetic attempt to stifle it again.

She knows that the neighbors think.

They are not quite aware of her empathy of their opinions, however, the fact that she agrees with them beyond their own contemplations. *Tame the beast and leash the fury, a theatricality of anger and sadness no messenger of love makes.* She is ashamed and burns hot-hot-hot. They have hushed her the length of her short life and willed her forcibly to be still and silent. She finds solace in corners; there the Monster can rest. They do not know how she also fears herself amidst the center of their carefully-contrived-theatricalities. There are no promises as to what Monster will say.

The other youth were oblivious to the tight coil of control within her, this relentless balancing, a life-time of internal-warring she'd never been pushed against the entirety of herself before, no, pushed down inside the grim cavity of her perceived-ugly-humanity that shadowed her. Once the bottles were popped, the bowls rimmed, and the whiskey flowing, they became oblivious and awkwardly aware of each other. A brutal-dangerous-teeter, she only needed that infinitely unnerving weekend-binge-catalyst, the perfect recipe after trekking yet another battlefield -Youth Catastrophe- and her wire would snap.

She pictures them dancing. He is a beautiful dancer. Handsome with a firm wit, she loves his energy. She pictures him static on the street next, the weekend-binge-catalyst nearing its peak, and she sees them collapse together on asphalt after the fatal swoon. Her body aches and she hangs her head.

These moments are always the most difficult for her, the inhuman calm after tragedy, the waiting, the hovering, anticipating treachery and a final blow of desertion. She cannot conceive how he remains.

Their lives are angular and curving projections from mirrors, the molten core of their stubborn-individuality a propelling flame that refracts their inimitable magnetism. The elders willed them to regurgitate an idea of monogamy, replications of their understandings of love, but they could not conceive the unbridled Monsters they dictated to. They wrapped the imperfections of their love in thorns and pushed a language into her head that shredded. Her one battle was to learn how to love herself, then, she could love him fairly.

Their words funnel and cut inside of her. She bursts out in that repetitive-delirium-speak, "I am a liar. I am heartless. I am manipulative," she inhales sharply and weeps to air, "I really do not mean what I say. I know I am a bad person." She hears, *bad girl, bad girl, she's a bad girl*, and sinks into the grass. The wetness chills her bones and she chatters to an open sky. The ground is painful against her back. Finally noting the rising rinds and welts along her she begins hiccupping. The spasms lull her and her eyes grow heavy.

She lifts from the cold and wet. She lifts from the pain and anger. She pulls away from the old-bro-ken-language and envisions herself bathed in light, laughing. Singing. She blinks through that reality and falls back into her habitual-constructed-vortex, a child's play house. She hears the trill of a circus melody evade and does not bother to push a fist into her bleating cavity.

"Dear Mom and Dad, you sure know how to raise them!"

Her body spits. She hangs her head. A low ominous siren rose within her and she broke open suddenly in a gut-retching-cackle. 'The Crazy Laugh,' she hears it echo against the hard-judgmental-lines of her own Bell Jar. It was easier before, without him, to push against the glass because then she was the only one left broken. She laughs louder and harder. Her ears throb and she feels the space between them scream. She has arrived at the

mid-point of a dangerous generational repetition. The terror grips her and she laughs-spits-laugh.

Memory: “It has been discovered that rats emit long, high frequency, ultrasonic, socially induced vocalization during rough and tumble play and when tickled. The vocalization is described as distinct “chirping”. Humans cannot hear the “chirping” without special equipment. It was also discovered that like humans, rats have “tickle skin”. These are certain areas of the body that generate more laughter response than others. The laughter is associated with positive emotional feelings and social bonding occurs with the human tickler, resulting in the rats becoming conditioned to seek the tickling. Additional responses to the tickling were that those that laughed the most also played the most, and those that laughed the most preferred to spend more time with other laughing rats. This suggests a social preference to other rats exhibiting similar responses. However, as the rats age, there does appear to be a decline in the tendency to laugh (Wikipedia).”

Her throat burns from the suffocating cackle. She is a rat but her laughter vibrates beyond the spectrum of weeping. They cannot hear just how much pain she chews-swallows-regurgitates, almost willingly. It is a brutal self-inducement.

The darkness shifts and she is unaware of time. She has lifted again into the lull and ache inside of her. She has gone looking for hope. The laughter collapses like a spent wave and she drifts.

It takes much processing for the settling to arrive. It takes waiting and patience. It takes breath and exhalation. It takes compassion and contextualization. It takes love, the courage not to fear to love, not to fear those who have not yet learned how to love her.

She realizes she has been singing. The hum and vibration of song filling her again to materialize, she is no longer dislocation, no longer isolation. Song enables her to re-enter. She is there with the guitar and she is practicing.

“I hear the sound of my own voice
Asking you to stay.....

This slope is treacherous
This path is reckless
This slope is treacherous
And I, I..”

He fell onto his knees amongst a broken prayer. The night swelled around him, a tight-mortifying-coocon, he wondered what was to be his destiny.

He sees her eyes immediately and can hear her jolting laughter. The loss is Earth-shattering; he'd give anything for her beautiful-blind-temper now. He sees the others and hears their laughter. He imagines the spaces he has left and he is sorry. He wishes his Mother could take his hand and lead him from the forest. Instead, he holds his tightening face in his own hands and he cries like a tiny child. He can only remain there a moment, the pain raw and crippling, he springs to his feet.

There is no strength to turn back and face the form. There is no shadow to follow him as he paces between the trees.

The mash-up is disturbing and he begs to revert chronology. The thought-train pulls him deeper and he relives his plotline in acidic colour. Years unfold in disorienting details and he perceives himself differently and the movements that had occurred around him. He can trace the process of the loss of identity and how the darker edge of that youth culture consumed and festered. He can understand that he was not alone.

But the lesson is not enough, torture, almost mockery, because this loss is irreversible.

“You can be my tan legged juliet ill be your redneck romio.” He cups the words behind his eyes. There is a series of senses that play back to him and he lifts his hands to push back hair and pull heaving shoulders against his chest. He is consumed and full.

But, he is not fearful.

“Like snowflakes when the weather warms up. like the leaves coulors change when the autumn comes.. it aint nothin we ever said or did wrong.. its just a love done gone. bah badda. badda bah...” he catches himself humming and he fans outwards embracing the sky with open arms, “you got whatever it is.. It blowes me away. Your everything I wanna say to a woman but I couldn’t find the words to say.” And he’s playing air guitar hopping along a crooked path on one swollen foot mouthing the memories of her skin and the sound of her eyes smiling when he mustered up the courage to extend to her. The song takes him back to those humid Jamboree nights and all they lived for was sunlight and a bag of ice. He feels the crowd and hears the smashing wagons, the tuneless melody of crushed cans against hungry-soles; he laughs how the put their boots through floors stomping into oblivion. They were high, the untouchables of that society, and he had never felt so free.

He’s comes full circle and confronts himself. There is the form. It has not gone.

There is an ocean inside of him and he is drowning. He tries to stay afloat, remaining as still as possible on his back but he keeps bucking his knees and flipping over. The ocean chokes him and fills his lungs. Even a fish couldn’t breathe. He can tilt his head back and open for air but another wave consumes him and soon he is levitating in water in a beautiful-underwater-backbend.

He thinks to himself from this ruinous cavity, “im a liar. im heartless. i just use ppl. i dont mean what i say. i am such a bad person. mom and dad.. you sure no how ta raisem.” He could open his eyes and face the dark through the watery current but he wills not, he refuses, from this ounce of final awareness; he will remain in his own darkness.

He thinks of normative-human-things and those warm safe niches. He enjoyed livelihood and lifts with the idea that he was happy with what he did. He did make them proud.

There is the image of a man lodged in his head and he cannot shake him free. The man hasfallen backwards on a hydro pole, his harness a lifeline, the charge life altering. He knows the fear in such a backbend, the variant perspective of dirt and sky, bone-chilling. He fears such voltage. There is the image of another man, as he is also harnessed and strapped high up. He is not in a life-fighting-back-bend but is curved forward, his arms supporting and balancing in a high-rope-pushup. It is unnervingly beautiful. There is power there, between those masculine bodies and he recalls the images with a core of rising strength.

He valued selflessness and goodness.

He hoped to embody those virtues.

But he fought a tug-of-war with himself that established a dangerous polarity in him. When they pushed and the outside came crashing down, he sought to escape: he was a youth, and they are perfect imitators.

“Never gonna groww up.. Never gonna sloww down !” He shakes his head at his own youthful stubbornness, that unforgettable gorgeous luster. The sun was hot that day.

If anything he knows, “i wanted to feel the earthquake.”



There is a phone call in the purple wet dawn of that hideous beast of a morning. Her love retrieves the phone and clears his throat three times before answering.

“Hello?” His right arm reaches around from the bed to the nightstand. He is thirsty. He stops mid-air, “what?”

He will spend years trying to forget that awful brief pause, she needed to breathe, before he will come to accept the actuality of that moment years later, and find peace.

There will never come a time in his self-actualizing that he can forget the scream that ripped from him

he instant she delivered the words that set his safe-social-harbour aflame, never.

The sliding glass door gives in his trembling hands and he realizes once he's rounded the shed that he's still in his bare feet. His breath hangs in sad-wet-clouds around him, goose bumps tattoo his chest but he bounds forward, jaw-clenched, fists pulsating like the wings of a dying butterfly.

He too feels upside down on a leaf, no, he is falling, he fell. He is locked in a life-fighting-backbend and he fears self-destruction. The mutilation is disturbing. He feels the scream building again, yet another vicious tidal wave in this relentless monsoon. The tragedy given far too early this sorrowful sunrise –if the sun would show its' face that day- he hadn't yet stepped back into himself from the camouflage of the night. (He was accustomed to orienting to qualities like trying on long sleeved T-shirts. This is how he survived the passive-aggressive-oppression.)

He felt the image of a body tumbling down the rock face of a steep fjord. Absorbed by the scream, the fall stole any capacity of noise from 'its' mouth, so 'it' carried that ugly energy beyond. The body had reached the devastating bottom and settled into a lifeless form. That body is strapped back up on a high wire in a life-fighting-backbend again, in his mind, when he eyed her form in the grass.

He is above her face in a moment, Spiderman-like, his hands and toes sinking into the wet ground. His eyes to her heart, mouth-to-mouth, his arms her long-muscled-altars, he connects with a kiss he's never given. His mouth calls urgently for her to pull away and come back to him, he knows that she is elsewhere and he loves her for that wild-untamed-mind, but he needs her now. He sends her this thought. Her chest lifts and she fills slowly. There is warmth creeping back into her face and she begins to slowly glow. He works his mouth in a serious labour, he sees them edging that brutal-dangerous-teeter and he is determined that he will not lose her. He cannot bear to live in this life of fear without her voice or strong ideas propelling him forwards into the gracious rooms of confidence. He breaks open in long sobs as he brings her closer to him. He cannot stand to hear his cries, he wills her to find him. He prays that this night was not the night she would lose her hope.

She coughs and opens her eyes, blinking against the crust of tears and pain. They connect over the bridges of noses and smile. He cannot anticipate the relief to see that smile. They say nothing as he lifts her from this shallow tomb and anchors her to his chest. He grips the back of her knees and folds his left arm around the entirety of her shoulders as he turns and takes them back into the warmth. He is now armour and he knows what he must do.

If there were a camera in that bewildering morning that could capture the vulnerable-sacrificial-offering of that kiss, the photo would be framed and hung in their future master bedroom to be talked about with excited little voices on rainy 'Banana-Pancake' mornings. When she dusts that frame she is always nagged by a tiny white dot in the photo. She swears it is lodged between the picture and glass. It can stay there she determines. For some unarticulated reason, she has a sense that it belongs there, one of those things, the way it is meant to be.

When there's no sun on Jupiter and you're afraid of the dark • Ruby Simoneau

Jupiter is so large it has never orbited the sun, and you miss her, hot and orange and dripping light from a sky you're no longer under. Your lover does not understand the weight of darkness, black and heavy like an ejected asteroid falling through space. The moons know what it's like to be left in the dark, they've been there since the sun crumbled and burned. The moons do not shine without her flame and they don't bother asking why their gray, cratered bodies are not enough for you. Jupiter is said to be a failed star like the sun, a heap of swirling gas, clouds and dust. Not enough mass, scientists say, so it turned into a planet with a sky made of ice crystals and gravity to choose what stays, what goes. Your lover takes paint buckets and travels moon to moon, paints them into wet, pale lemons. At night they bring you fireflies in a jar and say here, these will help you. They squirm and hum like a cluster of supernovas and you wonder if they've ever seen light other than their own. You let the bugs go, watch them polka-dot the empty sky like fallen dandelion dust. Your lover sighs, reaches into their pockets and pulls out handfuls of pulsating stars. They sit you under an orange tree and tie the constellation from spidery branches, let the stars and fruit dangle, fuse around you like you are the sun and this is your solar system. You take an orange and peel it with your front teeth, bite into its core and let the juice slide down your chin, your neck. You are the center of everything, your lover tells you, yellow and warm and dripping with light.

Broken State • Nicolas D. Sampson

Athens, Greece: Day One of what became known as the Age of Wrath. Thugs and extremists attacked a camp of illegal immigrants near Syntagma Square in the late hours of the morning, chanting mottoes like 'Our taxes! Our healthcare!' They beat people with wooden clubs and iron rods and planks stitched with nails. Forty-eight immigrants – ten of them women, and a child – and five social workers ended up in hospital, nineteen of them in critical condition.

Outrage ensued. The story made the news, the news made a mess of it, a surprising number of panelists coming to the support of the extremists, claiming that a broken state could no longer afford a welfare system for its citizens, let alone for those not contributing to its funding and maintenance.

The minority of panelists and journalists, pundits and viewers protested, standing up for common sense, decency and the rule of law, but they offered no realistic solution as to how to fund the healthcare system, which had run out of money.

The country fell in disarray. Dependent on back-to-back loans offered by a number of international organizations in exchange for reform that had yet to materialize, the Greek state was frayed and collapsing. To engage in reform was seen as weakness. Debate was deemed a waste of time, and calls for calm and level-headedness were ridiculed and taken advantage of.

Things heated up rapidly. A prominent politician announced on live TV that the only way to be rid of the problem was to stomp it out. Many in the studio audience cheered, others booed. The man shook his finger at the anchor.

'If they don't make themselves scarce, we'll crack open a few skulls and leave them in plain sight for others to see, in the ditch, where they can die like dogs.'

The comment alluded to the fact that some of the injured illegals had ended up in the hospital, putting the country's tax euros to use, irony that only exacerbated the toxic debate.

Encouraged by the comment, or irked by it – some claimed it had been voiced sarcastically and with no intention to instigate violence; others argued that words such as these were malicious, cold and calculated, their supporters perfectly aware of what they were setting up – whatever the case, armed thugs stormed the hospital and dragged the patients in question out on the street and dowsed them in red paint and glitter.

The police didn't intervene. The TV crews came rushing in, a wave of flashlights and microphones, vans screeching down the streets, helicopters roaring, a scramble for media posterity.

The image that traveled the world was caught after dark. A hooded man was spotted dragging a patient by his blue hospital gown to a deserted side street. The cameraperson shone his spotlight down the alley and in the gleam of primetime TV the hooded man raised his foot. The heavy boot sparkled darkly in the camera light, his bull-sized body casting a long, street-wide shadow down the alley. The raised foot hovered above the hospital patient's head who, lying on his back, his face swollen and purple and bloodied, stared at the bottom of that boot, at the cleats protruding from its front end, at the metal-plated tip, at the compressed rubber heel with its sharp, edgy corners – the patient stared, eyes narrow in the flood of the camera light, trying to discern what was happening, unaware of what was happening until he saw the foot come down. He screamed but his scream was cut short as the heel rammed into his mouth, smashing the front row of his teeth, drowning him in a sputter of blood, the boot rising and falling until all that remained was a pile of meat, hair, and teeth in a pool of blood.

All around the globe the stations broadcasted the heinous execution and the social media went insane, and the world climaxed in guilty horror, screaming bloody murder, unable to turn its eyes away. Many protested, asking for a censored version, but that would only cover up the problem. According to an unnamed source, 'only by not flinching from this image will we understand how Orwellian our reality has become.'

The day after, the EU placed a moratorium on its loan installments to Greece, pending an international investigation. No money would be released until the guilty were brought to justice, according to an EU spokesman.

This put further strain on the system. Organizations such as the Hellenic Ministry of Finance and the

Guild of Commerce protested, arguing that to punish a crime with added hardship would lead to more crime.

Things got complicated when a government probe identified agent provocateurs who, as the Greek government spokeswoman claimed, had been working for the Opposition. These provocateurs, the spokeswoman announced to the press, sought to undermine the government by creating an international incident that would halt EU payments, maybe even provoke a revolution.

The Opposition dismissed the accusations as 'hogwash.' They claimed that the thugs in question were government stooges under orders to stoke up trouble and make the Opposition look bad.

By noon on the following day there were clashes on the streets between anarchists and fascists. Random protesters were drawn into the fighting and groups of likeminded people often mistook each other for rivals.

A week later, Athens was a cauldron of unrest, round-the-clock riots and looting. Police forces were unable to contain the mayhem and the countryside followed suit. Small towns across the country flared up. Factions established strongholds – the rightwing in Attica and the Peloponnese, the leftwing on the isles. A mixed bag everywhere else. Villages saw an upsurge in gun crime as people dug out their WWII weaponry. People who'd known each other for years accused each other of treason. People were beaten to death, others shot in their homes, or dragged in the street and executed in a manner that brought back memories of the Military Junta, the Civil War, and the Nazis before that. Martial law was declared and the streets echoed with boots and armored vehicles, and checkpoints were thrown up in major boulevards, highways and country roads from the Peloponnese to Thrace.

In response, the EU extended its moratorium, demanding that the military be 'withdrawn from all civilian areas.'

The Greek government spokeswoman demanded that Brussels stop taking advantage of the situation and 'pay the hell up.' She tore up her notes and walked up to the camera, screaming:

'The blood of innocent people is on your hands, fellow Europeans. All this – take a look! – is care of the EU! Want to stop the carnage? Resume the loan installments immediately! Without the funds, matters will get worse. We'll have a tragedy on our hands, and so will you! This regional fire will spread to your houses!'

The EU's response was an extension of the moratorium on additional emergency funds for the Greek banking sector. So-called 'Emergency Liquidity Assistance' would be halted until the situation stabilized.

There were some in the international community who argued for a reinstatement of the ELA, but their reservations were dismissed. Even in Greece there was resistance to it. While some government officials demanded the ELA funding, others said it would simply inflate the tally.

'Good riddance! Emergency funding is a con. The rates cost an arm and two legs. Loan sharks! Vultures!'

A few days later the EU announced that no further ELA would be provided under any circumstances, not until the military stepped down.

The Greek government responded by seizing three tankers and a number of merchant ships sailing under EU flags. There was also an assault on the European Union cultural center by a group of 'unidentified hooligans.' Two aides were flung off a building and suffered severe injuries. One of them died two days later.

When the president of the European Commission described the event as 'an act of savagery,' a wave of demonstrators clad in blue shawls with blood-red stars surrounded the hospital where the surviving aide was being treated. It was rumored that the stars were dyed with pigs' blood, but that was quickly discredited as propaganda.

The demonstration was peaceful, at least it started out that way, but the situation degenerated. Three civilians ended up shot dead by army personnel. Live ammunition had been used.

The next day millions of people took to the streets in a series of protests that saw people clash en masse, and every building turned into an emergency hospital, every street into a morgue. The air reeked of gunpowder, burnt rubber, pulverized concrete and metal. The government declared war on domestic enemies, and then an obscure Army Colonel decided it would be a great idea to declare war on the EU itself, and just like that fighting broke out among factions of the Greek military near the straits of Salamis, and up in Thessaly and Macedonia. In the mountains of Olympus, a British radar installation was raided by irregulars, who posted pictures of their exploits on social media. A fleet of British and French warships was deployed to the region within hours. The borders were shut down and the country was ring-fenced.

November 2014. This is a developing story. Please stay tuned ...

Author Biographies

Philip Wendt is a proud native of the great state of Texas. He has been writing short fiction from the age of eight, always of the horror genre. Regretfully he was always too nervous to submit anything. Now, at the age of thirty five, his first submission “Watercolors” was recently published in the anthology titled “American Cult” by Madness Heart Press, released July 2019. His flash fiction piece “Maydays” is published in Dream Noir magazine and Adrenaline Anonymous is to be published by Running Wild Press next year. Besides writing, his other passion is the outdoors, the solitude is essential

Dick Bentley’s books, Post-Freudian Dreaming, A General Theory of Desire, and All Rise are available on Amazon. He won the Paris Writers/Paris Review’s International Fiction Award and has published over 280 works of fiction, poetry, and memoir in the US, the UK, France, Canada, and Brazil. He served on the Board of the Modern Poetry Association and has taught at the University of Massachusetts. Find him online at www.dickbentley.com.

William Vlach’s poetry is published in the United States and the UK. Both his playwriting and parody have won writing awards. His debut novel, The Golden Chalice of Hunaphú: A Novel of the Spanish Attack on the Maya, was named the 2015 best novel by BAIPA. The Gospel According to Father Coffee, Vlach’s second novel, is composed of comic tales informed by global trickster stories. His Western satiric saga, The Guns of Revenge, was on Amazon’s best selling classic Westerns list for over three months

Dr. Keith Raymond is a Family and Emergency Physician that practiced in eight countries in four languages. Currently living in Austria with his wife. When not volunteering his practice skills, he is writing or lecturing. He has multiple medical citations, along with publications in Flash Fiction Magazine, The Grief Diaries, The Examined Life Journal, The Satirist, Chicago Literati, Blood Moon Rising, Frontier Tales Magazine, and in the Sci Fi anthology Sanctuary among others. The story featured in this issue, “The Following Answer”, has also been published in issue 79 of Blood Moon Rising Magazine (Jan. 2020).

Sarah Estime is an Aircraft Mechanic in the Air Force. When she is not working my day job, she is composing works related to literary fiction. She has been published by “Cardinal Sins,” “O-Dark Thirty,” and “The Charles Carter.” and she currently writes for Blogcritics and Litro Magazine.

Kendra Genereus is a recent graduate of Rhode Island College majoring in English/ Creative Writing. She has been published in Shoreline Literary Magazine, The Albion Review, and Providence Monthly. She currently works at Banfield Pet Hospital as a receptionist and spends her days cuddling dogs young and old.

Alan Gartenhaus had a thirty-year career publishing a professional journal for museum educators, and serving as a curator for the New Orleans Museum of Art and the Smithsonian Institution. His non-fiction has been published by Running Press, Caddo Gap Press, and the Smithsonian Institution. His fiction has been appeared in the Santa Fe Literary Review, Euphony--the literary magazine of the University of Chicago, Entropy, the Broad River Review, and Evening Street Press, among others. He lives on the Island of Hawaii, where he writes and farms

Sara Hailstone is an educator and writer from Madoc, Ontario who orients towards the ferocity and serenity of nature and what we can learn as humans from the face of forest in our own lives. A graduate of Guelph University (B.A.) and Queen’s University (M.A. and B.Ed.), she is currently completing her Masters in English in Public Texts at Trent University.

Ruby Simoneau is an undergraduate student in Northern Michigan University. She studies English Writing and

Journalism and is an intern at Passages North. She is currently an unpublished writer.

Nicolas D. Sampson is a writer-producer based in the UK and Cyprus. His stories have been published in Panorama: The Journal of Intelligent Travel, The Writers' Magazine, The Scofield, the Tales of Reverie (Dec 2019). His short story Flames and Shadows was nominated for a 2018 Pushcart Prize. Nicolas' film project include Behind the Mirror (writer/producer), Vita and Virginia (executive producer), and Show Me the Picture: The Story of Jim Marshall (executive producer). He loves Alfred Hitchcock films. And traveling. And the Cloud. And is currently working on a psychological horror script