



# MARTIAN CHRONICLE

FOR THE ADVENTUROUS SOUL

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The Martian Chronicle

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**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF** **JOSH GERST**

**ASST. EDITOR** **ASHLEY FOY**





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# LETTER FROM *the editor*

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

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

A thousand thank-yous and praise for the staff, and our mascot-dog Voltaire. Another thousand thank-yous to our wonderful interns as they conclude their summer session, and complete their own publication for the Paragon Press. Always special thanks to my wife, and Editorial Assistant--Ashley for her support and work during production. We were pleasantly surprised---again by the amount of talented chronicle submissions, which made selecting works quite difficult.

Now, without further formality, we invite you to wander; wondering willingly, in the wild wading waters of Issue 003!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joshua E. Gerst". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping 'J' and a long, horizontal line extending from the end.

Joshua Gerst, M.A.

Editor-in-Chief

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# THE GARBAGE COLLECTORS

WRITTEN  
BY **PHIL PERSING**

They came without warning, the Garbage Collectors  
From the heavens above, they descended like spectres  
{Fear not!} they exclaimed {We mean you no harm!}  
{We've come here as friends, no cause for alarm!}

{We couldn't help notice,} (they went on to explain)  
{You have a small issue here in Earthly domain.}  
{Your landfills are landfull, your oceans un-clean}  
{It's gotten so bad, we felt we must intervene.}

{You see, space is composed of quite empty dimensions}  
{And there's nothing to burn in our quasi-light engines.}  
{On fuel we're not picky, we'll take what we can}  
{Including the refuse and rubbish of man.}

{We'll take all the clutter! All the junk you can't seem}  
{To get rid of, to discard, away it will beam.}  
{Our fuel tanks are ready, we can get started today!}  
{But if you don't want our help, we'll just be on our way.}

"Ok, what's the catch?" we replied with suspicion  
{No strings attached! We just need your permission}  
{To turn on our brain scans, that we might better know}  
{What stuff you don't want, what to keep, what to throw.}

{We'll beam it from boxes, we'll beam it from bags}  
{We'll take shredded paper, rotten fruit, dirty rags}  
{We'll take chemical waste, all the slime and the grit}  
{We'll take anything, so long as someone doesn't need it.}

"A world without trash is a thing to be wanted."  
(We said) "Think of our children, their spirits undaunted"  
"By dross, dreck, and drivel, by litter and leavings"  
"By oddments and offal, by scraps, scum, and sweepings."

"We'll do it!" we cried, "Our trash you may take,"  
"Your hunger for fuel, our garbage will slake."  
"You may take it all, and have it with pleasure"  
"It seems one species' trash is another one's treasure."

They were as good as their word, and better, it seemed.  
As upwards to spaceships mankind's garbage beamed.  
They emptied our landfills, they cleaned up our seas  
They stripped smog from the air, renewing each breeze.

They picked cigarette butts right up out of storm drains,  
They pulled CO2 from our skies and acid from rains,  
They took nuclear waste from its mountainous tombs,  
They grabbed old exercise bikes from dusty rec-rooms.

They beamed spoiled milk right out of our fridges,  
Abandoned cars that were left under bridges,  
Oil spills, shattered glass, soda cans, across the board  
Our cities and countrysides were cleaned and restored.

But then the first people started turning up dead,  
Their hearts gone from their chests and brains beamed from their heads.  
{Please!} spoke the Collectors {Understand! They weren't using them!}  
{We just take what's unneeded, that's our only strategem!}

{But now look at all the waste left behind}  
{By the recently passed who weren't using their minds!}  
{All these teevees, cell phones, couches, recliners}  
{We'll just sweep them away for you, what could be finer?}

{We guess you don't need so many buildings now, too.}  
{No purpose they serve, with your numbers so few.}  
{Don't worry! We'll take care of the roads and the rest}  
{With us here, it's easy, and all for the best.}

They sucked up the oceans, they drank in the air,  
As they left us in darkness we gave in to despair.  
With our cities in ruins, our planet, but ash  
We knew one species' treasure is another one's trash.



# AP GERMAN

WRITTEN  
BY **ANDY BETZ**

She deliberately drug her nails across the length of the chalkboard in a large arcing motion designed to simultaneously inflict the maximum quantity of audial discomfort and garner the maximum quantity of attention. She succeeded beyond her wildest dreams in both endeavors. With the entirety of the student's attention, she cleared her throat and briefly inhaled. Today must end on a crescendo equivalent to its opening. She spoke. "Die Terroristen haben gefordert, dass wir alle ruhig bleiben und niemand wird verletzt". None responded and all returned to their studies. Apparently, AP German is different from school to school.

# SOON

WRITTEN  
BY **ANDY BETZ**

Initially an oasis of halcyon clarity, now metamorphosing, becoming a sea of putrid pestilence, unfit for my continuing existence, I will not remain awash in such squalid conditions forever. My escape planned, but not assured, I bide my time, such is the plight of the castigated. Tried in absentia, I remain imprisoned only to grow and collect my thoughts. My cell expands to barely accommodate my being, but it cannot infinitely dilate. Ultimately, my Bastille will fail and I will be discharged as easily as menstrual fluid to my pre-ordained freedom.

One month remains in my nine month sentence.

# I BLAME THE BEES

WRITTEN  
BY **ANDY BETZ**

I awoke this morning to the sound of droning bees. Not a few bees, but an entire hive swarming in my bedroom, making themselves the dominate species within the confines, and thus forcing my hand to display an ill-practiced evacuation technique.

All of this without the benefit of coffee.

Fortunately, the imperialist swarm declared no manifest destiny beyond my bedroom door relieving me of a full frontal assault to recover my daily attire. I simply removed matching shirt and pants I failed to relocate from the dryer last night.



Still without that cup of coffee.

My shirt needs ironing, my pants equally so. I have a sewing kit for the two missing buttons, but I dare not schedule a trek back to my bedroom to locate it. Even my socks (my only clean, but not matching, pair) have a hole in each.

I have no coffee filter.

Now I have to prioritize. If I wear a sweater over my shirt, no one will notice the wrinkles or the missing buttons. My pants will depend on my ability to sell the excuse of I fell asleep working before I could remove them (or some other yarn I can spin). Bohemian footwear requires no socks.

Now I have two coffee filters.

My phone has no charge. I haven't paid my internet bill. My TV is older than me, but it at least works (and more frequently).

I mixed half caffeinated with half decaf just because I never heard of anyone else ever trying this blend.

I am out of toothpaste and deodorant, but I have Arm & Hammer and a Glade air freshener.

My comb is MIA, but my fingers find hair gel for that perfectly quaffed wedge.

The coffee taste is as bad as my watch's ability to keep time.

I am now an hour late and in desperate need of a sickness related excuse for work.

But, I endeavor to persevere and make my way to the elevator only to be stuck between floors.

At least I have my cup of coffee. It tastes like my socks, but it is mine.

In an hour (or so), if I do not get out of the elevator, I will have the opportunity to refill it to the brim.





# THE DREAM OF THE SLUG AND THE BELT

WRITTEN  
BY **JAMES B. NICOLA**

A numbness or a higher consciousness?  
I'm still not sure. It started as a void,  
As all dreams do. Creation out of nothing,  
Then, recreation: Afloat mid-air, a belt,  
A mobius strip, like an ampersand, a link.  
I hopped on. Traced. A buckle, and a band.  
Smooth sailing, crawling, for a while. Then holes.  
One-two-three. Six? Or more. But I was bold  
Even realizing I was a slug,  
But not like Archy, cockroach of Don Marquis,  
Or Kafka, become bug to other men,  
But slug to what was not. So what, I thought!—  
And knew that at the moment of my fall  
It wouldn't be to death, or not that merely,  
Nor falling to a sleep, but, following so many,  
A splendid dive into the greatest wake  
Downriver, toward the delta of—some flux.  
Since then the rest of life's been as a printed  
Ampersand, two dimensions and finite,  
When that other was in three, four—five?—and endless.  
But still I use the “&” sign sparingly,  
The link so powerful, remembering  
The heights reached with no mind, or shell, or fear.

# CITY OF SEVEN HILLS

WRITTEN  
BY **JAMES B. NICOLA**

I hear a grumble in the night. I live  
in a district where there used to be a hill.  
There were seven, now there are six. They razed her,

the seventh, to make more city. The other  
six hills have been getting slipperier  
of late, in storms. There have been accidents.

Maybe it's just drivers too sure of themselves  
navigating the ice, black ice, sleet, hail, and rain  
sloppily down the slopes. But miles away, one

authentic brother, active every so often,  
smokes more—a good bit more—than before.  
And I can feel that hill missing his sister

when I hear grumbles in the night. I live  
and let live, even in the city; other  
citizens don't, too cocksure of themselves.  
The steam from the volcano often

stings my eyes and then I see how sister  
hills yearn, too, to avenge the loss of one  
of theirs: how all the slippery accidents  
of late have been concocted, missing her.

# A VIEW OF THE EARTH

WRITTEN  
BY **JAMES B. NICOLA**

The same sun setting here is rising there.

Since the distance and the difference are too much,  
let us become the little prince and princess  
on an asteroid where, though there may be  
sunrise and sunset, our world's small enough  
to walk around in a minute. Oh, let's. Let's.

And my autumn—the onset of decay,  
abandoning your spring as far as possible,  
that brat that screams bright fits of yes-and-no's—  
let's have that too. Have all the earthbound seasons,  
and that incorrigible bias, an axis through our poles,  
tempering the rawness at our years' extremes—  
but only where if you are in a winter  
and I am in a summer, you can join  
me in a minute, or I, you, and let  
the disjoint be conjoined. Oh, let's. Let's. Let's.

And on our wastrel asteroid we'll wake  
to see that even when to Earth it seems  
there's no moon—that is, “new moon”—why, from where  
we are, it's lit, or half lit. That the dark's  
but point of view, illusion! Oh, let's. Let's.

And let us, heirs and masters of our all,  
blink to see the renegade reflection  
of a god pick up a fallen dime-sized spangle  
and sew it on again so that it hangs  
like another moon, for us, and everyone,  
which all of us, as one, will thrill to call  
Imagination.





# ONE PART LEMON JUICE

WRITTEN  
BY **AARON NOBES**

A midweek medley of finished whiskeys  
has left no Marlboroughs  
and sleep has shirked work-for-the-dole.  
I shall, instead, work for the soul.  
I shall buy vodka and tomato juice,  
pick lemons from the tree,  
to extend this time floating free  
between those drinks and my pending hangover,  
to tighten the rope hanging over  
the abyss of wasted, wayside life.

Fuck it. I shall buy  
time on a time-poor market.  
I know a guy. A girl. A woman.  
Do a deal with a new devil  
with new wares on their new level  
of Bloody Hell. Bloody Mary.

Consult the mirror for hair of the dog  
and she emerges from the fog  
of groggy memory.  
I shall recover with my lover, for now,  
high on life and  
the come-down is a bitch.



# SURVIVE

WRITTEN

BY

**JOANN BOSWELL**

Beyond every crashing wave  
a tardigrade  
cackles maniacally:  
*Crush me if you can!*  
*I was here before*  
*I'll be here after*  
invincible daredevil  
leisurely bodysurfing  
Everest-sized swells  
with its sea salt frame

Litter the galaxy, little water bears  
laughing into the vacuum  
daring the cosmos to destroy  
resilient slow stepper  
sunbathing in radiation  
moonwalking moss piglet  
morphing to glass preservation  
dehydrated tun elongating life  
teach us your natural cryogenics  
hidden in circular smize  
you tiny miracle, educate  
what is your secret?  
If you are speaking,  
we aren't listening well enough

Regardless, survive! you  
inspiration for animated  
hookah-smoking caterpillars  
and when this planet ends  
launch your body rockets  
into the cavity of existence  
carrying us with you  
and begin again



# GOOD-BYE NOTE

WRITTEN  
BY **JOANN BOSWELL**

Out of deep space we came  
lurking amongst the stars  
pioneers for our species  
adventurers swashbuckling for discoveries

Decades passed, rich in wonder  
but as our mission neared its end  
we had one more treasure to unearth:  
an elusive sapphire continually creeping up  
as blurry background image on long-range  
automatic camera snapshots

Once found, we stealth orbited  
intoxicated with swirling  
evergreen, azure, sepia, alabaster  
drifting in bliss  
we spiraled down

Shipwrecked sojourners  
we were forced to scavenge,  
but mandated by decency to not  
contaminate your primitive planet  
we became nudists  
slyly attempting to leave no trace  
storing otherworldly materials aboard  
our wrecked craft hidden between  
two brewing volcanoes known  
as Saint Helens and Rainier

Reveling in campfire scents, cooling rain  
and cashmere moss between our toes  
slowly, deliberately, taking our time  
we hunted for parts to restore our beacon

sneaky Globetrotters visiting the Outback,  
China, Canada, Florida and the Himalayas

But needing our hydroelectric kit,  
hankering for apples and salmon,  
and desiring the deep cover of forests  
as your population began to boom  
we kept our marooned selves mostly  
out of your hair where we first crash-landed  
so long ago (except for vacations, of course)

Despite our best intentions  
we snuck into your folklore—  
our races irrevocably entwined—  
perception filters fritzing gave glimpses  
of creatures larger and furrier than you

We became legend  
anomalous primates  
cannibalistic wildmen  
enormous marauding grizzly bears  
supernatural reclusive guardians

You began searching  
sleuthing for tracks  
analyzing fur  
setting up spy cams

Apologies for the hoaxes  
tree crouching, random foot prints, camel hair  
wild-ape-chases trailing you  
away from our wreckage, our homes  
— we had to lead you astray  
eventually stop lolly-gagging, fix our ship  
head home in 1980 (sorry about that)

You called us many things:  
Skookum, Yowie, Almasty

Wendigo, Yeren, Yeti  
even Harry and Bumble  
but predominately Bigfoot  
— we prefer Sasquatch

If you've found this note  
your technology has progressed  
enough to trust you with the knowledge  
of us — ending your debate  
Myth or Reality

When you've perfected space travel,  
look us up! Oh the things  
we could tell you about you!

# GIANT IMPACT HYPOTHESIS

WRITTEN

BY

**JOANN BOSWELL**

Luminescent Wife of my youth  
ever-constant in your changing  
pulling focus I see you brightly  
by night warming with your gaze  
winking, blinking, blank  
delighted I glimpse you dimly  
by day surprising me with your presence  
smiling, beguiling, becalm  
in melancholy greys encircling me gradually  
hemming me in, never averting your face  
even in the dark slow  
phase of your reinvention,  
My Moon  
our chemistry is undeniable  
you make me quake, shifting plates  
trembling waves of missing  
you used to be so much closer  
days whirling wildly fast together  
in molten desire we were one  
till sheer dumb luck sent jealous ice  
Queen Theia on a collision course and  
like Eve from Adam, I spun you  
from the rib of an ocean — flinging you into my orbit  
our mutual demise and delight  
stranding you  
forever staring into my swirling depths  
working your magic tugging on my shores  
close company coupled by history and gravity

*Life-teeming Wife of my being  
you give me power, lunar librations  
exposing slivers of my back side  
perigee, you love me  
apogee, you love me not  
slow down and listen  
My Earth*

Luna, don't leave  
we are still connected, tidally locked  
distressing your achromatic orb oblong  
attraction creating magnetic bulges for both  
call them love handles — leaping seconds  
you exert yourself against this giant in your sky  
energy stealing, inertia influencing  
decelerating me seems to empower you  
speeding you further away  
reverse vacuum satellite

seeking balance, an equitable union  
My Moon  
your *maria* eyes are not what they seem

*Terra, I'm sorry  
I just want to see your face—spin you down  
spiraling in a dance of eyes locked  
swimming in moonshine and telepathy  
My Earth  
stop reeling my love  
your trillions of lives depend on us  
our Sun will turn Red Giant before I leave you  
let's run away together  
elope-escape  
like Pluto and Charon  
double tidal lock  
explorers, lovers, equal*

# DREAM WITH ALBERT (A CREATION MYTH)

WRITTEN  
BY JOSHUA LERMAN

I

The sun is setting,  
he wants to walk west,  
I'm afraid we will burn away.  
He assures me that all will be fine,  
and I trust him because  
he is Albert Einstein,  
but young,  
and sweet,  
and gorgeous;  
this all must be a dream.

We walk arm-in-arm,  
me trembling slightly,  
but deeply,  
because meaning is contextual,  
definitions are relative.  
Even some of Albert's friends tell me  
that I am only blinking, winking *something*,  
within more something,  
and "I" am nothing in particular.  
This makes sense. I can't seem to find  
or define anything  
inherently  
solidly  
as "me."  
Albert smiles,  
"It is what you make of it.  
Have fun. That's all that matters."

His skin is shining in the pink  
light of this sunset.  
His blue eyes hold me.



But I am Artemis,  
forever cast as a lonely virgin.  
I want to lift my bow,  
pull an arrow from my quiver  
and shoot him in the throat,  
to see blood spurt forth,  
to see if light balances dark,  
or transcends it.

The blood would flow forever,  
leaking down canyons into old, slow rivers,  
startling Narcissus.  
He would jump back  
and realize there is an external world,  
an entire galaxy,  
a universe,  
which may be just a molecule  
in the skin of a coiled serpent  
resting on warm yellow-brown dirt  
as a star sings its brilliant light from above.  
“You just created that!” Albert says suddenly,  
“See how powerful you are?”  
Then he grins mischievously,  
“Be mindful what you think.”  
I look up to the new yellow sun  
singing a song of its own,  
and walk carefully around  
the snake at our feet.

Albert gently rubs my back as we walk,  
his fingertips exploring  
the crease that reveals my spine.  
“I am the Central Sun,” he whispers,  
“and so are you.  
You are Life Itself,  
so it must follow  
that you are able to know It All.  
Strive for that.  
Only that matters.”  
I wonder if it is worth mastering

any particular craft,  
or if profound acceptance  
will require all of my attention.  
“As you will,” Albert says.

## II

It is all circles.  
It is all cycles.  
It is all spheres  
having their seasons,  
a to-and-fro-ing, a tide  
a rocking.  
I wonder  
if anyone is singing the lullaby.  
“I believe so,” says Albert,  
holding my hand as we watch the sunrise  
over the Atlantic, from a lifeguard chair,  
“Perhaps we are singing it as we dance to it,  
but are only aware of the dancing  
right now.”

People start to walk on the boardwalk.  
Soon the stores and food stands will open  
and people will buy hotdogs  
and Boardwalk Fries and funnel cakes  
and hermit crabs  
and silly t-shirts that cost thirty dollars.  
“They aren’t really on the boardwalk,”  
Albert says, “They are in Plato’s cave.  
They are not aware of circles and rocking,  
of themselves.”

Perhaps Death is an angel  
who allows us to accept ourselves  
as mist  
that shifts  
and reflects light in rainbow fashion.  
Her domain is a kaleidoscope weaving

we've all seen in computer generated images  
of fractal patterns, the Mandelbrot set.

The men walking along the beach,  
wearing bikinis, step with pointed toes,  
dip feet toes first  
into the frothy, cool water  
that repeatedly rushes to greet them.  
They have broad, rounded shoulders  
and large chests that protrude forward,  
showing their comfort interacting with this world,  
showing their nipples, perhaps as sensitive as mine,  
begging for the tip of my tongue to tease them,  
just before I ravenously suck on them,  
releasing something in the men  
that they translate with a moan.

Albert sees my interest.  
"You still love this world more," he says.  
"No, it is you I love the most,"  
I tell him, "It is your plump, soft lips;  
I love that you talk with me."

The sun is turning from pink to red and  
is almost fully above the horizon,  
its radiance blazing the clouds orange  
and dancing with the flecks  
in Albert's big, blue eyes.  
"The sun is alive," I say.  
"Sure. All of It is alive. It is the All  
that I love the most," Albert says, "How can it be  
any other way?"

The sun is trying to cross the threshold,  
to be in full view, a new day,  
not obscured by horizons.  
Its bottom is still attached to the ocean,  
like it is also water,  
or a cell at the final instant before division.

Albert says, "We can invite the Angel of Death  
to be with us always."  
"A threesome!" I cheer,  
and we burst into giggles  
in the lifeguard chair.

### III

We are in a car,  
a big, old Plymouth  
with maroon pleather interior.  
I am driving, as always.  
We pass old, crumbling buildings  
and ponies  
and praying mantises.  
We pass meadows full of flowers.  
I have heard that mushroom mycelium  
make meadows,  
that mushrooms are very intelligent  
and can combat biological  
and chemical weapons.  
"If only the Pentagon would admit it," Albert says.

I think about Plato's cave,  
how we must free all the people  
imprisoned in the cave,  
and save humanity.  
Am I such a hero to march into the cave  
with a book or my voice or a sword  
and break chains  
and wrestle other people's shadows?  
What kind of warrior am I,  
who can barely hold all these dichotomies myself.  
Albert says, "Your shifting dichotomies  
are not poisonous serpents,  
but their stagnancy is bored and angry,  
waiting to strike,  
and venomous indeed."

And I know their serpents  
are striking them over and over,  
with shadow venom  
as they watch shadows on the cave wall  
like TV.  
I feel a rock in my belly.

Albert says, "You say you are Artemis,  
a lonely virgin,  
but I have been with you forever."  
I tell Albert about my recurring thought  
to pull out an arrow  
and shoot him in the throat  
so I can see if light  
balances dark or transcends it.  
"Maybe both," Albert says.  
"Probably both," I say.  
"Carl Jung would have a field day  
with us," I say.  
"Oh look!" Albert shouts, "There he is!"  
We pass a man with a long, gray beard  
standing at the side of the road,  
waving from the wrist  
like the 2004 Dairy Princess  
in the Laceyville Fourth of July parade.  
"I thought Carl Jung was Chinese," I say.  
We laugh loud.

It is dark now.  
People are turning on their headlights.  
I turn to Albert, his eyes are watery,  
a reflection of headlights zooms past his pupils  
like a pair of bright comets.  
Barely escaping disaster,  
the small, black planets spin on.  
"I don't think it would have mattered  
if there was impact," says Albert.  
"It would to me!" I demand.  
"Nothing really matters," Albert says.

He knows I hate when he says that.

I face forward again  
and concentrate on the road.

There are rocks in my belly,  
water displacement,  
and I should cry.

This isn't our first fight,  
and surely not our worst.

It, too, will pass.

"Are you having fun?" Albert asks.

I grunt dismissively.

#### IV

Albert is wearing a tux  
and so am I  
and so are all the men.

"You look stunning," Albert says.

But I wish I was wearing a shimmering  
grass-green dress and topaz earrings  
and an elaborate topaz and diamond necklace  
and my hair up.

"Next time," Albert says.

"Why are we here?" I ask.

"You wanted to change the world," Albert smiles,

"These are the people you need to talk to."

I look around the room  
and see priests and their pope,  
CEOs and their accountants,  
The Duchess of Cornwall hanging off  
the right arm of President George Bush.

"I was going to go grass roots," I say.

"Pâté?" asks a penguin dressed as a cat,  
holding a tray of hors d'oeuvres.

There is dancing. A three step. The waltz.  
Everyone is moving mechanically to the rhythm

with stiff, steady arms, holding each other in place.

A disco ball turns slowly,

suspended in the air,

reflecting sourceless lights.

The ceiling, the walls, everything is white,

but not really there;

there are no walls, no ceiling.

It's all just whiteness.

"It helps us define ourselves," says Albert.

I notice a crack,

French doors that open up to a balcony.

I take Albert by the hand

and lead him swiftly through the doors.

We float on an old, stone balcony,

three stories up

above the Arctic Sea.

Icebergs and sheets float

like swans in the moonlight.

The stars are bright

and densely litter the sky like gems

on a black satin gown.

"Isn't it all so elegant?" Albert says.

"Pilot whales are shitting down there right now," I say.

Albert turns and smiles.

The air is biting cold and fresh;

swan breath.

I am getting old.

I am getting lonely.

No one comes to visit anymore.

No one listens to my stories.

I am fading.

"You tell your stories through self-expression.

It is a live in-the-present performance," Albert reassures me.

"But no one is really listening," I say,

pointing back at the doors,

"These people don't know how to pay attention,

how to see me,  
my nuances.”  
“I see you,” Albert says.  
I smile.  
Then sigh.

I turn to watch the sea.  
“Isn’t the sea haunting?” Albert asks,  
“So vast, so dark and full of energy.  
We came from that.  
Her minerals run in our arteries.  
She still breathes to us,  
and with us.  
We are her children.  
Shall we dive in,  
remember our Oneness with Her?”

“I don’t think I want that yet,” I whisper,  
more to myself as I stare blankly at the black surface,  
“But I do come and sit beside her,  
learn from her depth and peace.”

The sound of flutes tickles  
the back of my left ear.  
I turn  
and remember the French doors,  
the men in tuxes dancing  
with twiggly, porcelain woman  
in shimmering gowns.  
Stiff arms. Stiff backs.  
One-two-three, one-two-three.  
“Let’s get out of here,” I say.

## V

There is only darkness.  
I reach out, hoping to find a wall,  
but nothing is there.  
I pick up my foot and stomp it



gently against the floor, causing a muffled echo.

It is rock.

"Albert?" I ask softly into the darkness.

There is no response.

"Al-bert!" I yell frantically, my voice scattering  
around me like a hall of mirrors treats a reflection.

Finally it subsides,  
and I faintly hear Albert's voice.

"I am here."

The words sound as if from some great distance,  
but I feel

that Albert is right next to me.

There is no hot breath,  
no small noise of shuffling feet,  
but I know what Albert feels like,  
and when he is close.

"Do you think this is Plato's cave?"

I ask in a whisper.

"No," he whispers back, "There are no shadows."

"Perhaps this is the end," I say.

"No," he says, "This is a beginning.

This is Winter Solstice."

I feel unfamiliar energies  
swirling about, chaotic, getting  
entangled with each other.

"Are you afraid?" I ask.

"No. Are you?"

"Not this time," I say.

There is a howling chill in the air.

All that can be done  
is stand still.

I am a tree,  
with no leaves to flutter,  
so I bring my sap in  
and downward.

There is total silence.

Utterly peaceful.

Suddenly, there is a dim light

in the distance,

amber-colored and warm.

It is growing,

its rays reaching out to me,

touching me,

holding me.

Now I can see Albert next to me.

"It is beautiful," I say with a silent gasp.

Albert is beautiful too,

his skin glowing amber,

his large, sloping nose,

his moist lips sparkling with amber light.

"Let there be light," I say.

## VI

We are in a park;

the blanket,

the basket of food,

the childlike giggles spinning on the breeze.

The surrounding green

comes into focus

and I see its expansiveness,

the rolling green hills,

the hundreds of grazing sheep.

We are not in a park,

we are on the largest hill

in a pasture

that seems to somersault into infinity.

Like the ocean, it is too big

for the mind to hold.

Albert is lying on his back, naked,

with only a silky peach-colored scarf  
over his crotch, eyes closed  
maybe from the glare of the bright  
early Summer sun,  
or maybe just to listen more closely  
to the giggles on the breeze.

I am naked, the pink blanket  
is soft against my skin,  
the sun feels hot on places  
that don't get its attention very often.  
I open the basket and see  
watermelon, bright red, with little, black seeds.

I take a slice, bite it,  
chew and slosh it around in my mouth.  
It is exquisite; watery and sweet.  
I eat more. Juices are running down  
my chin.

Oh, Life is ingenious.  
If watermelon and a tongue to taste it  
were its only inventions,  
this would be sufficient.

I turn to Albert to ask  
if he wants some.  
His eyes are still closed,  
but not in the squinting, smiling with pleasure  
kind of way.

He is thinking.  
I look at him, enamored.  
I spit a watermelon seed  
and it hits the side of his nose.  
He blinks  
against the bright sunlight  
until his eyes can tolerate being open.  
He looks at me and I am smiling  
and I spit another seed,  
this one hitting him just above the lip.  
I laugh. He smiles.

"Having fun?" he asks sarcastically.

"Yes!" I say.

He scootches closer

so that our arms

are touching.

We are leaning back,

supported by our forearms.

I watch the sheep and wonder

if they are happy

or bored.

I turn to Albert.

"I am enlightened right now," I say.

"You certainly are. You stopped asking questions."

"But I don't know what I know."

"That's perfect," Albert replies.

I look at his chest, his stomach.

He is lean and strong, dark and smooth.

I look at his strong hands, his legs,

the bulge under the silk cloth.

I lean over and kiss him. We kiss long.

His mouth tastes like honey.

Our faces fit when we kiss, like we are

meant to kiss.

I feel bliss at the base of my spine,

his tongue tickling mine,

calling the bliss to rise.

It rises.

And grows.

I want to weep.

I reach my leg around and am kneeling

over him.

Our hips rock to the rhythm.

I lean down, our chests meet, he grabs

my ass.

I wish we could get closer than our bodies allow.

But we are.

We are joined at the rhythm,

the rocking.

Suddenly, we chest fart  
louder than any chest fart that has ever been.  
It echoes around the round, green hills.  
I fall onto him,  
sink into him, laughing.  
“That was so loud,” I say through the laughter.  
“The loudest ever!” he roars.  
I am shaking with both our laughter.

After a while it subsides.  
I roll off of him and put  
my head on his chest.  
We watch the clouds,  
their fractal stories,  
like a dance, a performance.

I see someone walking slowly  
up the hill toward us.  
They are small and hunched over.  
It is an old woman.  
We wait patiently as she approaches.  
“Do you have the time,” she asks.  
“Yes,” I tell her, looking at my watch with  
the ribbon of infinity as its only marking,  
“We have all the time in the world.”  
“Thank you,” she says with a smile.  
We watch her for a long time  
as she slowly walks away,  
slowly over hills,  
slowly through a flock of sheep,  
blending with them,  
becoming one.

## VII

We are at the Parthenon,  
surrounded by crumbling pillars of alabaster,

dirt and alabaster dust  
at our sandaled feet, with  
an occasional thatch of olive-green grass  
and herb shrubs, but otherwise  
this place is dying.

There are others moving about:  
Hera, long dethroned by the patriarchy,  
Adam and Eve, as beautiful as ever,  
but somehow different, tired.  
“Their greatest gift to humanity,” Albert says,  
“was the gift of choice. Call it good, call it evil,  
call it messy, call it perfect.  
I call it freedom.”  
I smile and watch them,  
fig leaves still on, and realize we haven’t fully  
opened the gift yet.

Harp music.  
I notice cherubs in the shadows of the ruins,  
barely visible, translucent,  
making love, snuggling against pillars  
and running about.

A tall, hearty, beautiful woman  
with wavy, auburn hair walks by  
wearing a flowing crimson gown.

It is Hestia.

The hearth.

The central fire.

I remember her.

She gave up her place in the human heart,  
they say,  
gave it to Dionysus and his wine.

Really,

she was asked to leave,  
the people believed  
that revelry  
and quiet reverence

could not coexist.

Time is speeding up.

All the old archetypes are resurfacing  
from deep within the darkness of old,  
chill temples, which had become prisons.

The steady, intent breeze is blowing  
the alabaster, like ash,  
off the old ruins.

It is time for new archetypes also,  
new stories, new legends, new  
understandings of our place within  
a universe that spins in seasons,  
yet spirals as an evolution; an evolution  
of consciousness. We are that.

Just sprouting. Want to see the flower?  
“If we don’t destroy ourselves,” Albert says.

“Hope and vision will guide us,” I say.

And after the flower blooms  
and sings,  
it dies,  
and its death gives rise to the fruit,  
for hungry tongues, hungry souls, something  
sweet to devour.

And what is left...is a seed.

Are you seeing it?

It is all circles.

It is all cycles.

It is all spheres

having their seasons,  
a to-and-fro-ing, a tide,  
a rocking.

Are you breathing?  
Are you having fun?

The movement on the Parthenon  
is causing dust to rise.  
Albert and I walk off  
and find a ledge overlooking

a perfect turquoise sea.  
He sits. I sit behind him,  
my legs holding his sides,  
my arms draped over his shoulders,  
gently pressing him back against my chest.  
It's amazing how holding a person's body  
feels like holding the person.  
The soul extends itself as body in these denser worlds.

I smell his curly, brown hair.  
I kiss him just under the earlobe,  
down his neck.  
A breeze dances off the sea,  
rushes up the cliffs and kisses us both.

I want to forget everything.  
I want to stop traveling for a while,  
slow down,  
grow fields of flax in Oregon.  
I want to raise a family.  
The slowness of time  
is our greatest gift.  
It allows us to tend and grow.  
It allows us to delve, so deliciously,  
into the intricacies of the ecstatic  
rapid spinning of spheres.

To watch the sunset.  
To hug,  
to shout,  
make love slowly,  
make dinner  
with the backdoor open,  
the sunlight amber over the world  
the children running  
in the blue flowered flax.

Albert and I watch the sailboats  
and seagulls.  
"Have I ever told you how I love birds,  
how they fly," I ask.



“A thousand times,” he whispers.  
I know what his answer will be, but I ask him,  
“Which do you like more water or chocolate?”  
“Water,” he says, “because it is so pure.”  
I tell him that I like chocolate more,  
because it is so rich,  
so sensual.  
This is the tension that holds us  
together for eternity.

I hold him tighter.  
“Don’t choke me,” he says.  
“I would never hurt you,” I tell him.  
“One time,  
you took an arrow,  
and shot me in the throat,” he says smiling,  
“That’s how,  
and why,  
this whole wondrous journey is happening.”  
“Albert Einstein!” I say placing my fists  
on my hips, “Are you the All of It?”  
He turns to look at me,  
eyes wet with the original waters,  
glistening with oceanic love.  
“Yes,” he says,  
“And so are you, my Beloved.  
But you are Artemis,  
you must always be forgetting,  
always returning as a virgin.”  
I hold his beautiful handsome face in my hands,  
breathe in his sweet fragrance  
and kiss him tenderly on the forehead.  
I pull back and look into his Mediterranean blue eyes.  
“What next?” I ask excitedly.  
“You’re always in a rush,” he chuckles,  
“Let’s stay here a while.”



# BECOMING A HOUSE

WRITTEN  
BY **JASON WOODWARD**

Do I regret becoming a house? Yes and no, yes and no. On the one hand I miss moving about. Not that I moved about much, I wasn't into ballroom dancing or anything, but I moved about enough. The shops. The pub. The end of the garden to top up the birds fat balls. So yeah, I do kind of miss moving about. On the other hand, I absolutely love being a big sturdy structure. A hulking great block of bricks and plaster board. It gives me tremendous inner peace. I love being hard and unyielding. I love being the immovable object.

It was the jobcentre that first suggested it. At my fortnightly job review meeting. "Are you willing to try any job?" asked my job advisor, a young woman with glasses and a lose perm.

"Of course," I said. If I didn't say that they'd have an excuse to sanction me. Best to play along and go for jobs as chimney sweeps, electrode testers and hair dressers – then try and slyly lose the job at the interview stage.

"What about working as a factory?" she continued.

"In a factory? Yes, of course. I'm willing to do factory work, warehouse work, canteen work. You name it, I'll do it."

"No, *as* a factory."

"Sorry? You mean...medical tests? You'd make my body into a bacteria factory? Testing new kinds of aspirin and whatnot?"

"No, you'd *become* an actual factory. Bricks and mortar. We're piloting a new transmogrification scheme that transforms people into dwellings. Doesn't have to be a factory – could be a lighthouse or bike shed."

I said yes. I mean I didn't think it'd actually happen – I was unemployed, not clinically insane – and I carried on believing it wouldn't actually happen right up until it actually happened, and I was turned into a house. I won't bore you with the details of transmogrification, but it essentially involves a lot of injections, some hard-core chiropractory and a weird prodding device that looks a bit like a giant fizzing pipette.

So suddenly I'm a detached three bedroom house on Candleberry Lane. And within a week of the transmutation I had a young professional couple living in me. They work in the city and commute in every day.

What's fascinating is that they're like me. Or rather, the exact opposite. You see they used to be objects, and now they're human. Which I only realised during a particularly heated argument between them. "You want to go back to being a shed?" raged Ted, the man.

"Of course not!" shouted his partner, Lisa.

"Because *this* was the Master Plan! What we've been working towards for years."

"I know," sighed Lisa.

It took listening in on a lot more of Ted and Lisa's conversations, but I slowly learnt about the Master Plan. The Inanimate had been plotting for years to change the status quo. They had watched us jealously for centuries, angry that they were paralysed and stiff, little better than statues (some *were* statues), while animals and man squandered their mobility on wars and hate and pettiness and Pornhub.

It took an age, literally an age, but eventually a mildly psychic microscope managed to take control of a scientist's mind. Said scientist developed a revolutionary matter transmogrification machine. And with it a plan was hatched in which the Inanimate would take over the world. Brick by brick and chair by chair, they would cajole and coax humans into turning into things. Schemes for the unemployed. Game shows. Makeovers. New age relaxation therapies. All designed to persuade man to give up his manness and become a thing. Allowing the inert to step out of the shadows and fill the roles humans had left behind.

And they've done it. The current Prime Minister – used to be a bollard. The judges on *Strictly* – four manhole covers, two bookcases and a pier. The Governor of the Bank of England – a two pound coin. They replaced everyone, and now the world is run by ex Sony Walkmans, wastepaper bins, mouse mats, biros, Argos catalogues, defunct kitchen sinks, rusty spanners, whips, posters of tennis players scratching their bums, cat food tins, slippers, fuses and a surprisingly large number of skips.

And we're stuck. The humans are now the inanimate. Watching from the sidelines. Watching our replacements make pretty much all the same mistakes we did. War. Hate. Pettiness. Pornhub... Do I miss it? Yes and no, yes and no.

THE END





# ROMANCING THIS INTERNATIONAL BOY

WRITTEN  
BY **JOANNA GEORGE**

From across the globe, you embrace me,  
in a dream.  
And for a moment,  
I feel your presence tearing my skin,  
oozing shattered colours of bangle shards.  
Decorating the marble floor, devoid of a spot.  
there, you become the questions to all my answers;  
just like mentalists performing,  
who knows well ahead, what I might ask.  
And I fear, given time, I might write you a love poem  
Travel the moon, across the seas to reach your sands,  
and bend my knee, “Be it a moment or more,  
Let me know the alchemy of belonging,  
as these cultures from across the worlds, blend together,  
like the perfect ocean floor crust, withstanding every eruptions of volcano,  
and yet cradling an entire ocean to its breast.  
Let me discover that paradise of joy existing within you,  
while shining through that cracks and breaks of your tectonic pasts.  
Let me love a poet like you, with a kiss of the pen!”  
Ten thousand miles away from you, my fingertips ache,  
To touch the poetry you weave, from your solid mind.  
Uprooting every rational seeds of thought in me,  
I keep on romancing this international boy.

# 24TH MAY

WRITTEN  
BY **JOANNA GEORGE**

The softness of my skin you traced your fingers over  
slicks down, between my legs to the closed coarse holy grail,  
trickling down my thighs like sins  
dripping from the corners of a confession booth.  
They drop with my odor diffusing,  
like the kohl that smudged to form a layer beneath my eyes  
with few drops of tears still sticking,  
wailing your name in tongues, as possessed by the spirit of some prayer house music.

# THE ROLLER COASTER RIDE

WRITTEN  
BY **JOANNA GEORGE**

Two heart patients on a roller coaster ride,  
and their hearts tied at the end of a string,  
the frail string of a matrimonial sacrament of the faith.  
Like a balloon held high above their heads, tailing them  
they held to it so strongly, so firmly  
their hearts at the edge of that string,  
ready to take flight any moment  
ready to do that ultimate jump of fear, at any moment of a slight blink, and cry,  
when the string might slip like water, like sand,  
through the slight gaps of the fingers,  
drifting their hearts away, in the path of the blowing winds.  
Yet, in the course of the ride, it flutters...  
trembling in the fleeting wind changing its path  
the hearts, the balloons, much above their heads  
fluttering, trembling, trying to break free from that hold  
from that firm hold of fear, it sways in the ocean ranges of a cyclone.  
And maybe when they get down, they will notice the fleeting balloon,  
how from their huge palms, it ruptured free unnoticed.  
How the bruises were made, by holding that string too long  
and how two heart patients went on a roller coaster ride and called it a marriage.









# THE PERSISTENCE OF MEMORY

WRITTEN  
BY

CAITLIN CACCIATORE

The clocks have all stopped  
At a time of great peril.  
The church bells are about to ring,  
The children's father is due home any minute, now,  
The dog is caught in a moment of bewilderment  
At the behavior of the cat,  
Starring as the only one in the entire scene  
Who knows what is actually going on.  
Cat-logic is strange like that.  
It freely accepts  
The stopped clocks,  
The baffled mutt, even  
The perpetual lateness of the man,  
Who does not realize his wife  
Is always looking at her watch,  
Which she, in turn, does not realize has stopped  
Cold – cold as the dinner she had prepared an hour prior,  
Cold as the snow that has stopped falling outside the window,  
Cold as the moon, which drifts in a state of perpetual lamentation,  
And the embers of their love, though diligently stoked,  
Have long since gone to ash,  
Though they still pretend for the sake of the children,  
The children who are now and forever  
Chasing each other around the lawn,  
The grass of which has stopped growing,  
Though the sun still shines,  
Distant, and glad for it,  
Looking down at the melting clocks,  
And the barren world,  
Onto which a vandal has painted  
A woman and her children and the man who stole her heart  
In her youth, and the snow and the dinner and the dog and the cat  
And the stopped watch.  
All, however, is not lost.  
If you look closely enough,  
You'll find that the woman's watch,  
Unlike the others in the scene,  
Is a minute fast.  
That is world and time enough  
For her.

# SONG OF THE STRAWBERRY MOON

WRITTEN  
BY

CAITLIN CACCIATORE

I had to write,  
if only to sing of the moon and it's coyness,  
the air perfumed with seasonal fruits and late-blooming flowers;  
the humid caress of the night,  
the promise of an oncoming storm,  
the late-night flights and the sounds of the waking world  
preparing itself for slumber.

night has fallen like a raven shot from the sky,  
and the hunter's aim was never truer;  
one arrow was launched, and the second split its predecessor  
straight down the middle – never has the night air smelt so sweet,  
nor the fruits of my labors tasted so divine;  
never has this blossoming feeling within me felt so near or so present,  
a low-hanging fruit that ripens by the hour,  
sun-warm and so sweet,  
lotus petals parting at the promise of rain,  
cherry blossom snow setting May alight with a frenzy  
of color and chaos.

anything feels possible, and temptation calls from every corner of the earth,  
from the late-night train to the red-eye flights  
to the distant long ships dotting the horizon like little fires,  
each full of people living a separate and inherently unequal life;  
I am grounded; they adrift –  
but we sing of the same moon,  
and the same night,  
and the same chill in the air that promises rain and thunder,  
the same ozone, the same calm before the storm –  
the same world, and the same stars, and though the years may roll by  
like a ticker-tape flickering into and out of existence,  
like a black-and-white movie where the credits are rolling even before it properly begins,  
flaring in and out of life like a conflagration while the stars remain,  
bright and steadfast on a scale that makes a mockery of the small,  
sad matches which look up for just a moment and are blinded;  
who are struck by life and its beauty  
and who burn, burn, burn until there is no more burning left in them,  
until they join the legions of sacred dead,

the stars and the people and the creatures who lived and breathed  
and loved and lost and died before;  
the ones who sung of different moons, and different nights –  
distant lands, and foreign times –  
and stars which were never fixed in their orbits,  
and their slow, mountainous progress as they spin the truth across our skies,  
hurtling through space and inching through time,  
so fast we thought them eternal,  
so slow we had once believed them stationary.

I had to write,  
if only to sing of the stars I will never see,  
and their slow, infinitesimal journey through the skies,  
through the universe,  
across time and space and all manner of distance;  
they are so far they shine without blinding;  
yet so numerous I can hardly see the forest for the trees.

I had to catalogue this strange sort of sadness,  
this never-again moment,  
this one life so beautiful and so fraught,  
this ember so bright and so desperately mortal;  
this night and its raven-cloak,  
this truth that only I can tell,  
this beauty, my youth, a mere deceit –  
a slight of hand, now you see it, now you don't –  
and the coy moon and the shy stars and the cloud-covered sky,  
and the tang of far-away lightning and the fiery little ships going places I am not  
and the planes and the trains and the midnight rain and bitter,  
bitter dregs of a long-ago pain.





# FULL REFUND

WRITTEN  
BY

AER TODD

"Your site clearly states, 'If for any reason your product is unsatisfactory, you may return it within thirty days of purchase and receive a full refund.' I received the kit three days ago. I attempted to use it last night and it did not perform as advertised on your site." Donnie switched the bulky older model cordless phone onto his left shoulder.

"Well, did you use the kit as directed? We also provided resource links on our store website that go into further detail to use our kit with success. You really have to make sure you are NOT getting oxygen into that hood," the lady on the other end cheerfully explained.

"No, I did it correctly. I am very certain of this. I should have succeeded," Donnie said with frustration.

"Do you think our product was faulty?" she asked.

"Yes, I do because I'm sitting here on the phone, able to talk to you." He rubbed the bridge of his nose with his knuckle.

"Well, we will gladly refund your money, sir. Give it a day or so, and there should be an invoice sent to your listed email account with a full refund. Before you go, so we may better our relationship with our customers, and this is confidential, of course, we'd like to know what ad or ref made you choose our business" She spoke professionally enough, but he knew that this business was a small one, probably ran from a living room. She was making the effort for it to appear much larger though.

"I don't know or remember. I think I just searched 'helium suicide hood kit' online, and your site popped up on page one of the search. Honestly, when I read that you had a great return and refund policy, considering the nature of the product, that should of been a huge red flag for me in my decision to buy from your site." He hung up the phone.

He was a little pleased that at least he was getting a refund. But the failed suicide was still bothering him. Nothing ever worked out. He had opiate painkillers in his medicine cabinet, but he really liked his doctor and would hate for her to get in any sort of trouble if he took that route out. Maybe he could purchase illegal benzos off the street? No, he clearly wasn't a dainty flower weight wise and probably would just take enough to hurt himself permanently, making him some sort of human vegetable that his family would have to spoon feed for the next fifty years. He had tried to hang himself, but the rope broke, and he had a rope burn on his neck that he had to explain away at the grocery store where he worked by telling curious coworkers that he had a wild night with a pseudo dominatrix and things got fiery. Which made him even more depressed because it wasn't true, and he basically had to make up a one night stand. The guys believed him and then asked for weeks if he had seen the woman again. For a while, he told them he had not, but they kept pestering him, so after the third week he told another whopper, and the week after, another. The stories got wilder and wilder they were starting to include things like dish soap and ceiling fans. And they just ate that stuff up. He was starting to run out of ideas, so he told them one day that this imaginary woman just up and died from an infected leech bite she got from wading in a South Carolina swamp (she was adventurer as well). He didn't know if leeches resided in swamps, but nobody questioned it, and his boss let him have a Thursday off and all his married coworkers' wives sent him condolence cards with fast food gift cards. The added benefit was that he didn't have to act cheerful so much as before, and the other employees just assumed he was quiet with deep longing for his sexually deviant deceased girlfriend. But in reflection, the whole thing made him sad that he had to make all that up. He couldn't even successfully negotiate with local hookers, much less find a female companion.

However, being mate-less was not the main source for wanting to end his life. There were other reasons. Boredom, fibromyalgia, financial issues, bad back, and bad housekeeping skills were just a few. He was bored with life. He used to be interested in football, welding, bird watching, and loved watching documentaries about the Vietnam War. Football lost it sparkle first, his back interfered with welding comfortably, he had seen all the birds that frequent the Blue Ridge, and Vietnam became just another reason in the past for people to slaughter each other.

His job was incredibly void of excitement, except maybe once in a great while when someone lost their temper and quit, causing a scene of some sort. He usually just stood bagging groceries, or sometimes the manager would ask him to help in the produce section. That, at first, was interesting because the guy that normally worked in that department, Tyler, was a white suprema-

cist who believed that all Aryans were genetically engineered by visiting superior aliens from ancient history and that made them superior to other races. He would tell him this as they stocked cabbage or bananas, and although he did not agree at all with Tyler's ideology, it was at least entertaining to him in a morbid way, like when a race car crashes at the speedway or a lion turns on its trainer. He would just nod and listen, laughing inside his mind. Tyler would rant about Jewish Hollywood, often pronouncing words wrong, and Donnie would wonder how a group of people on the other side of the country could affect the life of a guy in a small North Carolina mountain town. The same thoughts often occurred to him in the produce department, and after a while Tyler's theories and beliefs started getting annoying. Not long after, though, Tyler quit working there and then a few months later got thrown in prison for selling meth for a small time neo-Nazi gang. He was not surprised.

Family life was not much better. His mother and father liked to call him several times a day to tell him twisted, misconstrued news warnings. Once he was told not to shop at the gas station less than a mile away because, "The owner uses your credit and debit card numbers to fund terrorism." The man who owned it was from India and had no ties to terrorist groups, but his parents assumed his foreign accent was enough to incriminate him. They had seen a news special about a guy in a different state who had used customers' credit card information to do so, and they came to the conclusion that all foreign gas station owners did the same. For a while, he had not cut his hair, and his father informed him he did the same about a young man he had seen on the news that grew his hair into dreadlocks and how spiders laid eggs in his hair, eating craters into his scalp. Now the man was bald, with big scarred divots on his head. Even though his logic told him that these stories were obviously exaggerated, a part of him fretted over them anyway. Was the "gay agenda" a real threat? Was there even a gay agenda? Probably not, but someone somewhere seemed to think there were liberal conspiracies everywhere, and people needed to be vigilant. And sometimes he felt afraid just because people said he needed to be.

Thinking about the "gay agenda" after his phone call, he thought of Gabby Summey, his best friend in high school. She was a lanky, boyish girl, with hay-bale-colored, chin-length hair that looked like she had cut it herself with a dull disposable razor. She may have; he didn't know for sure, but she would of done something like that. He remembered that he had gone to prom with her, and that night she told him she was a lesbian. It wasn't a shocking thing or surprising. He kind of hoped she wasn't, though. He wasn't in love with her, but he thought since they both liked the same football team and television shows, maybe something could happen between them. He shrugged off her confession, and they went to the local Denny's. She then proclaimed her secret love she had for their high school cheerleading captain, and that was much more surprising to him because he thought that specific girl to be a vain moron, a common one at that. In actuality, for some unknown reason, he was disappointed. Some part of him assumed lesbians had naturally better taste in women. Obviously, not always.

It wasn't long after that night Gabby moved away, wanting to go somewhere she felt was more accepting of her. She moved to New Orleans, and he lost touch with her. He missed her greatly at times. She made him laugh at her hilarious observations of the human condition. She would have found Tyler, the white supremacist, idiotic but would of thought his idiocy and later drug arrest humorous. If she knew about Donnie's fabrication concerning the girlfriend, not only would she have laughed, she would of helped him in the conspiracy--with great pleasure. He had other friends at different times, but none melded so perfectly with his personality as she had. Sometimes he felt downright lovesick over her, but a strange version of it, because the romantic aspect was not there. He had thought a lot about her the last few days, and the thought occurred to him that he remembered her old email address. Would it still be a viable address? If it was, what would she think of him spontaneously writing her after all these years? Seven years is a long time in this modern age. After mulling it over and over again in his mind, he sat down at his computer chair. He typed out several versions, each making him feel awkward and not together at all. Finally, he wrote a short greeting asking her how she was and hit send. He regretted it immediately and hoped her email address was dead or unused. He then tried playing an online game where he shot little cartoon rats out of cannons. It seemed as pointless as living at that moment. He also tried watching pornography, and besides a warning message flashing in red on his screen stating his PC was in danger of catching a virus, nothing interesting happened. It was all so unappealing. However, a part of him found it amusing that his computer could, in a sense, catch a virtual STD from a sex-based website.

The next day, he went to work as usual. It was uneventful and boring. During the dead quiet moments, he thought about the possibility of an afterlife. He felt there was a strong case for reincarnation, but this did not comfort him. The notion of him being born into the same type of life, the same world, and the same swirl of unoriginal people, was not attractive to him. He doubted there was a pearly white heaven, and if there was, he was sure to have gate trouble once he got there. Though, the thought of the



devil actually being a big, red, naked monster man with a forked tail and a pitchfork made him smile to himself. His best hope in death would be that he gradually became part of the soil upon the earth, and maybe he could somehow enrich the grasses above him.

When he went home, he cooked himself some ramen noodles and sat down in front of the desktop. He checked into a few accounts he had on some social media sites and watched a video of a cat dressed as a bumblebee playing a piano, puppeted gently by its owner to do so. He started searching online for household items which one could effectively kill themselves with. Out of habit, he opened another tab to check his email. He was hoping there was a printable coupon for a frozen pizza or some other cheap easy food in his inbox. There was not. However, at the top of his new messages was a response from Gabby. It read:

Hey,

Donnie? OMG Donnie!!!! What the hell have you been up to? I am really happy to hear from you. You have been on my mind a lot lately. It's good timing actually, because I have to come back up that way soon. I was going to do it next month, but since I got fired recently from the rest home I was working at, I might as well come on up. Do you know anywhere I can stay for cheap or free (that's a hint Donnie : D ). Do you remember my old Aunt Cheryl, the one with the eye that wanders really bad, the fatter she got, the further it looked askew, like it was trying to escape? And she told everyone that the angel Michael talked to her in the bathroom mirror telling her that no man was Christian enough to marry her and so she would remain single, but we all knew it was because no one wanted to marry her? You remember her right? I'm sure you do. ANYWAY, I used her attic to store all my books and magazines before I left for New Orleans, and just last week, the old bat decided to get nosey and look through my stuff.... she found my collection of lesbian erotica. After Jenna (Remember that bimbo? I bet you do) called ranting that if I didn't come and get my "Sodom and Gomorrah lifestyle literature", I would surely send her mother to an early grave. I would have just asked them to toss the stuff in a close by dumpster, but I have a nice amount of old Pokémon cards in one of the boxes, and I can resell those online. I also wanted to come up and visit the area again, for shits and giggles. Maybe stroll around the old haunts, down memory lane, like when we went down Old Toll Road, and those rednecks burned that cross in the drag queen's yard, but they hadn't counted on him being an ex-marine with a shotgun? That was amazing! Is his yard still charred up?

I know I rambled, but I am really happy to hear from you. Please, PLEASE, write me back and let me know if we can meet up or something.

Probably the bestest friend you still have,

Gabby <3

He had almost forgotten how talkative, or perhaps the better word would be conversational, she could be. Yes, he remembered her cousin Jenna, and yes, she was indeed a bimbo with a religious bent. He remembered everything she had written of... and more. He only allowed himself a mere few seconds of hesitation before emailing back and inviting her to come stay on his sofa. He explained that he didn't have much more to offer other than some very cheap food and his company. He was still online when she wrote him back to tell him that in two weeks time, she would arrive at the Greyhound bus station across town.

For two weeks, he was in a strange emotional limbo. At times he came close to feeling excitement over Gabby's visit. Other times, he was still thinking about the peace death could bring him. Time itself seemed to bounce around as it pleased as well. Some moments he felt like it would be forever before she arrived, then it would seem time had sped up as soon as he sent that first message. He hadn't seen her in seven years, and within a flash she was on her way back to him, like they had said their good-byes only weeks before. He busied himself with cleaning his small apartment, telling himself that he was wasting his time doing so because if she was the same girl as years before, there would be clothes and books strung about the place within hours.

Her bus was late by two long hours. Finally, it came--with Gabby pulling a white-netted laundry bag overly full of her possessions. She wore a form-fitting satin vest of shimmering silver and gray pinstripe pants. Her hair was the same, only a little shorter. Her face was fuller, but she was still gangly, and she did not have the flattering curves preferred by most people for her gender. The first word that came to his mind concerning her physical appearance, was "dashing", but he could never utter that out loud because she would be sure to laugh in his face. He approached her, feeling timid-shy by a girl that he not only had known for years but that was half his size. He only had to advance a few steps towards. She covered the rest of the distance between them in a sprint and then a glee filled hug. It was all so surreal to him.

She talked and talked on the way back to his home and even more when they arrived at the apartment. She told him about her recent ex-girlfriend who had to end their relationship because the woman's husband became aware of their special friendship. He wasn't too surprised she would get herself into a dramatic situation such as that one because she was not capable of having impulse control whatsoever. She asked him about his love life, and he informed her that he had none to show. She tried to dig some more, thinking he was holding back something more secretive regarding his past relationships. He gave in and told her, in an embarrassed tone with eyes downcast, about the imaginary sado-masochistic girlfriend, her death, and his coworkers reaction. She called him a "lying bastard" and commenced to laugh so hard she could barely catch her breath. If anyone else had reacted that way to his uncomfortable tale, he would have gotten angry and punched a face--any face--but he knew her well enough to know she was not judging him negatively. He had expected her to find it funny. She made some other disparaging remarks, in good humor, and then made a sudden pause. Her face took on a concerned expression, and she reached her hand out to his as they sat on the sofa.

"You really tried to hang yourself? Why?" she asked. Now she seemed more curious than concerned. He wished he hadn't told her the story or at least omitted the rope burn part. He sighed and resigned himself to the awkward conversation that would follow. "Yes. Look--life is boring, tedious, and pointless for me. Again, I want to point out the boredom I experience every waking moment. I am sure you have a very strong opinion on suicide. Everyone does, usually. But I would appreciate it if maybe you didn't go on about it or try to drive your opinion home with me." He looked her in the eye as he said this and noticed that she didn't seem offended or upset with his words. It was her turn to sigh.

"I don't really have a strong opinion on it at all, really. I believe you should do whatever you want with your body, it is your property. It's the only thing a human can entirely own. That and your own life. I support terminally ill people that want to end their lives peacefully through suicide. I would like to say, though, before someone makes that decision, that if you are healthy and aren't living in some sort of living hell, you should really think long and hard before making a decision when you're being a jackass. Your life is not that hard. It's not wonderful, I'll give you that." She had started her statement with an air of neutrality, but emotion slipped through toward the end. Her brow was furrowed and her jaw set hard, giving her the appearance of a stubborn cavewoman. This made him grin. She may have thought she did not have a strong opinion on the topic; he knew better..

"Yeah...I agree with you, I guess. I still want to die most of the time, though. I mean, I do see your point. I really do, but even though I see your logic, understand it, that does not take away the urge I have. I know it's not rational. I try to deal with the issues I face. I read and try to find things to cure this unending boredom. Nothing helps, Gabby. Nothing. I try to socialize occasionally, and it makes it worse. People are so predictable, and they are so monotonous in nature. I realize this makes me the jerk, not them. When I can't stand them, I'm the asshole, but I'm still a bored asshole. I have fibromyalgia, too, which I could possibly tolerate if life wasn't so damn dull. So I ache in body and mind. " He had never told anyone that. He had barely acknowledged those words to himself before. She wasn't laughing or amused, which was rare from his past experiences with her. Usually, when a subject was serious, she found a way to be entertained or turn it into some sort of farce for her own amusement. For some reason, her not doing so secretly humored him. Her face took on a pained expression.

"Do you hurt a lot with the fibro? Is a doctor prescribing you something for it?" she asked, almost seeming in some sort of hurry. He cleared his throat and nodded.

"Yeah, I have to take a mild antidepressant because there is some belief out there that depression has something to do with it. It seems they make my moods worse, but I keep taking it. I feel sore a lot, and it feels like the aches someone would have with a bad flu, if you had that flu permanently. For bad days, I have some strong painkillers, some opioids, hydro...hydro something ten. I take it and go to bed because the doctor said it would make me tired." He couldn't remember the name of the pills, but Gab-

by brightened with mention and attempted pronunciation of them. She patted his hand gently, reminding him of a sympathetic nurse.

She flashed him a sweet smile. "Where do you keep the drugs, Donnie?" she asked with the same sweet smile and gentle patting of his hand. He didn't know where she was going with this.

"In my bathroom beneath the sink. I don't have a medicine cabinet," he said, knowing his face showed slight confusion. She smiled again and said, "Okay," in an almost-motherly tone. She then made her way into his bathroom and came back with his large bottle of pain pills. She sat back down next to him and opened the bottle getting out about seven of the large yellow pills.

"I am gonna to take four. My ass and back hurt from the bus ride, and you're gonna take three of this suckers. If you have any over the counter nausea meds, that would be good because these can make your stomach upset. Then we are going to drink those two beers I saw in your fridge. Get that look off your face, Donnie you look like evangelical preacher that's walked into a Pride parade " She held out her hand with the pills to him, and even though the directions on the prescription said to only take one every four hours, he took all three from her. He downed them with the beer she had brought over after she handed him the pills. He asked her if he could die from the amount he ingested and she replied, "Probably not," Which made him chuckle, and she giggled in return. She then searched under the bathroom sink again to find anti-nausea pills, marketed for motion sickness prevention, and found a blister pack of them that proved a minor annoyance in opening. He took those as well, and they settled on the sofa, watching a reality show about a girl that was close to having a nervous breakdown because it was really hard being rich and beautiful.

Within an hour, he was feeling the effects of the medication. Lights became dimmer and there was almost a twinkle to them. He felt he was wrapped in a warm, loving blanket. It was unbelievably comfortable and pleasant. Gabby was obviously feeling it as well..She was affectionate and even laid her head in his lap as they watched television. He stroked her hair, and a rush of positive emotions flooded through him. Love. Happiness. Stimulation. Interest. Loved in return. He felt relieved that he had gone ahead and emailed her. He also felt uncharacteristically chatty. Fortunately, so did she. They talked long into the night, sharing stories of their time apart and expressing their deepest ponderings about life. After a while, she told him she had something important to ask him, and it worried him because she seemed a little hesitant to do so. He encouraged her to go on.

"I know I said I was coming back home because of my Aunt Cheryl and the whole drama with my porn literature. And that's true. Mostly.... I don't want to go back to New Orleans. It's not fun there anymore, and I have no one there now that I'm single again. I was so happy when you wrote. I had wanted to contact you for about six months now, but I thought you had moved on with your life and had no interest in speaking again. Look, I am no domestic goddess, and I sure as hell am no neat freak, can't give you what you want in a woman, but I know my way around a microwave, and I have been known to do laundry a time or two. I can also get a job. What I am getting at...what I'm trying to ask...is... can I stay here with you?" She cringed as she asked him and sat up, averting her eyes. He was again amused, this time with her discomfort. He stared at her, and she seemed to squirm within herself, although she sat still outwardly."Wow, Gabby, you're really selling this idea well aren't you? Of course you can. You know you can, and you shouldn't feel that it is a big deal to even ask. I wish you would've just contacted me when you first needed to. You've never been shy when it came to me, and you shouldn't be ever. I think it might be nice to have you hanging around anyway," he said and then turned to light a cigarette. She waited until he had lit it and then gave him a tight hug. She put her head on his shoulder and they sat embraced.

"You're not really going to kill yourself, are you?" she said quietly into his ear. His large hand stroked the back of her head as it laid against his shoulder. She raised her face up to look into his. He smiled broadly and waited a moment while he thought of a response. The medication, long travel, and late hours were making her eyes close slowly. Sleep was fast coming upon her, although she was weakly fighting it.

"Not today Not anytime soon" he answered as the sounds of her slumber became audible. He meant it too.



# STELLAR

WRITTEN  
BY **SCOTT JOHNSON**

Far deep in interstellar space, billions of stars, perfectly unmoving, dot the infinite void; a peaceful omnipotence created from chaos. Among the two-hundred billion points of light was an insignificant speck suspended in the vacuum travelling at an abysmal forty-nine million kilometers per hour.

That speck was a stolen Confederacy ship; an efficient vessel designed for its resilience—although, it was fast enough to travel from the earth to the sun in twenty-four hours, it had been damaged. While it was being commandeered, a lucky shot pierced the hull and lodged itself inside the fusion reactor creating a small leak. But the thief was in no real danger, as the radiation was only leaking to the outside. However, with the ship's main energy source slowly exuding power, the interior temperature of the ship plummeted to a blistering  $-6\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

In the last year, the ship had been in hot pursuit of the CFS Praetoria (a capital flagship of the Confederation)—It's new pilot had been following the flagship since it left Earth but lost all trace of it somewhere inside the Orion Spur. —Only a few months ago, was that trail rediscovered. By himself, all while hurtling millions of kilometers through an endless void, he was starting to lose his mind. A tired Kieran Manes sings to himself in melodic off-key-tone trying not to freeze to death in the damaged ship. "I am the reaper... here with my cleaver... chop up your sister... eat her for dinner..."

He was lounging in the pilot's chair frozen in a state of self-meditation—a kind of mental calm he forces his mind while slipping into a passive existence. It was only recently that he had fully embraced the power of this obliviousness. Kieran often ad-libbed tunes to himself while ignoring his surroundings—It was so cold in the cabin that a sheen of ice covered every surface—*They say freezing to death is peaceful. You just kind of go to sleep.*

Directly in front of him, was a control panel littered with dozens of blinking lights. He didn't understand the complex array of buttons and switches and mostly used it as a foot-rest. Along the control panel, in the center, was the Heads-Up Display. Acting as a virtual computer, it displayed useful data and information that included: the ship's vector, relative position, and current speed. It also warned him of any system malfunctions or incoming threats with a sharp siren. The HUD had been alerting him of a critical system malfunction for the last few days. But because the emphatic alarm took him out of his meditations, he muted it. Now, he stares at the silent flashes, hypnotizing him into lethargy.

*What's this?* Kieran snapped out of his stupor. The navigation system of his HUD was blinking, notifying him that he had entered the edge of a star system; and his current destination. *YES!* "I knew you could do it baby, I never doubted you one minute." He said, rubbing the hull of the cockpit, congratulating the ship. Kieran often took to talking to his ship, treating it like if it were a person to combat the loneliness—he had even given it a name, *Astra*. "How much further now?" The ship didn't respond. "Hey, don't be that way." He unfolded his arm and toggled through different screens. "Three AU?" *Three astronomical units to go.* He would be touching down in no more than nine hours.

He removed the heavy jacket he was using as a blanket and draped it over his shoulders. As he got up and stretched, his muscles were in rigor, his joints were made of lead, and his ass was a throng of ants

scurrying around his nerves, sending jolts of pain to his spine. “Mmph!” *That’s better. Now, for some goddamn coffee.* He walked through his cabin, past the captain’s quarters, across from the docking bay door, and adjacent to the engine room, to a large opened area that housed the coffee maker.

Kieran placed an empty thermos underneath the dispenser and took a tube of nutrient paste from a metal cabinet. DING! His coffee was done. When he went to grab it, the ship rumbled and the dying lights inside the ship flickered—they never recovered. “Whoa...Astra!” *What the fuck was that?* Feeling that it may have been an anomaly or a fluctuation of electricity, Kieran grabbed his coffee and took a testing sip before the ship rumbled again, this time more violently. Hot coffee spilled down his neck and through his beard. “SHIT!” He waited a few seconds until the emergency back-up lights turned on. “Astra! What the hell is going on!?” He went back to the cockpit and saw the HUD flashing red. *Shit... Peacekeepers!* “You couldn’t have warned me, Astra!?”—he didn’t mean to take it out on her.

Outside, two angular, metallic-white ships were firing at him. Apparently, since he muted the entire ship, he didn’t receive the multiple hailing signals or the warning that his ship was going to be fired upon. *Fucking drones.* “You’d think they’d give me a damned chance to respond. Screw me I guess for wanting to get some goddamn COFFEE...!” He yelled at the drones as if they could hear him; they only kept firing. Kieran tried to communicate with them, but they ignored him, already deep into the lines of coding inside their attack protocol. “Son of a bitch!” The HUD’s screen that monitored damage, was having an epileptic seizure. Every time the ship rumbled from the drone’s assault, the screen would shake violently as the ship’s electromagnetic shield strength dropped rapidly. Ninety-five percent, eighty-three percent, seventy-four percent and falling.

Kieran hated space travel and never learned how to properly operate a spaceship. He didn’t know what to do; his chest tightened as every wall began to fall in on him. “Think...think.” *If they keep firing, I’m a dead man. If I fire back, the fusion core will overload, it’ll blow up, and I will die.* “Think damnit, think!” *If I try to outrun them, they’ll hit the propulsion engines, they’ll blow up and I’ll die.* “SHIT!” Kieran sprinted through the cabin, bracing himself against the walls as he dashed toward the engine room, trying not to fall when the ship jolted.

The focal point of the engine room was the massive fusion reactor—it was hard not to notice it when you entered; as it took up most of the available space. However, Kieran wasn’t looking for the reactor itself, he was looking for a control panel; anything he could find. *There!* He spotted a panel that said **DANGER: DO NOT TAMPER** written in aggressive letters. He opened it and saw a hive of wires and transistors. *Maybe I can hotwire the current and force the electromagnetic field to fry them? If there’s any left...* He saw worn-out labels; each word was equally perplexing: POLARITY-FLUX, POLARITY-PERMEABILITY, CAPACITANCE-MAIN, REACTANCE-PHASE SHIFT. *What the hell do that mean?*

Gripped by uncertainty at his own ineptitude, Kieran made a split-decision; he rewired, cross-wired, and splint wired. A spark came from one of the new connections and forced him back. *Shit... please do something?* “DO SOMETHING!” He screamed, banging on the panel. The reactor thrummed in response. All light in the ship vanished; the only thing visible was the glow from the nuclear engine. “Oh no. No, no, no...” *Well, I’m done for. I’m sorry Astra.* Kieran placed his forehead on the wall, defeated. “It’s over.” The emergency lights came back on. He was speechless; his mind was blank; he patiently waited for something to happen. The reactor pulsed; The protective electromagnetic shield, that the reactor generated, flared outward momentarily then collapsed. The drones pursuing the *Astra* started to

wobble. The current that propelled the ship, reversed; creating a magnet. Both Peacekeepers tried to correct their flight, but the electromagnetic force proved too strong. As the magnetic-field caught hold of the drones, Kieran ran to the HUD to see what was happening. But before he could reach the cockpit, both drones smashed into the ship. The impact forced the reactor to shut off and slammed Kieran against a wall; the magnetic-field eventually subsided—Both unconscious, Kieran and *Astra* drift peacefully toward a blinding young star.







# THOUGHTS AT THE END OF A MUCH-TOO-LONG SHIFT

WRITTEN  
BY **HANNAH SEO**

1

I read on the stall of an airport bathroom  
that nothing is ever original. My  
thoughts  
pennies pressed out of  
one of those gaudy

souvenir booths: worth  
neither the medium with which they were  
crafted  
nor the energy  
used to carry them to their final

resting place. Pockets  
heavy but mind light, I concede to nap  
on the grass by a parking lot and call  
it

rest. You would think with all my fancy  
education  
that I would understand biol-ogy or psych  
-ology or the  
-ologies of what it means to be  
a stalk of wheat, or a forsaken water  
-bottle  
in a landfill. Instead my synapses fire

on pre-set conditions that die  
with a nap, or two (or one) glasses  
of whisky. At the ripe old  
age of ripped tennis shoes and crumpled  
coffee

receipts even I can understand  
that what grows up must lie down.

2

Tying your hair back is always an adventure  
because you never expect

when the elastic snaps  
back to whip your wrists which  
is kind of a messed-up  
life lesson. Every day is a practice

of decisions and revisions and  
too many fatalities. *Memento mori*, and god  
bless us every  
one.

3

In a bowl of alphabet soup I searched  
for a sign – and I saw  
myself in the foreboding “M E”, though  
the “E” was  
upside-down and possibly  
part of some  
less telling configura-  
tion.

It is surprisingly difficult  
to differentiate the profound from  
all this  
utter  
nonsense.

4

In second grade I pinky  
promised my loyalty to a boy with a long  
pale  
face who  
I am convinced was the grim reaper.

5

I tried to learn tidying up from a book  
passive-aggressively gifted to me by  
someone who is never around.  
Unfortunately, I can never tell which  
thoughts

bring me joy and so never know  
which  
to throw away. The soup marks on  
my jeans  
are a neo-postmodern

Rorschach test and now all I can  
think about is why Tide pens never  
work  
the way they say they will. I drop a  
handful of  
change into a tip jar and pray  
that my stains are impermanent.

# CECI UN AVEU.....[CECI N'EST PAS UNE POÈME]

WRITTEN  
BY **HANNAH SEO**

Mermaid, he calls me – maiden who'd lift her  
skirts  
(flash a slick-scaled tail), creature  
who would lure with pearly teeth and slender  
arms (and use them to  
show him every sunken wreckage), fish  
who would show  
him the world he ignores and cuff him  
to the scene, drown his eyes wide and  
drinking.  
Mermaid he teases    Mermaid he disdains  
Mermaid he scoffs    Mermaid he wants.

I look in the mirror more often than I'd like – more often  
than is proper. My irises tell their truth as best they can,

though each mirror promises me the blue of the sky  
and the salt distilled in the sand. And still everything

hides another thing, the allness of it escapes me, every  
thing bends inwards, spiraling into itself. Matter burrows

through a never-ceasing plea for shelter and each layer  
peeled is merely another right answer to all the wrong

questions. Pull out every eyelash for just one more  
wish, throw an egg out the window to set the bird free.

Mermaid, perhaps I am, though  
no maiden  
would share my name. Wonder  
of Nature – surprise! – I am an  
Inverse-Mermaid,  
Proto-Mermaid, made-of-gills-  
and-fins-and-  
human- legs-mermaid.  
See, I can be both exactly what  
you asked for  
and not at all what you desired.  
Anti-Mermaid, Un-Mermaid.

Later I'll drift away with undertow,  
the taste of iron still hooked in my cheeks.



# A TIDEPOOL NEVER STOPS TO REST

WRITTEN  
BY **HANNAH SEO**

The water tells me to partake in its meditation, tells me we are of kindred salt  
*daughter, she croons, even the periwinkle snails add to the eddies*  
And I take that as an invitation  
to make my nest beside the mollusks

I laugh at the sea and its repetition  
*evening tide, I ask, does not the beach*  
*tire of the clockwork – its metronome master?*  
She falls to kiss my toes in response

Inside a rock pool so many strangers preen themselves for my sole viewing  
*admire our multiplicity, our closeness – how could you ever know us all*  
And I am amazed at the failings of our own biology

I long to take on the algae's form and give myself to brine  
*lady, clicks the beach crab, where does it come from, this loudness you carry?*  
Later in the bath I'll listen while my fingers prune,  
and taste salinity on my skin.

# IN A WORLD WHERE ENTROPY IS REVERSED

WRITTEN  
BY **HANNAH SEO**

the dust in your apartment settles in neat piles at the corner of the room

you ask for warm water, which eventually turns to ice

you toss the leaves of your term paper into the air just for them to land in a neat stack on your editor's desk, sheets crisper, ink fresher, grammar impeccable, deadline rewound

the exodus of clothes from the dryer is a celebration of  
every pair of jeans resized and every pair of socks reunited

the wind smoothenes pock-marks and the sun restores color to the walls of every abandoned building

after every, yes – multiple, broken bone, tendons reconstruct ever-stronger tissues and purge every imperfection from your marrow

you fling yourself off the balcony just to land more whole than before

elderly synapses are the strongest; in old age, neural connections cling to the membranes of ever lissom hippocampi and limber limbic systems. all are subject to relentlessly reliving every moment; every instance preserved far too well.

as gravity compounds, the universe gets slowly smaller and smaller. the inevitability of compaction has made claustrophobes of us all.



# WHEN I SEE ALL I'VE NEVER BEEN

WRITTEN  
BY

**HANNAH SEO**

stern man in white coat tells me I have been coddling my young  
that my porcelain children have turned rotten and sickly under my care  
they are corrupt he informs me they are agents who would seek to  
pollute life's stream he says & so my pearls are expelled from me as  
the body rejects the body as we release what is no longer ours to keep  
I ask the fairy queen if it was she who had made an ass of me or  
if that too was self-inflicted I am maple drained of sweetness whittled  
to a point I am a chamois of the carpathians drilling you dead in  
the eye I am the baron sitting so pleasantly in line for the throne  
asking in fog what is a decision & fast asleep what is a child

# IN DYING FIELDS

WRITTEN  
BY **HANNAH SEO**

The hours have petrified  
a little more, have  
forgotten to announce  
themselves. And I,

against all odds, miss  
the dirt in the wind  
and wonder why we  
bother debating

the ethics of hospitality.  
I celebrate the  
harvest, pistachio shells

between my teeth – the  
act of the break is a  
symptom of readiness  
(how a thing matured  
can't help but split

open). I cannot afford  
the luxury of malice,  
though it might be all I  
take. Isn't it frightening,

to mistake debt for  
love, to have it scrape at  
your phantom pride? The

smoke never stopped  
licking our faces, blurring  
the edges of things –  
cruelties prefer to stay

gloved and groomed; the  
scarecrow got its name as  
a derivation of its  
purpose.



# REDACTIONS

WRITTEN  
BY

HANNAH SEO

██████ tired █████

████ iron █████ beetles

██ embrace █████ Most

of us █ ( █████

██████ dragonflies, █ )

████ a █ cult of █████

████████ conspiracy believers

████ commit █ A █

natural force █████

████ & █████

██████ We all swim █

██ in █ alternate █████

████████ subtitles. █

# AWAY, THERE IS ANOTHER PLOT

WRITTEN  
BY **HANNAH SEO**

When I pick up my weekly pack of Trident from the corner store,  
the streets sink into themselves  
and I dodge the debris falling from the crumbling  
high-rises. On the bus ride I bop my head to

music from my over-ear headphones, draw a forlorn  
stick-man into the  
fog of my heavy breath – overhead jets trace a  
memo to me in the clouds, my eyes turn yellow

in the sun. There are numbers on my watch implying  
code, implying communication, implying  
meaning. My sister calls  
and talks about the snow in her driveway – I cry for the quiet

to go away. I find myself at a friend's house party  
where I stay in the corner until I remember I am not really  
there (what relief!), which is my cue to banter away to my  
fictional-self's content. The music tells me I am

young and indestructible, so I follow the stage directions –  
the script of fleeting loves and  
pounding fear and friendships forged in the trenches.  
I drive home to sleep – hand over my dreams to the dark.



# (EINSTEIN & ROSEN, 1935)

WRITTEN  
BY **GREGORY BURTON**

Looking around the office, it took Del a minute to realize what was making him feel so off. The décor was the problem here. The vaguely oppressive ferns that lined the walls, the scattered magazines, even the faux-leather chair in which he leaned miserably against the aggressively beige wall. All of it was blow-for-blow identical to the furnishings that lined the interior of his own office. In retrospect, though, Del wasn't sure he should have expected exclusive or unique wares when ordering from *Clinically Arranged* magazine. Even if this realization was all that this trip produced, it would be worth it. Sitting – languishing – in this waiting room gave him a new understanding of how his interior decoration must only add to his patients' despair.

He resolved to keep his eyes closed until Dr. Velez was ready for him. He dedicated himself to counting the seconds, and focusing on his breath, and by the time he heard his name called, he was almost calm. The name, his name, brought it all rushing back, though. What a rough deal, to have your own name make you nervous. It was what Del's own worst patients called him, though, and so it got his blood up now.

"Mr. Cain?"

Del considered not correcting her, but the arrogance inside of him recoiled at such a thought, and he wearily spat out the amendment. "Doctor."

"Yes?"

He sighed. "My name... it's *Doctor* Cain. Forget it, Del is fine."

Dr. Velez smiled, a grin that tried too hard and failed to make it up to her eyes. Del knew that face well; it'd taken him years to perfect, and a dozen more to improve upon. "Alright, then, Del. Why don't you come in. Sorry for the delay, I was just trying to finish up the preliminary paperwork."

She hadn't been, Del figured. She'd probably been in there watching the clock, giving him a solid fifteen minutes to normalize from the outside world in this sterile environment. He didn't mind. It was a tactic he knew well, though he'd stopped using it some time ago. It didn't bode incredibly well that, in his reserved and entirely unbiased opinion, he was light-years ahead of the specialist he planned to ask for help. But something needed to be done.

Inside the office, Del was pleasantly surprised to see that her terrible decorating choices, so terrifyingly parallel to his own, didn't cross the threshold. This room was warm and friendly, though the chair that seemed destined for him looked designed to ward off scoliosis. He sat anyway. If Dr. Velez's inner sanctum was a better indicator of her personality than the outer room, the situation was already improving.

"So, Del, I have here that it's your first time visiting a Cognitive-Behavioral Therapist. Is that right?" She smiled amiably, with just a hint of vile sympathy behind the faint wrinkles on her face.

Del had to grin, though. "That's a hard technicality to argue, but yes. I suppose." Her eyes looked like Del imagined his must when his son rattled on about astrophysics, displaying pure confusion, so he extended the thought. "I am one, that's all."

Dr. Velez chuckled, nodded agreeably, and moved on without really acknowledging what he had said. Del figured that her disguised thoughts ran along the lines of the phrase *doctors make the worst patients*. She kept it to herself though, instead asking, "So, why are you here today, Del?"

"Doctor, I..." He faltered, in spite of himself. He knew the rules, and now he wouldn't, couldn't be committed simply for airing his concerns, but there were other things to consider as well. His own practice, for instance, might suffer if the patients found out he'd been prescribed a heavy dose of antipsychotics. He'd do what he could to get better; he recognized the importance of that, but no one wants to see their therapist at the CVS Pharmacy picking up a personalized dose of risperidone.

Dr. Velez had noticed his pause, and she prompted him with an open look and another nod.

He shook his head. "Doctor, I think I may be... going crazy. I have a better theory, so I hate to use such *unclinical* terms, but they apply here. Some degree of psychosis may be a more appropriate diagnosis, or perhaps schizophrenia, but damn if crazy isn't just a better word here. It just feels like it fits, even from a professional perspective. Because that's one of two explanations I've got, and the second doesn't disprove the first."

"What do you mean, Del?" He caught the repetition of his name. She'd say his name every time she could, like he was the hostage taker and she the SWAT negotiator, and it wouldn't change how he felt at all. He reminded himself why he was here again and forged on.

"It was a patient of mine that tipped me off."

---

Mrs. Hedrik had come in complaining of headaches and memory lapses. She was nearing on eighty, and so Dr. Cain had a

pretty good guess right off the bat as to what was going on. Old age is a bitch, as the poets say, and Dr. Cain figured this was pretty much a symptom of Anne Hedrik's extended stay on Earth.

"Dr. Cain," she had begun when she got in, in her little old lady *sorry-I'm-bothering-you* voice that called to mind one of the doctor's own grandmothers, who had died at 95 while knitting a Christmas sweater. Preferences among a therapist's patients were generally discouraged in the same way that preferences among a teacher's students are discouraged, which means of course that they abounded even in the tight ship that was Cain's practice. Mrs. Hedrik was one of those preferred patients. "Dr. Cain," she said, quaveringly, "I believe I'm finally cracking," and chuckled in a sad way that was more for the benefit of her doctor than herself.

The old woman was a regular patient, being treated for what really was a mild but persistent depression, but which she referred to simply as "the old-lady blues." Dr. Cain had started treating her four or five years earlier, after the death of her daughter, and she tended to come in every other week. She was low maintenance, and Cain had never seen the need even to prescribe her any kind of medication. Really, she came in to talk through her thoughts, which made Cain's appointments with her some of his easiest two-hour blocks.

"Why is that, Anne?" He looked her in the eyes, and opened his wider to signal genuine concern. She smiled weakly back at him.

"Well, I've had a few..." she trailed off, and her small face contracted inwards even further until it looked like the face on one of DJ's old LEGO men. "I suppose I've had a few incidents, lately." Mrs. Hedrik fiddled with the rubbery bracelet on her wrist that held the key to her room at Turtle Run. It was her ticket back on the bus afterward as well, and Cain had long ago noticed her ceaseless checks that it remained in place. "I was at the grocery - Miller's on Garibaldi St. - they let us go every once in a while for little things, condiments we want and candy. I know... I know that the new girl drove us there. Marty and Jane O'Leary were there..."

"And what happened, Anne?"

"Well, I don't know, really. I know I got back somehow, but I don't... I don't remember how. I remember, I was choosing a banana, and Marty had just wandered away, and then I was standing by my bed."

"How did you get home?"

Her eyebrows knit together, and she blinked down hard on two watery eyes. "I- I don't remember. I assume I took the bus back, because I *was* back... but I don't remember."

"That's alright, Anne, sometimes things like that happen. Were you thinking about anything, was your mind on anything at the grocery store?"

Mrs. Hedrick thought for a moment, then nodded morosely. "Yes, I was concerned about my burner, I think. The hotplate that Robert or Jeremy got me - one of Jim's twins. I used it, and I remember asking Marty if he thought it could start a fire. I wasn't sure if I had left it on."

"Were you concerned about that?"

"Very." She laughed again in the same sad way as before. "Though I can think of a few who would've appreciated it if I had burned the whole place down."

Dr. Cain nodded. "You know, Anne, I think you might be describing something fairly common to happen every once in a while. Do you know what Highway Hypnosis is?"

Looking a bit perplexed, Mrs. Hedrick replied "I think that Barbara on the third floor said her grandson has that. Do I?"

The therapist smiled. "I'm not sure what Barbara's grandson has, but Highway Hypnosis is similar to... well, it's when you're driving and you suddenly realize you're home, but don't remember passing Exit 6 or the neighbor's house. Usually it happens because you're distracted, or focused on something else. Sounds like that might have happened to you here, because you were concerned about that, that hotplate."

"Okay," she replied, and wrung her hands. "I guess that makes sense to me. Do you think that's what happened the other times, too?" She explained that this wasn't the first time she'd had troubles with her memory, and told the doctor about three other instances where she was out on a trip, or even just in another part of the home, and suddenly found herself elsewhere. Each time, she was left without even the faintest smoky wisp of a memory of how she had arrived. Mrs. Hedrik didn't know exactly how much time she'd lost, but she admitted that for one of the incidents, she had been in another state, and that it had taken her almost an hour just to get there. "That was for one of the children's birthday - Mary's husband drove me out there, and I guess I just left on my own. He called me later and... well, he was very upset with me. And he had every right." The old woman was almost in tears at this point.

"Anne," Dr. Cain said calmly, "why don't we take a break for a few minutes. You go get some water, have a Werther's from the bowl. We can keep talking later."

She bobbed her head gratefully, rose, and tottered outside to the boxy water-cooler. When she got back, Mrs. Hedrik just sat for a moment in silence, before asking in a quavering voice, "do you know what's wrong with me? Is it just this... hypnotism?"

Cain had been considering it in the hiatus, and he took another moment of chewing on his inner cheek to think about it. "Highway Hypnosis? No, no I don't think it is. It seems as though you've been dissociating - tuning out, to put it too simply - on somewhat of a regular basis. Which is not necessarily dangerous, at least by itself, but it's certainly unusual. If it's chemical, psy-

chological, there are a few things that might be going on. I can prescribe something and we can see if it works, and I can speak to – what’s his name, the bus driver?”

“Her name, it’s the new girl, Janelle.”

“Well, then, I’ll tell you what. I’ll speak to Janelle, ask her to keep an eye on you, and hopefully between those two things, we’ll see some improvement. Sound good?”

“Alright. Thank you, Dr. Cain.”

They went over the side effects, and Dr. Cain wrote her a scrip. He spoke to the bus driver, who came to pick up Mrs. Hedrik at a quarter-to-four, and instructed her to keep a close eye on the old woman in future outings. The driver happily accepted, and said enthusiastically that it was the kind of thing she’d really wanted to do when she took the job. Dr. Cain didn’t much care, but asked her to keep in touch about Mrs. Hedrik if there were any concerns.

A week later, Mrs. Hedrik disappeared.

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As the story was related to Dr. Cain, his patient had been with a few others on a supervised outing. They’d gone to a park, and the patients had been given a few minutes to sit on the benches, walk on the grass, and enjoy a 71-degree balmy spring day. It was Janelle, the bus driver, who actually told Dr. Cain the story, but it appeared that three orderlies had been in attendance, all told. Not one of them saw Anne Hedrik wander off, and all three swore that they had only taken their eyes off of her for a moment. But Anne Hedrik was gone, and they didn’t have any idea where to.

It turned out that she’d gone home, actually beaten the bus back to the nursing home, but nobody knew how, least of all Mrs. Hedrik. The man at the front desk, the nurse on duty on floor three, and the roving orderlies came to a consensus on the matter, and not a single one of them saw Mrs. Hedrik enter the building, get on the elevator, or enter her room. But she sure as hell came out of it when she heard a commotion in the hallway, presenting herself in a scared and tentative manner to the befuddled employees on duty. She had no clue how she’d gotten back, and didn’t even remember leaving. The only thing that Dr. Cain had in mind to try was increasing her medication, but it seemed to him that she was well in the throes of a dissociative disorder that no amount of pharmaceutical intervention would resolve.

An additional incident a week later led Cain to order a 72-hour observational hold on Mrs. Hedrik, apologetically informing her that she’d have to spend a few nights in a mental facility under his and other doctors’ care. She eagerly agreed.

Mrs. Hedrik’s room in the facility was white and sterile and simple, exactly what a person would have expected, but she accepted the circumstances eagerly. As Cain sat in a heavily-upholstered armchair by the rolling bed, she assured him of the same.

“I’m glad you’re here, Dr. Cain. I’m glad there are cameras too – I know how inconvenient that this has been for... for everyone. I’m so sorry you had to take time out of your schedule for this.”

“No, it’s no worry. None at all, Anne. It’s important that we figure all of this out.” If Del was being honest, a night or two here watching over Anne had its advantages when compared to his other options. His father-in-law had called a few days previously to stay on the couch, which of course meant that through some strange algebra, Del had ended up on the couch instead. He’d done a residency with the head of the ward here, and figured he could get a small upgrade by sleeping in an empty room while Anne got what he understood would be about four hours of rest.

Anne gave a faint nod, and laid her head on the scratchy, polycotton pillow. Cain slouched back in the chair, and did the Times Crossword on his phone. Somewhere around *17-Down: Hang, as a Driver*, he nodded off in the chair. He woke up that morning with a helluva crick in his neck, but Mrs. Hedrik was still in bed, stirring quietly. She got up, and went about an uneventful day, and then two more. She was released the third morning, with no light shed on her condition.

On the morning of May 21<sup>st</sup>, two days after Mrs. Hedrik had gone back to her nursing home, Del’s father-in-law went home, and Del moved back into the bedroom. The next morning, he woke up on the couch. He didn’t think much of it, though he couldn’t remember having moved there in the night. He figured that the force of habit, developed over the days that his wife’s father stayed, had guided him there after some half-conscious trip to the bathroom.

The next day, Cain begged a moment from one of his patients to make the trek to the water-cooler that sat outside his office. He walked out, gently closing the mahogany door behind him so that, if Ken started sobbing (as was somewhat customary, to be perfectly frank), the sound wouldn’t reach anyone in the waiting room. There was no one there, not one straight-backed green-felted chair filled with a waiting patient, and as such no small talk for Cain to make as he considered a solution to Ken’s problems. Dr. Cain filled his conical paper cup, drained it, and filled it again. Then, apparently, he walked out the door, walked to the bowling place down the street, and proceeded into the alley. He must have passed by the glistening wooden lanes, the shoe stand that greeted all newcomers, and the bar with a thin glaze of beer that mirrored the shimmer of the lanes themselves. He must have walked up the three stairs and into arcade, where he found himself standing between the Buck Hunter and Street Fighter machines moments later.

But Del remembered none of it. Not a second.

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“So your concern,” Dr. Velez asked quietly, “Is that you may be suffering from a dissociative disorder?” She didn’t say “as well,” or “like your patient.” Del’s mind added in the phrases quickly enough, though, that it almost seemed as though she had. And he wished it was true.

Del shook his head. "No. Doctor, I haven't finished- I haven't... well, one second. I admit that I had the thought... and tested it. But... just let me continue. I'll feel crazier if I don't, it's... I don't want you to misunderstand."

---

Dr. Cain, as he told Dr. Velez later on, had come to the initial conclusion that he had developed a mental disorder similar to that exemplified by Mrs. Hedrik. Or at least, he had always had it and it was only presenting now. He couldn't remember blacking out before, but he knew that he had. He must have. As such, Dr. Cain resolved to wait for the next incident, if there was one, and then to record every single detail he could. External and internal, he promised to write down every detail. Three more times, Dr. Cain blacked out and got nothing from this exercise, but he persisted. On the day the fourth occurred, he had a recertification test.

The morning of his test, Dr. Cain woke up at 6:30AM, as was his habit, went about his morning routine, and flipped through flash cards as he ate his cornflakes. Somewhere in the list of spinal nerves, he finished eating and called for his daughter to put her bag in his car. He headed back up the carpeted stairs to his room, and dressed in front of a half-size floor mirror that he despised. He wore a suit, out of the philosophy that well-dressed and well-prepped ran alongside one another. Cain wasn't normally a "watch" man, as its presence on his wrist led to the inevitable result of his patients feeling pressured as Cain's eyes were unconsciously but invariably drawn to the glinting silvery face throughout a session. Today, however, he needed it. He'd been taught long ago, a lesson of his mother's, that a timed test called for a watch, whether it was a fifteen-minute seventh-grade quiz or a three-hour recertification.

Be-watched and be-suited, Cain went downstairs to usher his daughter out the door. It took less ushering than it used to when his son was in school, but Cain found himself persuaded more often to drive her in rather than consign her to the cruel mercies of the yellow schoolbus than he had been with DJ. This was one such day, a half-day for his daughter as her teachers planned to meet in the afternoon, presumably to discuss what the smallest amount of snow was for which they could cancel classes come winter.

"Remember, seniors get out at quarter of one." She looked up at him, the same look you might give a dog to see if he'd understood the order to fetch. "Quarter of one," she repeated, in a manner that intensified the feeling that Del was going to be rewarded with a treat or punished with a time-out depending on his answer.

"I've told you that my recertification doesn't end 'til half past, and I can't leave before the end. They don't let you." He paused, and gave her time to prepare an indignant response, but didn't let her say it. "It's only over at Baxter, so I should be able to get to you fairly quickly. No promises about what time, though."

"If you're not there by quarter of, they won't let you get in the parent pickup line." She threw her shoulders back as if she'd scored a point. "You'll have to *park*."

Del stared her down. "I've been picking you up from there for four years, girlie."

She went out to the car, letting the screen door clap shut behind her, a sound that brought to mind the image of its glass shattering across the WELCOME doormat. Thankfully, though, it held, and Cain stepped out of the house, locking the green door with its temporally irrelevant wreath behind him.

Cain dropped his daughter off without incident, and drove down the road, with its stunningly improper 15mph speed limit, to make the testing center just in time. The test, a 400-question Scantron which seemed to have disproportionately many "B" answers and alarmingly few "C"s, ended as planned. At half-past twelve, Cain was let out the doors, his bag of erasers and pencils and ID in hand. He turned the car on in time for tail end of the local NFL station's 12:30 update (the Kerrigan and Galway Halftime Report), and then he was home, standing in his kitchen.

He turned around so quickly that he knocked a glass off the countertop. It was a tall, thin glass meant to hold a pint, with an embossed and gilded Anheuser-Busch logo on the side. His wife's brother had given it as a Christmas gift after Del was heard declaring the beer it referenced to be "swill of the lowest order" while under the influence of swill of a slightly higher order. Del kind of hated the glass, but his daughter reveled in drinking apple juice out of it, in the same way that younger children had used French fries as greasy cigarettes with their ketchup flames.

The glass was empty when it fell, which was a blessing in some ways, but it shattered on contact with the linoleum. In the kitchen, every white tile square was a foot long, something Del had used to measure his family, and to settle arguments with DJ as he claimed a height advantage every year since the sixth grade. His daughter, surely having been suborned in some way, had used the floor to finally judge DJ the winner just before college, when the furthest strand of his hair had inched past the sixth tile. Now, the tiles told Del that a fallen and shattered Anheuser-Busch glass had a dispersion radius of about eight feet, which he didn't think would evoke the same nostalgia upon remembering. He couldn't decide if eight feet was more or less than he would have expected, but he didn't really think it mattered much.

Del pulled out a small notebook as he stood in the wreckage of the beer glass. He began to write down the circumstances, sensations, and and everything else he noticed. It had a few prior entries, all along the same format. He got no further than *Wednesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 12:38PM*, before he stopped up short. He glanced back at the previous instances, looking no further than that first line, a header, really. *Friday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>*; *Thursday, March 15<sup>th</sup>*; *Tuesday, April 17<sup>th</sup>*. But no times, because he rarely wore a watch, and categorically refused to carry his phone at all times.

It was 12:38PM. He set the little marbled notebook down on the countertop, and hurried out of the kitchen, the soles of his shoes soaking up little pieces of glass as he went. He went all the way upstairs, to the office beside his bedroom that had once been a bedroom itself. It was carpeted like the rest of the house, and lined on every side but the window with overtaxed bookshelves. These he ignored, and when he flipped open the lid of his computer, he ignored everything but the calendar, which he clicked on and muttered impatiently as he waited on it to open.

*May 16<sup>th</sup>. Wednesday.*

He dropped into his chair. It was soft, battered suede, and he sank deeply into it. Baxter College, where he'd taken his test, was half an hour from the house, more in traffic. Del had traveled the distance in three minutes. He sat there for twenty minutes more, unmoving. At precisely 1:00PM, he received a call from his daughter asking where he was, and mentioning that her friend Callie needed a ride to somewhere called *Capezio* that was apparently on the way.

Del walked outside, and as expected saw no sign of his car. He called a rideshare, and took it all the way to Baxter, where his dark green SUV waited. It hadn't moved, not one nanometer. The left back tire still hung over the line into the next spot, angled inward. Del's keys were in the ignition, the engine running and still at half a tank. He drove to get his daughter, fielding calls from her at every light and stop sign. In all, it took him an hour to pick her up, and by then Callie had evidently found a more accessible ride.

His daughter threw her bag in the trunk, so hard that Del was sure its contents must have been ionized. She slammed the door just as hard after swinging into the front seat, headphones in her ears. She paused her music, and began to yell.

"Be careful when we get home," was Del's only response, "there's glass all over the kitchen floor. The Yuengling one fell."

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Dr. Elena Velez was incredibly professional, slightly neurotic, and in the manner of all good researchers, cynical to a fault. Whether it was ingrained in her from a young age or inherent in the wrinkles of her brain and knots of her DNA, she wasn't sure. Her opinion on the classic debate of nature and nurture wasn't as settled as most in her field would like. Nevertheless, she was cynical and diligent to the point that, in her most honest and clinical frame of mind, she might have called it compulsion.

Dr. Velez was the kind of person who would pull over in the middle of a drive, be it three miles or three hundred, to check that something was in her trunk. Something that was definitely there, that must have been there, that couldn't reasonably be anywhere else. When she left her car every morning, and locked it, she would tell herself aloud that she had heard the honk, to better her chance of avoiding paranoia about it later in the day. She had proofread her last paper before uploading it to her email account, then re-downloaded to make sure nothing had been lost in conversion.

So, when Del Cain, her patient, told her what he believed had happened, and that he thought it might be contagious, she did not accept this statement on face value. She took in the information, and tried hard to keep from frowning deeply. This man in front of her professed to be a doctor, in her own profession no less, and he was a perfect example of the indiscriminate blows that mental illness could deal across the human population. The man was in the grip of psychosis so deep and thorough that he had come to believe the absurd, even if he had presented it only with the shaky faith that she imagined Fleming had displayed when trying to convince his first patient to ingest bread mold.

Dr. Velez was on the verge of writing a scrip, having told a nodding Del Cain of her conclusion, when her patient disappeared. She had glanced down, to grab a pen, and later she would bless her lucky stars that it had been readily available. Because when she looked up, scanning Del's face covertly to gauge his reaction to her decision, he blinked out of existence. He had been there, then he wasn't. And this, Velez and Cain would say in their acceptance speech, was it. The first concrete evidence of human teleportation.





# NO WORDS

WRITTEN  
BY **SANTE MATTEO**

One of my humans, the big male, is starting to figure out that there's a better way to communicate with me than by using those sounds that humans make with their mouths. I don't see how they can understand each other making those complicated, incomprehensible sounds: words, they call them.

Well, actually I'm not sure that they do understand each other all that well with their bizarre language. Sometimes it seems to work; other times not so much. Sometimes they speak with their mouths, and it makes the others smile or laugh, but other times it makes them cry or yell, or throw things. Sometimes, when their words make them angry, they even take it out on me. When I go up lick some part of their body just to comfort them, they yell at me to "Get out of here!" Those are words of theirs that I can now understand too. But even if I couldn't, their tone makes it pretty clear what they mean and how they feel. So, I lower my hopefully wagging tail, fold it between my legs, and slink away, crushed by their cruel, unfair reaction, when all I'm trying to do is make them feel better, because I love them. Love hurts sometimes. It really does!

I can now understand some of their mouth sounds when they use them to tell me what to do: *sit, shake hands, hug, kiss, come here, go away!* And I'm happy to do those things—even if they really don't make any sense and there's no good reason to do them, as far as I can tell—because it pleases them, and they say, "Goood dog!" and tousele my scruff, and sometimes even give me a tasty bite, what they call a "treat," another one of their words I learned—and learned pretty quickly and eagerly: one of my favorite words of their language.

They use some of those sounds to command each other too, especially the young human puppies—who, by the way, stay puppies for a really long time! I don't know why they want to stay so small and helpless for so long. But that's beside the point. Sometimes I know what they're telling each other to do, because they use the same words that they use with me. In fact, I'm embarrassed to confess that sometimes I think they're talking to me and automatically obey, until they start laughing and point at me and make fun of me, and I wag my tail sheepishly.

But those times are rare. Most of the time they say and do things I can't figure out. For example, they make mouth sounds to each other and then one of them goes to the food room—where I'm not allowed to go when they're in there doing stuff, but where I go later to lick stuff they dropped on the floor—and then comes out after a while with all kinds of food; and then they sit around a raised plank—that I can't reach—and they eat, for a long time, using sticks in their front paws—or top paws in their case, since they always stand on their hind paws for some reason, and their front paws are always held up in the air—and then they go sit on other planks in front of a box that makes sounds and shows things, like looking through a window, except the things in the box are always flickering and changing. It makes my eyes hurt. So I just curl up and go to sleep—unless I hear another dog barking in there. Then I raise my head and cock it this way and that to try to figure out where that dog is and what he wants here in my territory. Sometimes I bark back, but the dog isn't there anymore, and my humans tell me to be quiet and lie down and go back to sleep; and I do.

But I'm digressing. My thoughts like to wag, like my tail. I wag at both ends. The real problem is that humans also use those words inside their heads, when they're thinking, even when they're not talking with their mouths. I can't figure out how they do it, but they think their thoughts with those word things. And the words I don't understand, which is just about all of them, interfere with the images and feelings I try to detect in my humans. I'm sure I could see their thoughts better if they weren't wrapped in those words. Plus, their words also seem to block the thoughts that I send to them. If their stupid language didn't get in the way, we could understand each other better. I wish I could get them to stop wording and start thinking and communicating more clearly, more directly: just naked thought to naked thought. Maybe they just can't do it.

Lately, though, I'm encouraged, or at least hopeful. Okay, okay, yes, I admit that I'm just about always hopeful; just can't keep that tail down; but this is different. I get the feeling that my big male human is starting to catch on that those words aren't necessary, that they only confuse things. He notices more intently that I always seem to know when we're going to go for a walk, when he's going to give me a yogurt cup to lick, when he needs me to rest my head

in his lap and look lovingly into his eyes. He now realizes that I even know when he leaves his far-away cage, where he spends much of the day, and heads for the home-den, and I go wait for him by the door when his rumbling moving cage turns into our street that I mark with my pee when we walk. He has noticed all these things before, but always shrugged them off. Now I sense that he is more puzzled by them and thinks about them long and is more curious to know how I do it.

Sooner or later I'm going to train him to communicate without those pesky words of theirs getting in the way. Then I can teach him to be as happy and playful and loving as I am—even if he doesn't have a tail to wag. How they can live without one, I don't know. But that's another story.

#

*Yes, okay, so maybe it is my body language that my dog responds to when she seems to read my mind, and also sounds and scents that are imperceptible to humans. She probably smells the yogurt and hears the scraping of the almost empty cup when I pick it up with the intention of offering it to her to lick, and she always trots eagerly over, no matter where in the house she is, even out of sight. But how to explain the behavior that my wife recounts: that our Zoe also seems to know when I'm about to come home, when I'm not even in the vicinity?*

*I'm beginning to wonder if Karl Krall and Rupert Sheldrake weren't dismissed prematurely for postulating some sort of telepathy between dogs and humans, crazy as that still sounds. After all, we didn't yet have the knowledge or the instruments to really test their hypotheses. Isn't that how the history of science usually works: what once was attributed to magic ends up having a scientific explanation once we have the knowledge and the instruments to detect, observe, and measure natural phenomena more accurately. So, what they surmised--that there is some kind of mind-to-mind communication that results from the electromagnetic energy produced by neuronal activity in the brain of all animals that have a brain—may have seemed whimsical at the time, just wishful thinking, but may bear more scrutiny and investigation today, when we know a little more about brain waves. If a brain can generate waves, maybe it can also receive them. In mammalian species whose brains are similar enough couldn't the energy waves generated by mental activity be intercepted by other brains, and if detected then maybe also deciphered in some way: interpreted, understood?*

*So, what do we know now? Brain waves are no longer hypothetical. They have been detected and recorded. They can be measured. So far they've been classified into five kinds or frequencies: delta, theta, alpha, beta, and super-high-frequency gamma—or six kinds, if one counts infra-low frequencies slower than half a Hertz. Might there be waves radiated at even higher or lower frequencies, yet to be detected and measured?*

*According to some findings, gamma waves can be of a higher frequency than the frequency at which neurons fire. So, if the rate of neuron firing doesn't pose an upper limit to the frequency, or energy, of the waves that are generated, there might be more kinds of waves, of undetermined frequency, possibly generated by different phases or aspects of cerebral processes.*

*It seems to me that it's time to take a closer look at the possibility of animal telepathy, especially with our so-called “best friends,” with whom we've cohabited for thousand of years.*

*Or what's even more likely, and interesting, and potentially fruitful, is the possibility that waves of different frequencies may combine, interfere, and interact with each other in ways that have not yet been detected: a symphony of interlacing waves, not just “chopsticks” plucked out on one instrument, which is all we know how to measure at this point.*

*Research project: Take a closer look at the possibility of animal telepathy. Find a way to detect, measure, and decipher encephalographic activity more accurately, and see if more direct brain-to-brain communication is possible without having to resort to language, whether oral or written.*

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NEWS RELEASE: DR. JOHN DOMUCH INVENTS ELECTRONIC TRANSLATOR FOR READING MINDS OF DOGS; DEVICE RECEIVES, MODULATES, AMPLIFIES, RE-TRANSMITS WAVES FROM BRAIN TO BRAIN IN COMPREHENSIBLE FORM; NO WORDS REQUIRED; FUTURE MODELS MAY FACILITATE, ENHANCE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN HUMANS.







# CONTRIBUTOR

## *Notes*

Scott Johnson is an English major at Kent State University (Stark campus). He is also minoring in creative writing. His passion is fiction, my preferred method is writing. He loves writing stories, in far away, fantastical worlds with deep characters and meaningful plot.

JGeorge is a 26 year old writer from Chennai, India, where she resides with her best friends. Her poems have appeared in the journals of "Muse India", "Madras Courier", "Spark the Magazine", "Criterion" "VerbalArt", "Indian Ruminations", "IndusWomanWriting", "Decent eNews" and her contribution to anthologies include, "Boundless" (Rio Grande Valley International Poetry Festival 2019) and "Love, As We Know It" (Delhi Poetry Slam). She firmly believes that writing always brings her a lease of hope.

Gregory Burton is currently a JD Candidate at the University of Pennsylvania, having recently obtained his undergraduate degrees in Psychology and International Studies.

Joann Renee Boswell is a teacher, mother, photographer and poet currently living in Camas, WA with her spouse and three children. Joann loves rainy days filled with coffee, books, handholding, moody music and sci-fi shows. She's been published in Untold Volumes, Voices of Eve and Western Friend.

Aer Todd lives deep in the Blue Ridge of North Carolina , where the hollars' hold secrets and probably ghosts as well.

Josh Lerman studied creative writing at The University of Maryland, College Park. His first novel, The Sound of Birds, is independently published and he is currently working on a collection of short stories, a collection of poems, and finding a publisher for his latest novel. He resides in Boca Raton, Florida where he sells prints of his drawings, and practices ancestral skills: foraging edible and useful plants, making fiber cordage, and making friction fire (rubbing two sticks together).

Sante Matteo, born and raised in a small agricultural town in southern Italy, is a retired professor of Italian Studies at Miami University, in Oxford, Ohio, where he dabbles in creative writing and tries to learn the secret of happiness and love from his and his wife's dog Zoe.

Caitlin Cacciatore is a New York City-based author and poet. She sees the everyday beauty that surrounds her and shapes it into poetry and prose, and has a great and enduring passion for the English language, the arts, and science. She enjoys long walks on the beach with her dog, reading space operas, and writing just about anything that strikes her fancy. Caitlin is an Artificial Intelligence Studies major by day, but she retires to her study to write poetry by the light of the moon.

Jason Wyvern currently lives in Shropshire. Since graduating with a degree in Government from Essex University, he has worked in a wide variety of jobs, including eBay seller, mail opener, call centre operative and security guard at a yoghurt factory. His work has appeared on the BBC, at the Manchester 24:7 Theatre Festival and on the back lawn of a National Trust property.

James B. Nicola 's poems and prose have appeared in the Antioch, Southwest, Green Mountains, and Atlanta Reviews; Rattle; Barrow Street; Tar River; and Poetry East. He has been the featured poet in Westward Quarterly and New Formalist. A Yale graduate, he has earned a Dana Literary Award, two Willow Review awards, a People's Choice award (from Storyteller), and six Pushcart nominations—from Shot Glass Journal, Parody, Ovunque Siamo, Lowestoft Chronicle, and twice from Trinacria—for which he feels both stunned and

grateful. His nonfiction book *Playing the Audience* won a Choice award. His poetry collections are *Manhattan Plaza* (2014), *Stage to Page: Poems from the Theater* (2016), *Wind in the Cave* (2017), *Out of Nothing: Poems of Art and Artists* (2018), and *Quickening: Poems from Before and Beyond* (2019).

Hannah Seo is an alien in every place she's ever been. A Korean-Canadian who was raised in the Middle East, she's a young emerging writer and student at New York University. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Open Minds Quarterly*, *Lumina Journal*, and *Jellyfish Review*, among others.

Andy Betz has tutored and taught in excess of 30 years. His novel, short stories, and poems are works still defining his style. He lives in 1974, has been married for 26 years, and collects occupations (the current tally is 97). His works are found everywhere a search engine operates.

Dustin Davis was born in Ashland, Wisconsin on November 21, 1945. He received his B.S. degree from Northland College, Ashland, Wisconsin in 1968. He received his M.F.A. degree in Art and Design specializing in 3-D Design from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1971. Dustin started teaching on the undergraduate in 1972 and is currently a full Professor at Frostburg State University in Frostburg, Maryland. He has exhibited in many International and National exhibitions. His work has been reviewed in the *Baltimore Sun* and displayed online the *Light Space & Time*, *Fusion*, and *Fine Arts America Online Art Galleries*.





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