

*Vagabonds*  
*Anthology of the Mad Ones*





## **Vagabonds Vol. 2 Issue # 2 2013**

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**Frank Roger**  
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**Valentina Cano**  
**Bob Carlton**  
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**Alyssa Cressotti**  
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**David Stallings**  
**Laura Taylor**  
**John Vicary**  
**Mahendra Waghela**  
**Weasel**

**Letter of Introduction**  
**From Emily Ramser, Assistant Editor**

Well hello there!

Take a seat, won't you?

Comfortable?

Can I get you a hot beverage? No?

Well, all right. Anyways, welcome to Vagabonds! You will have to excuse us, we are all a little mad here. No, not insane. We just feel a little deeper than most, look a little longer at the way leaves twirl in the wind and wonder why we feel sad sometimes.

See, we are writers, artists and photographers. We find beauty in the world and bring it out for everyone to see.

Don't believe me? Take a look. Open the pages and read. Let these works open your mind, your eyes and your heart. And then, once your blood is pumping a little faster and you can see the world around you a little better, pick up a pencil, camera, or paintbrush and join us in being a little mad.

“Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming "Wow! What a Ride!" – Hunter S. Thompson



**Hold On by Casey Dolan**

**Flames of the Rubicon**  
**Bob Carlton**

By being here in the first place, Billy Chase was already admitting failure. He liked to believe he was somehow transgressing, but he was well aware of the fact that no one gave a damn where he was or what he was doing. As he sat daydreaming near midnight over his first beer, a remarkably ugly and stupendously drunk woman wavered in front of him.

“Do you want to dance?” is what he believed she was asking.

“No thanks,” he replied, trying to muster some wit on short notice, “I haven’t had nearly enough to drink yet for that.”

With a look that was either drunkenly sour at a perceived insult that was in reality social ineptitude, or simply palsied, she lurched away into the darkness and noise, the latter of which Billy thought excessive, even for Biker Night. He sat for a few minutes with an empty mug sweating onto his table while the nearest waitress laughed, flirted, and served her more engaging and lucrative clientele. Across the room he saw a couple dancing, and he suddenly realized that the woman might very well be his daughter’s kindergarten teacher. A glance seemed to pass

between them, and he thought that perhaps if she were indeed who he thought she might be, that she may have seen him as well when the paths of their eyes crossed, so that there may or may not have occurred an awkward moment for the both of them.

Time passed as Billy sat and drank, wandering in the world of his own thoughts, where fatigue fought with free time and discretionary cash. When he finally retook notice of his surroundings, the crowd had thinned considerably. Most of the bikers had left, and only a handful of regulars remained. At least he assumed they were regulars since the wait staff spent all their time chatting them up while once again his mug sat empty in front of him.

Suddenly, in that way that miraculous things seem to occur at an exact moment while drinking, a moment with such exacting tolerances that it often passes into drunkenness before it can be seized, a waitress appeared.

“Would you like another beer?” she asked, the simplicity of the question ornamented by tone, timbre, and body language into an irresistible proposition.

Billy nodded and smiled. With a practiced eye, he took a quick physical inventory, as she turned around and headed back to the bar. She was perfect: a young face that was certainly not as young as it looked in this light; a curvaceous figure with just enough extra weight to give her self-esteem issues; straight hair, halfway down her back, just dark enough not to be truly blond.

“What's your name?” she asked as she set his beer down.

“Billy,” he replied.

“Hi Billy, my name's Kristen.”

At first he suspected a feigned friendliness, the introduction a way to get his name to run a tab, but then he realized she had volunteered her name, or a name at any rate, without being asked. Throughout the rest of the night, snippets of conversation passed between them, sometimes when she was only passing by on her way to other customers. Billy took this as a good sign. The next day, however, the only exchange he would actually remember would be the last one.



“Last call, Billy,” Kristen said, “You want one more?”

“No,” Billy said, “I better get going.”

“Are you okay to drive?” she asked, edging closer to him.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” he replied.

“You know,” she said, leaning against him, side by side, arm to arm, her fingers lightly taking those on his right hand, “I could give you a ride back to my place for the night.”

“I better not,” Billy said, his heart rate doubling instantly.

“Why?” she asked, “Got to work early tomorrow?”

“Married,” Billy said, holding up his left hand.

“Happily?” she asked.

“No,” he replied.

“So...?” she started to ask, then leaving out the question, its punctuation taking form as she curled her hand into his more firmly, her chin now resting on his shoulder.

The clarity of his situation hit Billy like a punch, and all the lust, temptation, and potential happiness of the moment was struck down. A dozen beautiful speeches danced across his mind, all about how he ached to be with her, about how flattered he was, about what might have been in another time and place. Instead, he simply said, “I’m sorry Kristen, but I made someone a promise. I’ve fucked up and failed at everything else. But not that.”

As he walked out into what remained of the night, Billy knew that he was leaving yet another place to which he could never return.

**Tall Grass and Hidden Love**  
**T.N. Brooks**

Moss covered lungs

Such from all the spores

That coated her lips and her hips

Flowers that grew around her back

A pattern I could trace for years

And bees on her wrists

Birds on her feet

And dandelions in her hair

She was a figment of my imagination

That always came to life

Underneath the night sky and glittering stars

Hidden safely behind my closed eyelids.

## **The Juneteenth Loan--1975**

### **Greg Smith**

The young black woman opened the row-house door  
and frowned, her eyes round, surprised saucers--  
a white man, on her shot-gun shack porch,  
staring at her with desire, forcing her to look down  
in shyness or in deference.

She kept touching her hair,  
kept apologizing for the way it stood  
straight out in different directions, then  
she asked him for a loan--five dollars--  
she needed to get her hair done  
before going out with him.

Without a pause he passed the bill  
and watched her put Lincoln  
with feigned indifference  
between her ample breasts  
which swelled the top of her blouse.

When he called the next evening,  
she couldn't talk to him anymore she said--  
because she was not yet free.

## Thoughts of Birds

Emily Ramser

In the shower,  
my hands fold over my heart,  
making the wings of a dove,  
and they flutter.  
They flutter like  
a caged bird now free.  
I think back to the lovers I've had,  
and I wonder if they ever  
grew the wings  
they always preened.  
My fingers flutter, growing  
feathers hanging bells  
from the tips to tell the wind  
that I've arrived,  
and I think back to the men  
whose lips I pressed my own to,  
to the birds I flew alongside  
and whose talons I tangled my own in.  
I think of the eyeless one  
and the one with the hole  
dripping black blood  
amongst the colored feathers  
of its puffed chest.  
The rain pounds my back,  
droplets dripping down the feathers  
I arranged in a cloak so carefully  
around my skin to keep away the fingers  
of wandering frosts,  
and as the sky cries, I think  
of the bird whose beak never closed,  
the one who sang his song to those  
with closed ears  
and of the northern one who could not settle,  
who could not stay, dreaming  
nightmares of peach trees under cloudless skies.  
The water touches my face, caressing the beak  
I've molded with paper-mache,  
and my fingers flutter, now  
wings of downy new feathers, and  
I raise my arms till they hit  
faux-porcelain wall and shower curtain.

**Seasonal**  
**Valentina Cano**

He ebbed,  
undulating between spring and winter,  
between chrysanthemums  
and snow garlands.  
She watched him becoming  
a pane of glass  
through which his seasons passed,  
and she could just press her  
hands against him  
(like a locked out child)  
hoping to leave a smudge.

## **Blues for Paul**

### **Nancy Gauquier**

People stared at us,  
when we were together,  
we must have looked strange,  
me so tall and angular and pale,  
with stoned blue eyes and wild  
auburn hair, in old shirts  
and crazy patched-up blue jeans,  
you Burmese/Filipino/Spanish,  
long shoulder-length black hair,  
your strong precise body in thrift store  
treasures, how meticulously  
you assembled yourself,  
bright shirts, old wide ties and colorful vests,  
you looked like a walking kaleidoscope,  
I looked like something out of Dr. Seuss.  
The tourists took pictures of us,  
posing gently for them, standing together,  
arms around each other,  
at Fisherman's Wharf.

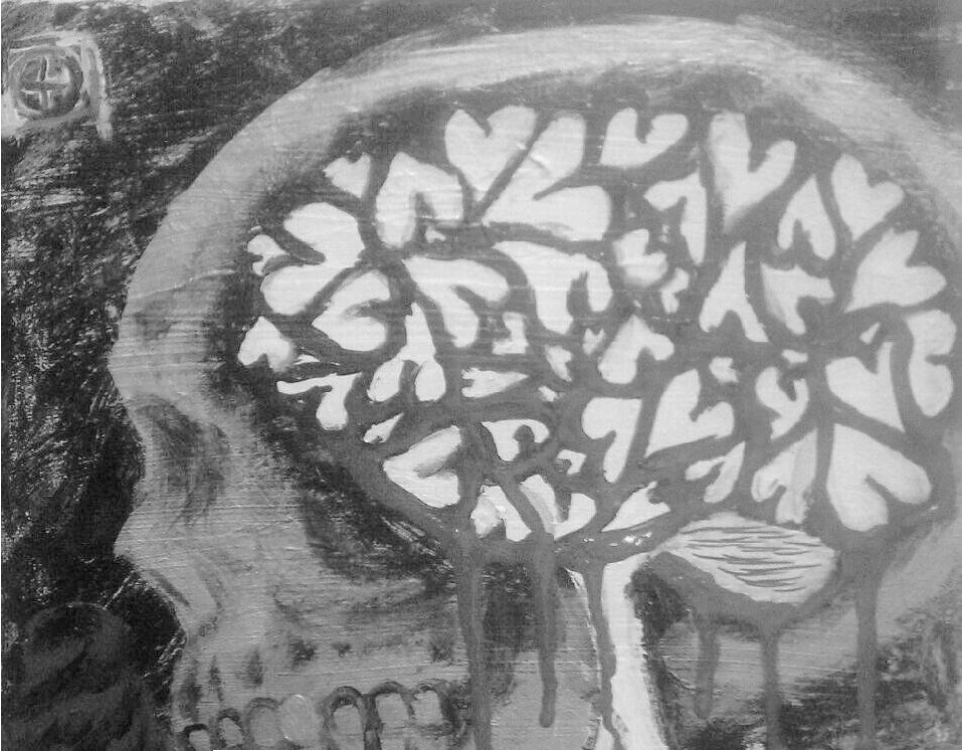
You were as good at creating your music  
as you were at destroying your life,  
but you had such class, you dressed  
it all up with such flash, you carried yourself  
with such pride, hiding your feelings deep  
inside, but they all came pouring out  
in your music, your music could reach deep  
inside and pull at my gut-strings,  
make me feel like I must be in love.

It was so easy to follow your crazy careening  
addicted-to-everything-but-love life,  
your music was your only soul-mate,  
it just had to be the blues,  
lust was just something to lend meaning  
to the lyrics, something you could use  
to pour into the blues.  
You ate, drank and slept the blues,

you made love to the blues,  
you smoked and toked and dropped  
and shot up the blues,  
you moved to the blues,  
you bopped up the San Francisco hills  
like BB King was playing the soundtrack.

You would do anything for your music,  
but you were such a purist, it just had to be  
the blues, even in prison,  
you formed your own blues band,  
you never ever gave up on the blues.

And who knows, maybe there is a forever,  
and maybe you are there and maybe you  
are playing the blues harp in the band,  
sighing through all the rapt souls, and  
maybe, if I ever make it there, you will  
remember me, and you'll play that song  
again, the one that made me believe,  
I must be in love, even now, whenever  
I catch the scent of Patchouli,  
I look for you.



**Johannes Naaykens**

**When you need me.**

**Josh Findley**

When you need me,  
I'll be long gone...  
Perhaps you can find me...  
Just up the way a bit, dancing with the devil.  
I'll be found conjuring ways to kill the pain.

When you need me, truly,  
I'll be resisting reality,  
And selling the World to fill the vein.  
Sitting, unraveling the stitch.  
The one that holds the wounds together,  
Just to see what will come of it.



When you need me,  
I'll most likely be clinging to life somewhere,  
Murmuring madness' melody,  
Stumbling back and forth from permanent slumber.  
Nodding off into a deep stare.  
Without worry of what's to come.  
Maybe lying in an alley between sanity and psychosis.

When you finally need me,  
Who knows if I'll need you?  
Who knows of where I'll be.  
Perhaps loving the woman with the brown eyes.  
The harlot that holds my heart.

Wrenching tourniquet please release me.  
For God's sake let me go...



**Chad Johnson**

## **Legend**

**David Stallings**

Ariel lolls in lambskin,  
burbling the December silence  
from her mother's back.  
After miles of icy forest path,  
we inhale the first wafts  
of sulfur, cross Boulder Creek,  
find a hot pool  
perched above snowy banks.  
To avoid tarnish  
we remove wedding rings,  
embrace our newness  
in naked waters.  
Through fir and cedar, moonlight  
fractals the swirling steam.  
Ariel suckles a misty breast,  
and for a time, her mother and I melt  
our differences within the fiery  
tears of dragons who fought  
to a stalemate above this place  
and now grieve alone  
in wintry caves.

## **Rehab Stories: Distortion**

### **David Rutter**

My head snaps  
To attention  
Out of a dead sleep  
For a disoriented instant  
I cannot figure out  
Where I am  
Or what I am doing  
Then the pain hits  
Like a runaway train  
With memory dragged  
Kicking and screaming  
Right behind

I must have passed out  
When they broke the third finger  
Maybe shortly before  
I don't know which is worse  
The sheer agony  
Of feeling my bone snap  
The sharp, nauseating sound it makes  
Or the pulse of pure, blistering terror  
That precedes both  
God, look at what they've done  
To my hand  
It will never be beautiful again

Then one of their faces  
Is mere inches from mine  
Screaming obscenities  
That strike me  
Like a hot punch  
"Where is it?"

They want to know  
Fuck me, I wish I knew  
I'd trade my mother  
To escape this dungeon  
With only the damage  
Already done

They fall silent  
Then the big one reaches over  
To pin my wrist with one hand  
Squeeze my fourth finger  
With the other  
I cannot hear myself think  
Over the sound  
Of my own blubbering  
As he begins to bend my finger back  
I can't help but think  
"Maybe you were right after all.  
Maybe I've got a problem here."

## **Snowflake**

### **Joseph Carro**

The sallow man squints up into charcoal sky, breath curling from his cracked lips and rising into nothingness. Snowflakes, large and crystalline, lilt along on cold bursts of air before coming to rest on his eyelashes. He doesn't blink.

He takes in a deep breath, the cold air rolling past his teeth and over his tongue like ice water. He shuts his eyes, feeling the flakes collide with his skin, hearing their light pattering on the fabric of his winter jacket as all around him the world is blanketed in silence and white.

His bottom lip quivers. A tear rolls down his cheek from the corner of his left eye, sinking somewhere into the collar of his sweater, leaving a whip of cold on his face. Light, pathetic sobs escape his lungs as his frame shakes.

He feels the weight in his front right jacket pocket, the metal absorbing the cold air and growing colder with each passing moment. He doesn't bother wiping his eyes. His vision blurred, the street lamp above becomes fuzzy-bright.

His face is curled up, his breathing and sobbing becoming more erratic. Hyperventilating. He doesn't recall ever crying like this. He has no control of the long release of anguish coming from his diaphragm in broken bleats.

In his pocket his thumb finds the hammer and he shakily flicks it back.

"Hey, man," comes a woman's voice from behind. He almost doesn't hear it. "You got a light?"

The man, still sobbing, let's go of the gun in his pocket and tries to wipe the tears and snot from his face before turning. Rather than reply, he simply shakes his head.

"No worries, not too many people smoke around here anymore. Figured I'd ask."

Silence, aside from some nose sniffing.

“Hey, you okay?”

“Leave me alone. Please,” the man says. His teeth chatter and make his words come clacking out.

“Name’s Charlie,” says the woman. “What’re you doing out here in the storm?”

Silence. He turns to face her. Brown eyes, freckles, dark hair. He knows that his own eyes are puffy and ringed with red but he doesn’t care. His bottom lip trembles again when she makes eye contact with him. Their breath mingles in the void between them. She holds an unlit cigarette in her left hand, rolling it between callused fingers. She looks at him and her eyes flit to his front pocket where the bulge of his gun is evident and then back to meet his gaze. He sees something there he recognizes.

“Why do you want to do it?” Her voice is like a snowflake, carried on the cold to rest in his ear, lilting, but holding a soft edge.

He begins to cry again, unable to hold it in, dropping to one knee in the cold white powder in front of the stranger.

“Never mind,” she says. She places a hand on his back. He doesn’t recoil. “It doesn’t matter.” She lifts up the sleeve on her left hand. There are deep scars across her pale flesh. “Doesn’t much matter what I say. I know that.”

She slides the cigarette in between his trembling lips as he watches her, confused. She flashes him a sad smile and walks away. He watches her go, never rising from the powder.

Charlie walks for what seems like miles before she hears the crack of a gunshot across the still of the night. She walks three flights up some snow-dusted steps and unlocks the door to her apartment, closing it behind her, shutting out the cold.



**Shovana Thulung**

**Untitled Two  
Gaelle Robin**

as we crossed the granite footbridge above the charles, he says look to either side, you'll get a good idea of what you've fallen into. I'd been holding my breath since interstate 95, since I could taste salt bay on my sandpaper tongue. I exhale, watch a stream of blue leave my wet lung, cut through the thick tawny smog that coats us and say cityscapes have never really been my thing anyway. the way these dingy skylines are marred with unmoving machinery scratching gaps into the stratosphere, pissing cancer into what is destined to trickle down our throats, what is destined to puddle into well water. not so sweet is it? my mouth is muddled by the ill-fate that we'll just conform to catching this shit on our thirsty dog day lips instead of doing something about it.

as we approached the train stop, we felt the roar of the track. I jumped the fence to catch it, but much to his prediction it was darting off before my feet hit the platform. most of my lovers will leave me this way. jumping fences without so much as a goodbye or a decent reason why. perhaps these lovers call me pollution. the chemicals I spill downstream: how I will chug and chug at the mouths of their rivers until I am swimming in the oceans I have swallowed for them, choked up before I can ask for low tide, gawking at perpetually darkened skies. no polaris to guide me home, nor a sun-reflecting crescent to pull me back and despite the whitecaps in these harbors, perhaps I've learned to float belly up, to pull myself out of this.

perhaps these lovers will always call me pollution. perhaps I am destined to puddle into someone else's quench. and how grateful they will sip.



**Duy Le**





**In John We Trust: Cannibalism in a Can: The South Pacific Cargo  
Cult of "John Frum"**  
**John Edwards**

“Where are you from?”

“United States.”

“What is your name?”

“John.”

“Hey, I am John, too!”

Although the polite fisherman was dressed like a mere native, in imported out-of-date Salvation Army garb straight out of “That Seventies Show,” I couldn’t believe that he was neither an AWOL backpacker nor an unemployed Import-Export artist.

For real, he was a local.

“When my mother gave birth to me,” she was divorced from her husband,” John related sadly. “She denied that I was a bastard, but the other villagers threw stones at her.” Thus, they were forced out of Vanuatu--“and now we live here,” he added for effect.

“That’s a very sad story,” I replied with mental alertness, hoping for the sake of a formulating magazine pitch that he would say more.

“When I asked who my real father was, she just said ‘John Frum.’”

I had read a brief section on Oceanic cargo cults in my classic used Moon *South Pacific Handbook*, still pretty much the bible of time travel in Polynesia and Melanesia, but I never expected to actually meet one of its members, albeit one of obvious European descent!

Aitutaki, Cook Islands, was a long way away from Tanna in Vanuatu, where the cult formed after an American serviceman dressed in Navy whites named “John” came during World War II, bearing gifts, mostly canned goods and processed meals.

Including “Spam” (™)!

As the legend goes, when everyone asked “Where Is John From?” the fledgling cult supplied a suitably outlandish surname: *Frum*.

They all are still awaiting John Frum’s second coming armed with profits and plenty.

Thus, one of the world’s most used conversation starters might have also been the origination of one of the world’s strangest wacko religions: “The John Frum Cargo Cult.”

One of the main beliefs of all cargo cults is that if the proper ceremonies were held, uncounted riches would be lavishly sent from some heavenly place. John Frum represented the spirits of their dead ancestors, and the “European” colonialists who had usurped their wealth, but were still willing to return it. The cargo cult members built modest replicas of airports and planes out of twigs to try to activate shipments of numinous cargo out of thin air.

John Frum devotees are more patriotic “Americans” than your average Joe in Guam, an actual American protectorate, even if most of the islands upon which they live are independent nations tied to the French or Australians, many of them with tattoos on their chests and backs saying “USA”!

Even today, in parts widely stretching from New Guinea to Vanuatu, such products as “John Fromm Soap” can be found, as well as vintage cans of “Campbell’s Soup” and antique bottles of “Coca-Cola.”

Not to mention, expired “Pringles” and “Milo.”

And wherever John Frum cultists are, especially in the former “New Hebrides,” there are pro-American barefoot GI reenactors with bamboo rifles and Bald Eagle tattoos raising the “Old Glory.”

James Michener’s book *Tales of the South Pacific*, upon which the famous Rogers and Hammerstein musical is based, is still one of the most popular reads among locals. Probably because not much has changed since World War II. Even so, anthropologists believe the cult today is based upon a much older belief system involving European colonialists who did not work hard like the locals but instead wrote down lists on paper, before magical Christmas Day-like supplies and largesse were landed for everyone.

As I journeyed with John past coral reefs and virgin beaches on deserted islands called “motus,” we pulled up in front of some palms and set about capturing lunch.

John dug a hole in the sand and filled it with corals, then after catching a bunch of glittery fish in his net, he set about lighting the “umu” with some dead palm leaves. With fresh coconut juice dripping like jism down his mouth, John cooked us up a feast fit for a drill sergeant.

I felt a little like a losing contestant on “Survivor.”

But then John pulled out a bottle of wretched *vin de table* imported from French Polynesia and said, “Can you open this?” Luckily my handy dandy Swiss Army Knife had a rudimentary corkscrew.

But I think it was the “can opener” he was most into.

Lightly pressing John for more info on the cult, I waited until he settled upon with gravitas, “I guess John Frum is our Jesus. We believe in both of them. . . .”

Then John produced out of nowhere some “Kava,” a mildly

hallucinogenic herb called “piper methysticum” from the root of the *yanggona* plant, which when wrapped in a T-shirt and dipped in Fiji-brand bottled water looks like dirty dishwater, and tastes like it too.

Within seconds my tongue went numb, then my entire mouth.

Out of the fire came the staples of cooked taro and yams, which I had trouble eating since I couldn’t yet taste them. Neither could I identify the fish we were eating, except that they were fresh.

But I was definitely enjoying the “Kava Klatch.”

“If we perform our dances, worship magic stones, and drink Kava,” John said, pausing slightly to gulp. “Then John Frum will return to us with more gifts.” Not just cigarettes and chocolates, but also outboard motors and television sets.

Once, the locals practiced polygamy and penis wrapping, but John says the Presbyterians from Scotland put an end to all that.

Not to mention, “cannibalism.”

With a sleepyhead Kava buzz, I wondered idly, as I slowly rolled over onto my side for maybe a light snooze, what would be the next course?

John just sat there with a vague vampire smile, sticking a kebab skewer of stale marshmallows into the fire. . . .

## **Mahendra's Last Story**

### **Mahendra Waghela**

Mahendra crossed his forties and felt the dark void after he sent out his 701st story. He ignored this strange mental blankness for some time. His non-productive gap grew from days to weeks to months. Every few days he sat down in front of his old computer, wrote a few indifferent pages, and stood up in disgust. He would read what he had written and curse bitterly: "Is this me? Am I reduced to this kind of crap?"

Another birthday bypassed him.

His editor friend suggested the idea of a break in routine: "A complete change of surrounding will put you back in circulation."

Mahendra booked his ticket in hurry, and went off to a nearby hill station to relax. But his gift of writing, his docile muse, his act of merciless self-discipline, that white-hot inspiration, the smooth flow of effortless words, all that he had taken for granted for so many years, had vanished. A quiet panic started to build inside his slight frame. He began to see what greatest of writers feared the most: he had written himself dry to the point of no return.

He remembered the first book he read and enjoyed. He remembered one-legged John Silver from *The Treasure Island*, and tried white rum as the last desperate attempt to drown his private demon. Within a week, he had to be hospitalized. "You have no enzymes to digest alcohol," the doctor announced after looking at the lab report. His wife stood by his bedside all the time; his friends, his relatives, and well-wishers came over to console him. Mahendra recovered from the prolonged illness but he knew that he was truly alone in this world now.

Questions whirled inside his shrinking head: Is this why Hemmingway slashed his wrist and put a full stop on his life? Or did he shot himself? Is this how Raymond Chandler - his favourite crime writer fell from grace? What was that rumour about James Joyce pushing his wife to have an affair to revive himself?

He solemnly assured his dutiful wife and requested to be left alone. She took the kids along and decided to stay with her parents for a few days.

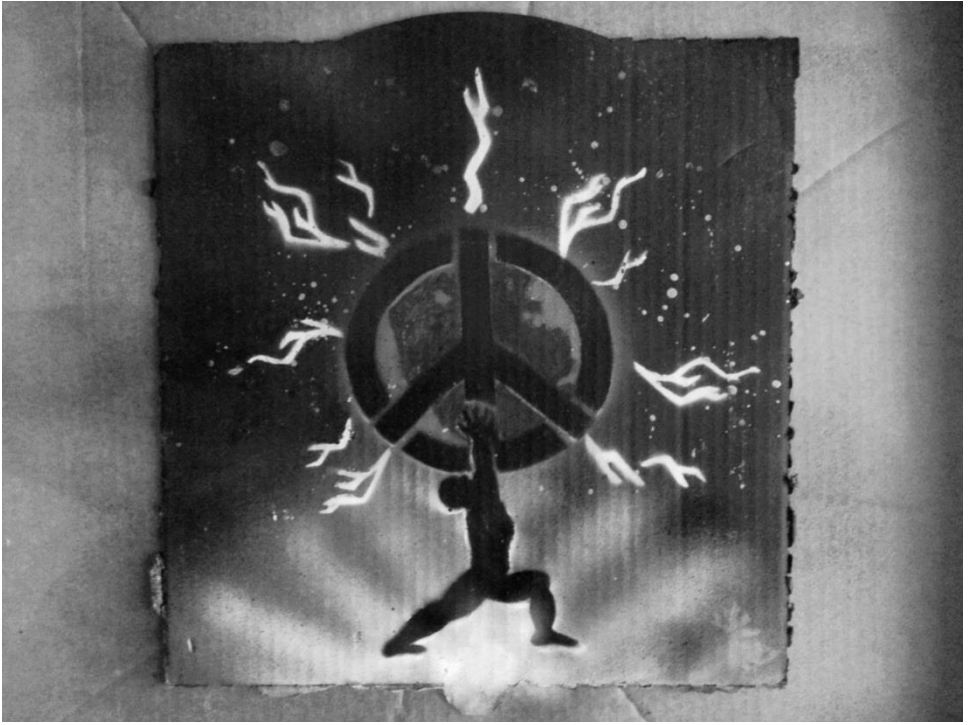
Now, he decided, was the time to pull down the final curtain. “I am my most desperate character,” he mumbled and went out to buy a bottle of rat poison.

He had read enough of ‘Forensic Procedures for Writers’ to make an embarrassing mistake. He made a generous cheese sandwich and sat down to relish his last dinner at his writing desk. A full stomach with unsaturated fat also ruled out the possibility of vomiting the poison.

To add a final macabre touch to his plight, he wrote furiously for a few minutes, and hit the ‘send’ button. Task over, he happily tilted the brown bottle till nothing was left inside.



**Shovana Thulung**



**Warrior of Peace (Aurora Borealis) Valdón Ross**

**Art that Bleeds is only Skin Deep**

**Valdón Ross**

*Two musicians sit in a booth; one is smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee.*

*MUSICIAN A appears to be in his late 30s wears slacks, a blazer, and a hat reminiscent of a bluesman. He began performing solo acoustic folk songs on street corners in his teens. After signing a major record deal he adapted his style to mesh more with what the record executives want. Though not without with resistance. He is well known in the music industry, especially for his songwriting ability, but he isn't well known to the mainstream. Those who have covered his songs have met more success than he has.*

*MUSICIAN B appears much younger physically but is in his late 20s. He is in torn pants, a t-shirt, and a vest. He is an independent musician, who has*

*managed a taste of mainstream success and established a wide ring of dedicated fans in only a couple years – a feat MUSICIAN A is still struggling with. He has also progressed into other genres of music beyond the folk-punk roots that attracted him to MUSICIAN A in the first place.*

*When MUSICIAN B was just starting his career, he sought MUSICIAN A for advice. They became friends, but differences in artistic concept and MUSICIAN B's success drove them apart. They have not spoken for a long time. MUSICIAN A still holds some bitterness.*

*On the radio a cover of “All Along the Watchtower” begins to play.*

A: I hate it when a band makes it off a song they didn't write.

B: You got something to say?

A: I don't get it. I've spent my career writing my own music. Then some rebel with a six-string comes and rips-off one of my licks. BAM! Suddenly he's a star... and I did all the work.

B: Maybe it isn't the content of the song, but the presentation that mattered.

A: You trying to say something?

B: Only if you were. (*Beat. A lights a cigarette and pours a cup of coffee while glaring at B.*) You sure you wanna have this talk?

A: Spare me, junior.

B: Well, alright then – have it your way gramps. ... Your music is stale. You've been singing to the same rhythm ever since you signed onto the band-wagon.

A: (*Grunts.*) At least I write my own music.

B: You know, I was famous before I covered your song –

A: This isn't about that...

B: Then why'd you bring me out here?



A: You brought yourself.

B: If you got something to say, you should just say it.

A: ... It's not important. (*Beat. A Offers a cigarette but B declines.*) I've seen nobodies become somebodies without any depth to their work.

B: This concept of nobodies and somebodies is in your head. Who's to argue if it sells anyhow?

A: You don't get it. Do you?

B: What's the matter? C'mon it's just a job – I just play to make a buck. Maybe sleep with a few –

A: It's not about the money, son! It's not *just* a job – it's *art*!

B: Cool it – don't burst a blood vessel...

A: (*Stubs out his cigarette to light a new one.*) It's just a job he says...

B: Why are you so hostile? (*Beat.*) Inner anger turned outward – (*A turns away*) now that's art... You don't reflect much do you?

A: ... On things you'll never know even. (*Stubs out cigarette again to light a new one.*)

B: (*Chuckles.*) You know, there is a difference between you and me.

A: You don't say.

B: I hold no illusions about what I do. I play music for a living. I'm a rockstar – sex, self-destruction, all the cliché extravagance. I know my music isn't going to change the world – maybe a couple isolated lives, but nothing major –

A: Where's the depth in that?

B: It brings enjoyment to many people – music is great entertainment. But it is only as deep as the audience makes it – and I'm afraid too many are like you –

A: I'm a sophisticated man.

B: Intellectually – sure... Emotionally, not so much. You're not too well-rounded. You're afraid of yourself. You keep everything on the surface... Maybe you are a sophisticated man in that regard, and that is why you lash out at me for your own misgivings about the music industry.

A: Piss off!

B: I rest my case. (*Beat.*) So why did you ask me here?

A: (*Stare.*)

B: You asked me here for a reason –

A: It's not important.

B: Still singing that "Woe is Me" ballad? Give it up, gramps! – You wanna talk about music and art?

A: What do you know about art? You sold your music to the pimps of commercial advertisement.

B: Your concept of art runs in circles. Look back on my albums you see evolution, mind, body, spirit. It's a healing process. Look at your albums and it's just stagnant. There is no change, there is no process. You've been writing the same songs with different words, while I've been going my own way exploring new ground – evolving myself. And you're calling me a sell-out because I found a way to get my music to more people? (*Beat.*)

A: I give the fans what they want.

B: They don't really want it – they just relate to it. We all have these events: despair, suffering, heartache... They want to move beyond it. Expression and relation is only the first step of the process. Next comes resolution, acceptance – moving on. The thing they all know they need but cannot see it on their own. They need us to realize it for them. To guide them. (*Beat.*) Now here's the trick – moving on – it only works if you actually do it. You don't want to be a parrot always saying the same thing but never delivering. That is the difference between you and me.

A: (*Beat.*) I don't get you.

B: Now since it's not going to kill you, you mind telling me why you asked me here?

A: You don't actually believe what you're saying do you? I thought living some life would have actually beaten some sense into you. Still as naïve as ever, you've never had to suffer. Born to a silver spoon.

B: I was naïve enough to believe you to be some mentor once upon a time, I give you that. But you are just jaded. You say your pessimism is just being real, is just being pragmatic. But you're the one that's blind.

A: (*A is building in emotional intensity.*) If you've been where I've been, seen what I've seen –

B: Then what? I might be a grumpy old man too? Afraid to feel the warmth of the sun on a cold winter day? You've closed yourself off to life.

A: And you've never lived! You've hidden behind privilege and success. You've never had a taste of what it is like on the darker side of life. Yet you mean to tell me something about moving on? About healing? You and your bullshit utopian dreams! Life isn't like that! People don't work that way! (*A has reached a denouement in his emotional crescendo. He is calming. Vulnerable.*) Look at yourself, you'd just as soon step on the neck of the man who gave you direction than to give him a helping hand.

B: (*B has a sudden sense of compassion in his voice, serious and penetrating like tempered steel.*) So the world isn't perfect. But that doesn't mean we should give up hope. That we shouldn't put forth the effort to change hearts and minds. Even if the winter storm chills our bones and clouds the sky – the sun is still shining behind it all. (*Beat. Sensing that A has lowered his defenses.*) You asked me here for a reason.

A: (*Beat.*) I don't know what to think– my career isn't going nowhere. (*B resists the urge to speak and simply listens.*) ... I was thinking you might have some advice – maybe... you'd like to work together and make some songs?

B: (*B speaks plainly with the unexpected compassion*) You want music with real depth? Look at the way music affects the fans. They like music that says what they're thinking, they love to relate to it – to know they're not alone. That is on the surface. That is what they want. But like most of us who have confused what we want with what we need they are left unfulfilled... Real depth is going beyond that, giving them what they crave. What they need. There is all this suffering in society, and if you only take the words your fans feel and give it back to them it is only adding to it. You keep them stuck. And you stay stuck with them. Clinging and grasping to the refuse of a world that could have been. What you have to do is move beyond that, take the next step – shoot out into nothingness and move past the popular symbols and scripts. Reimagine life. Give them back their hope. How can the fans start to feel better about themselves if the artist never evolves? Their journey happens through you. You've got to dig deeper to make real depth and then you have to take responsibility and make something of it. If you continue to be miserable – or writing songs like you actually are even when you aren't -- your fans will stay miserable too. There is no progress when the artist fails to take the journey... (*Beat.*) Here's some advice: (*Quoting the advice A gave B when they met the very first time.*) "Start calling your own shots." ... Quit your band. Leave the record company. Go back to making music on street corners... rediscover purpose in what you sing. Play what is in your heart. (*Stands up to leave.*) And take off those bullet-proof pajamas, gramps. (*Exits. A continues to sit while smoking.*)

A: Young and arrogant... just like I *used* to be. (*Beat. Pours more coffee and sits starrng out the door.*)



**Jeremy Mejia**

**The Big Horn**  
**Edward W. L. Smith**

I wrap my hands around it,  
cool 'til my touch warms it up.  
Spread my legs, take a firm stance,  
weight pulling my neck and back.  
Make it wet, and maintain it,  
lest the smooth flow disappear.  
Breathing harder and harder,  
double tonguing gets applause.  
I growl and my lips tingle.  
I bite and I hear a squeal.  
Going down low as I can,  
I feel the vibrations grow.  
The plangent tones and screaming  
resonate in my pelvis.  
Energy builds to climax,  
then resolves into quiet.  
I clean it, put it away,  
and wait to perform again.  
Evincing passion, this Big Horn,  
B-flat tuning, tenor range.

## Into Forever

### John Vicary

“We are the lunatics, invisible until you teach yourself how to look.” Dave leaned on his shovel and took a cigarette from his pocket. “Benny used to say that. I think he was right.”

“You crazy? You know that's not allowed!” I hissed.

Dave inhaled without looking at me. “You want one? I got a whole pack.”

“No. What's gotten into you?” I waved away the smoke, but no one was watching. There must be a funeral about to begin.

“You're not listening, Brother. When did you stop listening to the truth?”

I gripped the shovel. “I'm listening, Dave. We're lunatics. I got it.”

Dave blew another stream of smoke into the crisp morning air. “No, the point is that we're invisible. Mostly. Until you learn to see. Then you can't *stop* seeing us. Benny knew it. He was always yammering on about this kind of shit, but we never listened to him, you know? We should have listened.”

“Well, we were kind of busy not getting killed and all,” I said. “And listening to the CO. That son of a bitch was *loud*. Had a set of lungs like a bullhorn, remember?”

Dave stared into the distance. “It wasn't like that.”

“It was,” I said. “I don't blame you for trying to forget it. Are you going to help or what?”

Dave frowned. “God, I hate this assignment.” He let the shovel fall to the ground and picked up the tamper instead.

“Could be worse,” I said.

He shrugged.

“It could always be worse.” I evened up the hole and wiped the sweat from my brow. This was hot work, even this early in the morning, but it beat having to present arms in front of the civilians. I didn't like that at all. They always cried, which reminded me of Rebecca, the last time I'd seen her, and I

didn't want to think about that. "Okay, match the number. Plot 4221. Urn 4221. Witness."

"Witnessed." Dave said. He didn't bother double checking the numbers anymore. I moved onto the next space and he began tamping plot 4221.

A rifle report echoed over the hills. I straightened, ignoring the kink in my back. My hand jerked by reflex to my brow in a sharp salute and I sensed rather than saw Dave doing the same. We remained at attention through the following volleys and until the last notes of *Taps* faded.

The rows of headstones stretched out in front of us, the precision of the markers an aberration in the tranquility of the otherwise natural landscape. When I'd first seen it, I'd been humbled by the sheer multitudes. There was both horror and comfort in seeing so many of my fallen brethren in one place. Some had died in the line of duty while others had come back years later to rest here in honor. After a while I numbed to the sight of the dress whites folding the flag and hearing the bugle's mournful call. Soon I only saw the headstones, one after another, stretching into eternity. Mine would line the path one day, too, but the thought didn't bring the shiver it once had. I was dulled to anything but my unending labor.

The flick of the lighter broke my reverie and a prickle of annoyance crawled under my skin as I watched Dave light another cigarette. "C'mon. We're behind schedule. You don't have time for that," I said.

"Who cares?" Dave asked and sucked in a lungful of smoke. "Benny used to say—"

"Benny's dead." I said. "Someone like us buried him, right over there in row three. We're burying someone just like him right now. We might be invisible, but there's work to do. So pick up that shovel, shut up and haul dirt until fucking *Taps* again, will you?"

We worked in silence then, adding rows together into forever.



## **Psalms: Collectors**

### **Weasel**

“You have one new message. It is voice: ‘Hi, this is a message for Izzy —. This is Miranda from Cash Advance and this is an attempt to collect a debt, we will need a return call.’”

The phone buzzed violently at 4AM for only a few seconds before the message was left. It appeared that the rumors of collectors having lives was rather false as Izzy deleted it from his inbox. No matter, they would call again, maybe shortly, or in a few hours. It was not a matter he looked heavily into, especially so early in the morning. He placed the phone by his television where it stayed for the most part when he was home. Phone calls were not something he had hoped for. Izzy grabbed a half-empty bottle of water and gulped the final drops of it before tossing the cheap plastic into a can of unopened envelopes. Past due notices never stated itself on the envelope as they did on television, that was the trick. You’d still have to open them eventually, but he tossed them and never looked inside them.

Izzy laid back onto the bed, the roar of his A/C unit blasting through the silence of the room. It was on most of the night, helped him breathe while sleeping. Suffocation was happening too often lately. His eyes closed, capturing the last image of the off-white ceiling above him, his eye-lids holding it warmly. The last image before the next interruption. The last meditation before realizing nirvana is not available at this time, please call again. Though bland, it was the last minute peace he could carry with him.

He turned over to look at his partner, inched closer to have some warmth in the morning. Kissing the sleeper on the cheek, Izzy lay there for a moment before feeling the body next to him shift and turn over, unknowing of the fact that he was there. He breathed in and let out a deep sigh before sitting up and turning on the television. Infomercials were the savior of his sanity, the escape from the real because they were the only thing available. The news didn’t start for another hour, cartoons for another two, and although he could read, the light would have to be turned on. Izzy did not want to disturb the peace because he could not afford the ability to sleep. Television on low volume was his last resort.

He sat there, looking at the images on the screen, but not really paying attention. Torrential rains echoed violently as he was flustered with the

negative amount of money in his bank account. Exhausted, for he had woken up too many mornings to really gather a good few hours of sleep, he closed his eye and leaned back against the partially white, rough-textured wall against his bed thinking to himself how easy it would be to just have been a traveling religious fanatic. Shoving papers in people's hands, praising Allah or a cross dressing Jesus Christ that allowed the earth to be formed in the matter of a few stroking minutes. Tossing books of ticky-tacky scripture filled with dribble-drabble psalms of Holy Tuesday. Maybe a bomb would be dropped in his name; the others have theirs as well as a spare few parts from their crew team members. They could be poor, no one would say a thing. The Universe was funny that way.

Izzy closed his eyes, listened to the smooth, smooth jazz of the television, the clanking of his phone against the pile of change that lay around on an island of books, paper and other sloppy pilings of forgotten stuff. There was never a moment in his life where the loudness had reached the sanctity of the early morning, but it was a realization that came all too soon. Being broke was never really a way of life, it's an anthem that stays with everyone. The unfortunate scar upon the backs, and though most are broken, Izzy hadn't reached the empty spots yet. He was full of them, full of bad decisions and empty shells; full of irritable dreams that he still wanted to reach. It was only getting harder to keep them in the darkness. Some nights end up like this morning, sleepless, thinking, solving the problem of achievement against the cold air.

The machine was against him, blocking his view from the visions he'd hoped to achieve. That's what they would all say as they injected bug poison into their veins to cop a fix, compensating because they're too broke to get the real, pure white powder. They, the underground hipsters plucking fingernails from the cracks of walls because their friends got caught between the cement stages of the new era that begins each year at midnight when the fires burst through the dark—the ones that forgot to celebrate accordingly. They, hanging out in needle-infested back alleys because the rent was due a month ago, but the addiction burns like a caught cigarette in the backs of their throats. Priorities must be straight in order to make the decision easy for them. They are not the enlightened ones; neither are they, the ones who've sold everything aside from their mother into slavery, coming close several times, to keep their lives in order, straightened out and parallel with the addiction that severs most from the physical world—the world that requires a paycheck. Manna will

not be dropping down for a few more days. They'll sing again for it one day, if either hasn't forgotten the sacred.

He stopped taking melatonin for he wanted to sleep naturally; to feel the tossing of the bed, the turning of each spring as the body curves and moves over them. He wanted to hear the dogs howl at the moon, invisible, black, hidden in front of the world; to experience the night life while he rested himself for the labor of the morning. He couldn't hear them this morning. They weren't asleep, but he couldn't hear them as he felt his feet walking, hands opening the door to the darkened hallway—no need for light as they've memorized everything on the ground before them. He was dressed, and although he wanted nothing more than to keep walking, make it to the state line and have a new life, the autopilot sat him in his car and he was off as the sun slowly rose in the sky. The dew still sitting on his window, disrupted by the windshield blades switching like a metronome, conducting the music of the car.

He drove off to his day; the day of “how can I help you,” and “I cannot account for anything that another representative has told you, but it appears your problem lies elsewhere.” He'll arrive at his destination at his normal time, fifteen minutes before opening the business, walk to the fax machine and send the same message to quench the thirst of his debt, only society can't collect on it. There were days he never expected a call back from some people, and there were days where he stayed next to his phone, even if it were turned off for non-payment.

He'll sing the same anthem tomorrow, the next day or any other day until there was a reason for him to stop singing it; until the road he imagined had finally appeared on the map. Running around with outdated material isn't helpful for the soul, but the soul can be an irritable beast—chained beneath the mistakes. She rose in the morning, tinting the sky with a harsh, hellishly orange glow. It blinded him as he drove, but he knew where the road was. The radio tripping, talking, buzzing against the static of early morning shows, and barely waking commutes. How easy it would be to keep driving. And though roads connect and return, bridge and complete, turns are still an easy item to miss. How fickle the universe can be.



**Grace Mack**

## **Secratine**

**Alyssa Cressotti**

“Secratine isn’t a word, and whoever told you it was is a liar,” Fink was laughing, but it was the sort of laugh one gives in place of full-on derision. No one there had the balls to argue with him. Finkelstein, Fink for short, was a small guy, thin and reedy with closely cropped blond hair and tattoos that covered his arms and crept underneath his shirt. And it wasn’t that he was a particularly intimidating or bad sort, it was just that he didn’t think twice about stomping someone’s face in. In general, he was affable and quite funny, but with enough alcohol and anger he could completely transform into some kind of hostile ass-kicking machine.

Currently, Fink was driving us to the 7-11 where he was going to buy us Marlboro reds and talk some shit with the other townies. “Secratine doesn’t need to be a *word*; it could be a name or something...” I said to him. He just snorts in response. Perversion of the Secratine was the name of our band, and he was the third person to bring up the fact that secratine isn’t really a word. “Eh, whatever. Still sounds pretty awesome. Right?” I sound pitiful; like I’m waiting for some sort of approval from the last person who has the right to approve. What was he, anyway, ‘cept some old guy who is nothing but a former punk, former skinhead, now currently a former Marine. He’s not saying anything. He reaches over with his tattooed arm and punches my leg—“You still wearing these?” and of

course he's referring to the bleach stained jeans. I'm not saying anything, either.

We pull up to the harshly lit beacon. The 7-11 is like a shining oasis at this time of night and all sorts of people are hanging out in front. Coffee Man, the homeless guy that walks the avenue, is trying to chat up Stanley Alcazar, who at the moment is holding court with the other kids from the high school. I heard last week Stanley beat some kid half-to-death with a chain. Probably not true, but if it is, then maybe Coffee Man should leave him alone. Fink hops out and bangs on the side of the truck. I can't see into the flat bed but a Fred Perry jacket flops onto the pavement next to me. I toss the jacket over the truck to Fink and he catches it and clutches it as though it were a football. "Get out, kiddies, rides over," he hollers and bangs the truck again. Sean finally pops his head up and grins at me. Suzie is struggling to yank on her ugly leopard leggings, one of her booted feet props up near the back window. It's cold and I suddenly wish I was still holding the jacket.

Fink goes inside and I stand there like an asshole for a few minutes, waiting for Sean and Suzie to get out of the truck. They're whispering to each other and I can't make out what they're saying. I probably shouldn't be trying to listen, but I don't care. I nod over to Stanley; I toss a cold quarter at Coffee Man, and I lean against the truck for a few more minutes, waiting there like an asshole. Finally Suzie comes and stands next to me. Her skirt is short and suddenly the ugly leopard leggings aren't so ugly anymore.

"Are you going to the show on Thursday?"

"Maybe," I say, and I can't tell if she's coming on to me. She smiles, the light from the 7-11 is glinting off her lip ring.

Just then Fink pushes open the door and comes out into the parking lot. He tosses me the pack of cigarettes. My middle finger extends itself before I can even think. Sean is somewhere behind the truck laughing at nothing.

"Don't get all pissy just because secratine isn't a word. It ain't my fault you guys don't have a dictionary."

## **The Carnival**

### **Nancy Gauquier**

It's dark, a full moon and stars piercing the sky. A night edged with silver. This time, I'm leaving for good. I have to be quick and quiet. I'm afraid my mother can hear my heart beating. I drop the battered old suitcase out the window and crawl out after it, in the dead of night.

I'll walk down the street and keep walking. Maybe hitch a ride, I have no idea where, just away.

I notice dark shapes by the baseball field across the street, where the carnival comes every year. They've started to set up. Some of the rides are already standing. There's the Octopus, which I never ride, I get too dizzy.

The rides hover in dark space, all unlit, nobody milling about, no screams.

I cross the street. I want a closer look. It seems deserted. The air seems empty without without the scents of hot dogs, cotton candy, popcorn and soda spilled everywhere. It's the abracadabra before the moment when life springs into being, out of the black hat of the night.

“Hey! Hi! Who are you?”

I jump and drop my suitcase. “I'm Anna. I live across the street.”

He holds out his hand, so I take it. A strong hand. He's husky, in his early or mid-twenties, with light brown hair combed back up in a wave.

“My name's Vin. We just set up. Come on over.” He gives my suitcase a glance. “Is that heavy?”

“No, it's all right.”

He grabs it anyway, and I follow him to an alcove between two tents. We sit on crates, joining his friend, and he introduces me.

“This is Anna. She lives across the street.”

They are drinking from cans of beer.

“Jack.”

Tall, dark, and angular, but gorgeous, so I make an effort not to stare. He looks at me with a surprised smile.

“What are you doing out at this time of night? What's with the suitcase?”

I shrug. “I'm running away.”

He peers at me through the smoke of his cigarette.

“Why are you running away?”

Vin offers a can of soda from a barrel of ice, and I take it, as he asks, “Where are you going?”

“I don't know. Just away . . . Can I work in the carnival?”

They laugh. Vin says, “Afraid not. They're only hiring thugs like us.”

Jack nods. “How old are you?”

“Old enough.”

They look at each other with their eyebrows raised.

Jack says, “Listen, you can't run away. You'll get in trouble.”

Vin agrees. “There's some jerks out there. Just hang on and wait 'til you're older.”

“But you don't know what it's like. . . . My mother is driving me crazy.”

It sounds lame, but how can I explain? She's always hovering over me. She has no life of her own and her compulsive anxiety drowns everything.

Vin asks, “What about your father?”

I think of when my father said he'd teach me to dance. I was surprised he noticed I was still alive.

I'd been trying to teach myself. When I came home from school; I didn't change right away into jeans.

I put my record player in the living room and lost track of the time.

He came home and caught me dancing backwards with an imaginary partner.

I thought he would laugh and put me down, like he always did, if he noticed me at all, but he surprised me. He said he'd teach me; he used to win prizes for dancing.

He took me into his arms. The song was Put Your Head on My Shoulder. I never thought he could be so smooth. We floated and I let the music lift me away. I remembered the father I used to love when I was seven and wrote his initials everywhere.

Suddenly, his hands were on my breasts. I tried to push them away, but he was too strong.

We struggled and fell onto the floor.

He fell on top of me, he was heavy, and trying to push his finger up through my cotton underpants. I was pinned beneath him. I was scared, but he couldn't see me, his eyes were wide staring crazy, and I screamed.

He stopped. He shifted and I slipped out from under him, ran to my room and shut the door.

“He hates me. He doesn't care if I'm alive or dead.”

I don't really believe that, I know that he would prefer that I was dead, and he'd never have to look at me again.

Jack drops his cigarette but into his empty beer can. “Don't you have any friends?”

“Not really.”

That's putting it mildly. I'm at the bottom of the pecking order at school, and have been since the first grade.

I watch the smoke escape from Vin's mouth. “Isn't there anyplace else you can go?”

“No. . . . I go to the library. . . . I go into the woods. . . . My parents hate each other. I beg her to get a divorce but she won't.”

They are solemn and they look at me. I know they don't know what to say. I don't know what to say. I know there is nothing they can do.

Jack glances at Vin. “Well, you don't have to go back right away.”

Good. I don't want to go back. “How long have you been with the carnival?”

They both answer, “Too long!”, as if they have said this many times.

Vin stands up. “I can't wait to get back to my wife and baby.” He pulls out his wallet and shows me a photo. “Teresa, the baby, she won't even remember me.”

We sit there and they drink their beer and I sip at my soda, things have gotten too solemn, and then somehow they start telling jokes.

“A man goes to a shrink and says, 'Doctor, my wife is unfaithful to me. Every night she goes to Larry's Bar and picks up men. In fact, she sleeps with anyone who asks her! I'm going crazy. What do you think I should do? The doctor says, 'Relax, take a deep breath and calm down. Now, tell me, where is Larry's Bar?’”

“A woman put an ad in the paper. 'Looking for a man who won't beat me up or run away from me and is great in bed.' She got lots of phone calls but met someone perfect at her door one day. The man she met said, 'Hi, I'm Bob. I have no arms so I won't beat you up and no legs so I won't run away.' So she says, 'What makes you think you're great in bed?' He says, 'I rang the doorbell, didn't I?’”

Some of them I get and some of them I don't and I don't have any jokes. I know they are trying to cheer me up and these are the only jokes they know. I'm grateful because they are letting me be there. It seems like I have known them forever. I think they are magical creatures, like large leprechauns.



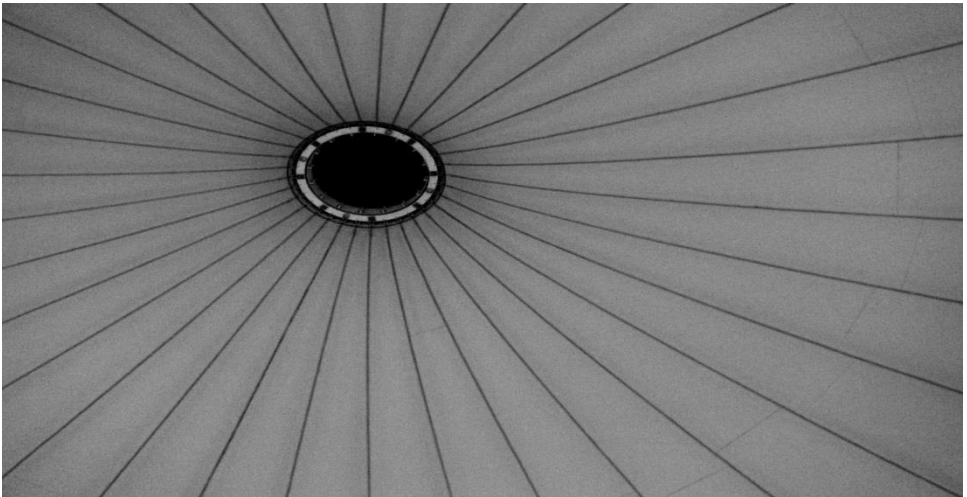
Then Vin says, "You'll have to get home soon."

We look around glumly at the ghost of the carnival. Jack stands, tosses his can and says, "Let's give her a ride on the Octopus!"

We run to the Octopus. They take the cover off of one of the seats. They make a step for me with their hands, and I climb in.

They can't put the machinery on, it would make too much noise, so they push it around by hand.

It circles in slow motion until I am poised at the very top, so high there is only the black space of sky. No lights, no sound, only a silence that pulses like blood through the heart.



**Safyah Alam**



**Grace Mack**

## **Nature**

**Dustin Pickering**

Nature, the mighty  
grandeur eclipsed by silence--

the fight entrances me.  
I enter the silence fondly.

But nothing can overcome  
the spade as it turns the seed.

These little digits are chaos  
within the haunting house.



**Karen Boissonneault-Gauthier**

## At the Beer Distributor

### Garth B. Porter

After work, I stop to get a case of beer and find myself standing in line behind a young couple. The girl puts a case on the check-out counter and her boyfriend adds another. "This should last about a week," she says to her boyfriend. She's wearing a halter top, capri pants, and sandals and looks to be about twenty-five. I can't tell if she's making fun of herself or her boyfriend or both. The boyfriend, for his part, offers no reaction. He's tall, probably over six feet and about the same age. Expressionless, as if his mind is on some long ended baseball game or earlier shift at work, he stares straight ahead at the wall of cigarettes behind the counter.

The cashier, a muscular guy in his mid-thirties that I've never seen here before, says nothing. He doesn't ask for their ID's but he looks hesitant, as if he's weighing the consequences of this in his mind. *Sure, they're probably both twenty-one, but what if this girl, who claims to go through two cases a week, looks older than she really is? Perhaps her premature alcoholism has aged her prematurely.* He scans the cases, takes the boyfriend's debit-card, and rings the couple out. Off to his right, a television suspended from the ceiling plays a baseball game. They always play sports at this distributor, usually hockey or baseball.

I stand in line, case of beer in hand, and watch the ball-game while I wait my turn. The halter-top girl and her boyfriend take a case each and head for the exit. The girl, with another week's supply of beer secured, starts talking to the boyfriend about less critical matters. One of their friends is, apparently, a slut of some kind and I can hear the girlfriend explaining why as the couple exits. The boyfriend nods in agreement. I place my case of Yeungling Lager on the counter while the girlfriend's voice fades and then disappears as the door closes behind them.

"How's it going?" I say to the cashier.

He gives me a nod, "Alright," and scans the case. I hand him my debit card and driver's license. We stand in silence as the machine verifies my bank card.

"Thanks, Garth," the cashier says, having gleaned my name from my ID, and he hands my cards back. He puts my receipt on top of the case.

I grab the case with both hands, tell him to have a good night, and head for the exit.

I walk out of the distributor and find the halter-top girl and her boyfriend are long gone. The distributor is in a small strip mall that includes a sandwich shop and an auto parts store. If you take a left out of the parking lot and drive south you find yourself on a winding road that takes you past car dealership after car dealership. Unlike in the suburbs, where car dealerships and retail outlets tend to amass along flat stretches of land with straight roads, the stores and dealerships in this part of town are situated among the glacially formed hills of southwestern Pennsylvania. Directly across the highway from the distributor, a tree covered hill occupied by billboards for cell-phone providers and insurance companies juts several hundred feet in the air. A half-mile north of the distributor, the Liberty tunnel burrows underneath a part of town called Mt. Washington. A half-mile south of the distributor, the road splits into three different routes, each heading off into the hills at slightly different grades.

The sandwich shop next to the distributor is a franchise restaurant. I look inside as I walk by and notice a mother sitting with her son by the window. The boy looks like he's in first grade. He looks up at his mother as he swallows a chunk of sandwich. No one in the restaurant notices me.

I place my case of beer in the trunk and head for the driver's seat. Before I sit down I take a look around. You can't see it, because the hills are blocking out the horizon, but the sun is starting to set. The thin, patchy cirrus clouds overhead are orange on one side and grey on the other. The air is finally starting to turn warm after a long winter. I get into the car and maneuver it from the parking lot out onto a four lane highway (five if you count the bus in the middle of the road). I head north toward the Liberty Tunnel and drive between a bronzeworks and a ramp that leads up to the busway. At the mouth of the Liberty Tunnel, you have to wait at a stoplight underneath an overpass. Pidgeons camp out in the support beams of the road overhead and either side of the underpass is covered in a thick layer of pidgeon shit.

At the light I have two options. I can go straight or I can turn left. Going straight will take me north on I-79. This will lead me back to my parent's house where, at this hour, I know they will be making their after dinner coffee and watching the news. Mom will be dialing in a station

from Pittsburgh and Dad will be pouring Irish creme into his coffee. Soon after they will pass out in their recliners and then Mom will rise to do some last minute work on a potato patch or rock garden before going to bed.

Going left will take me back to Mt. Washington, where I live in a rented house with two other guys. My roommates there will be staring into their computer screens. One will be editing sound files that he recorded at a recent concert and the other will be making a website for a local family farm. This is their work. I make the left and head for Mt. Washington. I have a case of beer, after all. When I get home I make chicken and rice for lunch at work the next day.



**Emily Ramser**

## Day 2: The Moth Saga

### P. Bloodsworth

#### I.

I'm off to the garage.  
The moth is there.  
It's really quite depressing.

I thought it was a stone  
(until a kick from Xavier sent its wings rustling)  
and I made a vain attempt at a rescue  
only to have it sitting on my shelf  
where I must watch its slow demise.

I've been watching it die for a couple of days now.

#### II.

I've tried to coax it to move with puffs of smoke but...

it has broken legs...  
and tattered wings...  
and I'm using the wrong kind of motivation apparently

because its latest response has been only  
in slight seizures  
and nervous twitches

It's really quite disturbing.

#### III.

I thought it had laid an egg  
on the cellophane of my pack of cigarettes  
but it was only a drop of blood  
from where its leg had been.

Did you know moths bleed in green?  
They do.  
A limey sorbet of a green that collects itself in pearls.

#### IV.

I found it this morning.

Its normally inquisitive antennae were still  
Twisted and bent into an outreach of demonic horns

as if the very experience of death  
had stolen away its innocence

and made of it, a jaded beast.



Earl M.

**In a Dead Manor**  
**John Grey**

I lose what I have never loved:  
dead flowers, brown grass,  
crumbling high walls,  
the rot of trees  
scarred like frozen scowls,  
the unhinged clapping clapboards,  
the cracks in the roof where rain drips through.

I love what I have never known,  
the young girl on the verge of womanhood,  
for all the wash of silken hair,  
half-open mouth, surprise of eyes,  
the image unclear, unstable,  
struggling against years and shadow,  
grave-yard soil and stones.

I know what I will never lose,  
the brackish thoughts,  
the clouded heart,  
the body bound and broken  
to window chair,  
in cruel demented covenant.

Decaying man,  
putrefying house,  
moldering memory —  
we got this way through living.



## **Fucking Ghosts**

### **Lance Manion**

His views on the fairer sex made him a bit of a dinosaur. Well, that and the armored plates that ran down his back. Luckily for him they weren't visible.

He was strictly in the 'survival of the fittest camp', but this typically didn't present many problems as the girls he typically ran into were firmly ensconced in the 'take anyone with a heartbeat and a decent job' camp.

That was about to change due to his job.

He was the ugly physicist who became the sexual swan.

He was the guy who, while playing around with uncurling the dimensions curled up inside each other, found the hole that wasn't there.

Or wasn't there until he proved it was.

Although the paper he presented was a little short on sizzle it didn't take long for the implications of the discovery to take root.

Females had another tiny hole between their vagina and anus. Not visible with our eyes or even with any technology that currently exists it was there nonetheless. There in the fifth dimension.

Also in the fifth dimension was a tiny little penis tucked under the ball sack of males. And little armored spikes that run down the male spine.

It was all there in the math.

Give him a cocktail napkin, a pencil and twenty minutes and he could show you.

Assuming, of course, you had a strong background in Bosonic string theory. For those who didn't, they relied on the celebrity scientists to explain it all to them. The public couldn't get enough.

Suddenly the ugly physicist was in play.

He went from speaking engagements to talk shows to putting his fifth dimensional penis to work on some of the hottest females on the planet. It became quite fashionable to have your fifth dimension cherry broken by the man who discovered it in the first place.

If you're trying to imagine what went on during one of these sessions let me congratulate you on your enthusiasm for the topic. Not an easy thing to dive into. Before you reach the conclusion that any pleasure derived from this rather odd intercourse was completely in the mind of the deluded partners let me remind you of a certain quantum principle wherein the act of watching matter can affect the observed reality. Or, in this case, recognizing the matter is there in the first place.

I.e. believe that you have a tainthole/taint-gina/tunt and it shall be so.

In fact, reports began to circulate that sex with these new extra-dimensional organs was even better than with the standard 3-D equipment.

Lost in all of the enthusiasm for the quantum fucking fad was the question of why we had these extra holes and penes. Nobody much cared, there had yet to be a case of a girl getting knocked up and delivering a five dimensional baby, no quantum STDs and clean-up was a breeze.

For a few years the physicist was a rock star. The taint was a rock star. Interest in math and science was off the charts.

So much so that eventually they found other holes and other appendages in higher dimensions, including a male hole and a corresponding female member in the nastiest of all dimensions ... the thirteenth.

By the time the big brains started peaking into dimensions in the twenties the human body was little more than Velcro. It was hard to find a square inch of the body that wouldn't hook onto or into another person if they both believed enough. Old people smiled to themselves and said "That explains a lot." Interest in typical pornography disappeared. It was looked at the same way we think of hula hoops and Pet Rocks now. In fact, three dimensional sex itself was viewed as passé. Boring. Sticky. Smelly.

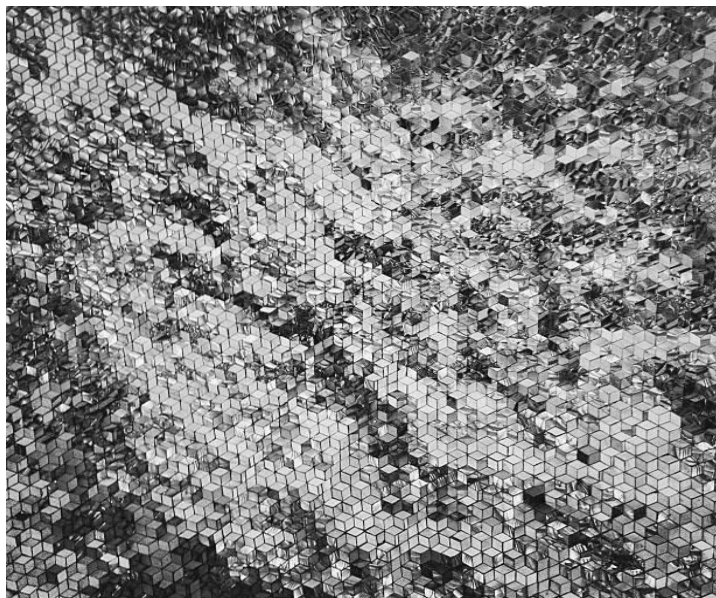
A chore endured only for procreation.

Birthrates plummeted.

In the third dimension anyway.

Before you go and feel sorry for all the newly created baby beings residing in higher dimensions just know most of them stayed curled up in both parents and every other person in the universe.

Until someone with a napkin and a pencil decided to take a look anyway ...



**Gautam Narang**

### **Some Geometrics of the Echo**

**Jim Eigo**

He shot his partner and then he shot himself. In neither case was he notably more successful than he'd been at forging a partnership.

In the hospital room they shared, his partner moaned over and over and over, "Why did you do it, Andy? We were like brothers. Why did you do it?" No fresh iteration brought any new information, nor did it precisely repeat any phrase that preceded it.

Andy (due to the closer range?) had shot himself less unsuccessfully than he had shot his partner, and so, was in no shape to reply. Still, lying quietly on his half of the room, there was enough of him there so he could hear above his respirator's whirr his partner's consistent pattern, or at least he thought he could, though thought as we usually mean it was far beyond his capacities now, enough of him there so he could remark in his head, though not in so many words: *So this is the shape of hell.*

## **Goddamn Asshole Cats**

**David Novak**

So.

I was telling a buddy of mine about this problem I got.

“You see,” I was telling him, “I got this problem. There’s this cat. And this cat, it’s living in the same apartment as me. It’s been living there for a long time, too, way before I bought the place.

“And this cat?

“It’s a real goddamn asshole.

“And not in the normal, everyday kind of ‘yeah, of course it’s an asshole, it’s a cat, all cats are assholes but at least you don’t have to pick up their shit.’ When I say asshole, I mean that this cat is a real, certifiable asshole. Because this cat, it attacks me all the time. For no reason. It starts every morning, right before my alarm clock goes off. It’ll jump up on my bed and scratch me right in the goddamn face. And it keeps on scratching me all day after that. I’ll be in the bathroom shaving, and it’ll take a swipe at my neck. I’m tying my shoes, it’ll jump up on my shoulders and start at the back of my head. I’m eating breakfast, and it jumps in my bowl of cereal, ruins that, and starts swiping at my face. In the middle of the night, I’ll be right about to fall asleep, like right on the cusp, and again, same thing. And this one time, I was on the toilet -”

“Yeah, I get it,” my friend says. “What’s the point?”

“Well, the point is, I’m tired. I can’t get any rest, I’m always so damn afraid. I’m at my wit’s end here. At the end of my rope, reaching the last straw, I’m -”

“Again, I get it.” My friend takes a sip of his beer and smiles at me, all reassuring-like, like he was the absolute expert on cats and asshole cats in particular. “So let me guess. You want to know what you should do.”

“Exactly.”

“It’s easy. Cat scratching you too much? Just get another cat.”

“Another cat?” I ask.

“Yup. Another cat.”

“As in a replacement for this cat, you mean?”

“No,” he says, “I mean, as in a second cat.”

“That’s all you got for me?”

“Well, what did you expect me to say?”

“I don’t know. To maybe get rid of that one cat I got there already?”

“What are you, crazy?” he shouts. “You can’t do that!”

“Why the hell not? It seems to make sense to me. I mean, (a) the cat is an asshole, (b) it scratches me all the time, (c) I don’t want it to scratch me, so (d) I throw it out the door.”

“Because,” he says, “because you can’t just go kicking cats out of apartments. Whether you want to acknowledge it or not, that cat is part of that apartment. It was there when you got there and it’ll be there after you leave. Hell, I bet it’s even worked into your deed or lien or whatever, that that cat has to be there forever. Whether you like it or not, that cat is part of the history of that apartment. And you can’t just go tossing history out the door. And anyways, you do know that there’s a law written somewhere that says if you move into an apartment and there’s a cat there, that cat has the right to stay. Which means you can’t just go kicking it out. Legally speaking and all.”

“That can’t possibly be true.”

“You betcha it is. And even if it wasn’t. You still can’t just go on kicking cats out of apartment. Can you imagine if everywhere, people like you went and did something like that? You’d see cats just being tossed from every door, thrown up in the air like it’s some type of goddamn cat blizzard. And you know where’d they’d all go?”

“Out of my house?”

“No. In the street. Now that would be dangerous.”

“You know what’s dangerous? This one cat indoors. In my doors. Do you even know where it scratched me when I was on the toilet?”

“No, and I don’t want to know,” he says sipping his beer, washing the taste of that image out of his mouth. “If you think that cat is dangerous indoors, imagine a bunch of illegal cats outdoors. Christ, you’d have a goddamn illegal cat army, just marching up and down the street and scratching whoever they want, whenever they want. And they’d be eating people’s pet birds and lapping up other people’s milk and littering the street with fur balls. No, no you can’t have that.”

“I wish I could.”

He ignores me. “And think of the bad precedent it would set, too. If you kick a cat out, what’s next? Dogs? Well, dogs are more quote-unquote dangerous than cats anyways. Do

you know that dogs bite more people a year than cats do? So what are you going to do? Kick all the dogs out too? That seems real practical,” he says rolling his eyes.

“Dogs?” I ask. “Who the fuck said anything about dogs? The problem is that cat, not some fucking dog.”

“Alright,” he says. “Don’t get riled up or we’ll have to throw you out the door too. Just take a deep breath and calm down before you say something else stupid.”

“Alright,” I say even though, between you and me, no amount of breathing in the past has ever prevented me from saying something stupid. I take a deep breath. “Alright. Let’s just assume that you’re right. That I can’t kick the cat out because it’s illegal. And it’d be unsafe. And that it’d create some sort of illegal, street-roaming cat army. Let’s just assume you’re right there. Is there nothing else I could do? Like, maybe the cat just needs something. Truth be told, I never really tried to take care of the stupid thing. Maybe the cat’s just disgruntled. Maybe I just have to watch it a little bit, or hire somebody to watch it if I’m out of town. Or maybe I should get it more food, or some toys, or some kitty litter or something.”

“Nah. You can’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“Listen,” he sighs. “It’s cat. Cats do their own thing. That’s the nature of the cat, to be free. You can’t just go on taking care of cats when it’s the cat’s own damn responsibility to take care of itself. What are you going to do, take care of its every need? Baby it? Spoon feed it?” He shakes his head. “No, no. That’s bad all around. First, it’ll cost you too much money and you’ll go broke. Secondly, you’re going to make that cat dependent on you. And third, I bet you it wouldn’t even help anything anyway. You can help that cat and watch over it all you want. But if that cat’s got its mind made up that it wants to scratch your face off, then you best be damned sure it’s going to scratch your goddamn face right off sooner or later.”

Now, truth be told, my face isn’t all that pretty to begin with.

But in terms of what’s left covering my head, it’s just about all I got left.

So needless to say, I was inclined to do whatever it took to keep my face where it was.

“OK,” I say. “So that’s your solution, then. Don’t get rid of it. Don’t help it. Just get another cat.”

“Just get another cat,” he repeats all smoothly.

“And why the hell am I getting another cat now?”

“Why else do you think?” he chuckles. “To protect you from the other cat.”

I was baffled. “Now how is one cat going to protect me from another cat?”

“Christ, you know nothing about cats,” he sighs. “Alright. Listen. You got an asshole cat in your house. Right? Well, if you have another cat in the house, then any time that cat – the asshole cat, I’m talking about – any time that asshole cat tries to scratch you, the other cat – the protector cat – it’s going to stop the asshole cat. So say if, hypothetically speaking, you’re taking a nap on the couch and that asshole cat tries to claw your eyeballs out or something. Well, that other protector cat is going to come and protect your ass and save your damn eyeballs.”

That made sense at first.

Until I really thought about it.

“How in the hell can I possibly rely on that other cat to save me?”

Again he sighs. “Sometimes, man, you just got to depend on the decency of other cats.”

“No, I mean – alright, hypothetically speaking, say if that other cat – the protector cat – say if it’s busy. Say it’s in the bathroom doing its business or say it’s roaming outside or napping or eating lasagna and complaining about Mondays or doing whatever it is cats supposedly do when nobody’s looking. Say if that cat’s not around, and the other cat – the asshole cat – tries to attack me. What do I do then? Or what if it is around? What if – hypothetically speaking again – what if that protector cat is actually around, but it’s not quick enough or strong enough to stop the asshole cat. What then?”

“Hm,” he mutters. “You might have a point there.”

“I thought I might.”

“You’ll just have to get more cats.”

“Fuck you.”

“I’m being serious. The more cats you get, the safer you’ll be. You’ll have cats keeping eyes on other cats, and the minute one cat starts acting up, there’ll definitely be another cat around to help protect you.”

“Now I’m being serious. Fuck you.”

“Well, you have any better plans?”

Like I said.

I was desperate for something.

So I thought about it.

I thought about what my options were. Or I guess, what my buddy told me my options were. I thought about how, for some reason or another, I couldn't kick that cat out. And I thought about, for some other reason or another, I couldn't try to watch the cat, or try to help it out.

And then I thought about the pain.

I thought about that cat jumping on me and digging its claws through me, tearing me apart, ripping open my skin, invading me, invading my being. And I thought about how the blood would just come squeezing out of me afterwards, and how it'd trickle down my arm or my leg or my face and how sooner or later it'd all end up on the carpet. And I thought about how dirty that carpet was getting, and I thought about how hard I had to scrub it to try to get the blood out and I thought about how no matter how hard I scrubbed, no matter how hard I sweat and no matter how hard I prayed, how I could never seem to really get it all out.

Because, goddammit, blood is really hard to clean after it's stained something.

So I was desperate.

"Well," he asks. "Do you?"

"No," I reply. "I guess I don't."

So I had this problem I was telling my buddy about.

About this asshole cat.

And now, I got a whole new set of problems. Because now I have an apartment with a seriously dangerous bunch of pissed off goddamn asshole cats. And I don't know why they're so edgy and I don't know why they're so paranoid, or why they always seem to go after me, because now most of the time now I'm just trying to ignore them, trying to step around them without them ever noticing me. But I know at any minute, one of them is going to snap, and then another one will, and then another, and another one and another one and I know that sooner or later there's going to be a goddamn cat massacre.

So now?

Now I'm always still too damn afraid to get any kind of rest.





## **The Alley**

### **E.M. Cooper**

He didn't know why he was still there – still lying in the pile of filth that clung to his ragged clothing while he stared into the cold November sky. He felt the chilly evening rain pelt his pale face before it trickled into the growing puddle he lay in. A raspy breath escaped his quivering lips when the cold and dirty water seeped through his damp rags and clung to his skin. But he did not move when the biting cold began to gnaw at his flesh and bone. He kept his eyes to the sky and watched as heaven fell upon him.

The man stilled his trembling body as best as he could in order to hear the rain pouring down around him. The droning hum of the flickering light above his head created a steady tempo for the rain while it spilled into the alley on streams of orange streaks. He bit his blistered lip to quiet his coughing fits as he tried to listen for the subtle changes the rain made when it struck various objects. He could hear the light hollow beating from the worn and rusted out pipes that lined the brick building behind him. He waited for the droplets to fall and strike the thick plastic cover of the dumpster at his side. The man dipped his numbed fingers into the water in time with the heavy thuds. He felt a soothing calm wash through him when the rain fell into his puddle and lapped against his wrinkled ears. He closed his eyes and listened to the symphony while it played in full swing.

From the entrance of the alley he could hear the irregular march of footsteps slowly approaching him. The man opened his eyes and drew in a sharp breath when he heard their feet clumsily splashing into puddles and disturbing his peace. The dull scent of liquor that clung to their bodies drifted into his nose long before he could see them. His tired ears could barely hear a word of what they said, but he only heard the rain and his labored breaths when their eyes met his.

They looked down at the broken man that lay in the alley, watching his haggard body rise and fall with each slow breath he took in. His withered and pruned fingers tapped against the grimy water his body was soaking in while he observed the group and their curious stares. One of them approached him and tried to look into his vacant eyes. One of his friends reached for the person's shoulder and pulled him away when they could see the faint glimmer of rage forming on the crippled man's face.

His shaky hands tried to ball themselves into fists when he saw them run off and leave him. He turned his head and stared at the entrance of the alleyway and felt his anger welling up in his chest and throat. Even though he lay on the ground he could see the bright lights of the city casting shadows over the faceless people as they walked past the alley. He remembered how day after day they would pass the alley to gawk at his crippled form before running off when their

curious eyes met his gaze. How he wanted to pick himself up off of the ground and yell at them – to curse out each and every one of them for pretending that he didn't exist. That he didn't matter to any of them or their lives. He raised his head and opened his mouth to yell at the top of his lungs but a scream of pain spilled from his lips when his chest began to burn. He was tired. He was weak; too broken to clutch his chest or wipe the rain from his eyes. The man's eyes fogged up when he turned his head back to the sky and began to cry.

During his sadness he began to reminisce on how the sun used to shine on him as it did any other man. How its light used to creep through the slatted window shades and tumble to the floor before climbing across his warm sheets to touch his face. He remembered how he used to sit on the porch of his home and waited for the morning sun to rise over the horizon. When he saw it breach the leafy trees to touch his body and made him glow with its warmth, he knew then that he was truly alive. He then thought about last time he saw the only ones that cared about him so long ago and how they all left him one by one. But he shook his head and tried to bury his memories by listening to the rain once more while he shivered throughout the night.

Dawn had arrived and the rain had stopped when the man opened his eyes once more. He shut his eyes when his coughing fit acted up again and tore through his body. He drifted in and out of consciousness as his body was overcome with exhaustion, numbness, and pain. His fingers lay in the frigid water, unresponsive to his thoughts. Even his face remained frozen when he tried to cry out for help. The only part of him that was still moved were his eyes. He still had to keep looking, he thought. That was the only thought on the man's mind while stared intently at the sky above him, watching it grow brighter as time passed.

His vision clouded over and slowly faded when he felt the tears streaking down his weary face slowly warm. The man looked up and saw the fiery sun fill his failing vision for the first time in years. He kept his eyes as long as he could while the sun's warmth caressed his body. With what little strength he had, the man closed his eyes and drew a long sigh through his smiling lips.



## Chad Johnson

### Skinny Love

Sophia O'Donnel

*i. [i eat all that i am]*

**1am:** “what was that moment before our eyes?” i ask you, never hope for words back. the general discourse shifts to ugly things: my lack of heart / ghost fragmented memory / slighted existence. you tangle me with thorned vines, breath as putrid as ever and swear that you will do me right despite the ribcaged reality encompassing us. the uglier we grow, the lovelier my sickness seems and if you are what treads lightly over my grave then i will swallow you whole (leave nothing besides a serious mess/maybe two).

**2am:** daydream thoughts aside, i wanted us to last this lifetime, maybe more. a jaw still aching from two lovers ago—others beg me to reconsider, stress that i am a spiralling galaxy, another milky way all on its own, but do not understand the hunger that stretches past my outermost stars. you do not see such thoughts, dig my grave a hundred years too early (maybe mine, most likely your own), learn not to scream from a snapped neck.

**3am:** if your bones can hold 19000lbs, then i reach right beyond that, do not hesitate to be the cause of your demise. with regards to what? between our sheets one night, i am left stunned at your whispered admission that my bones exist for your consumption / not worth more than the muscle around them. left a hollow sun; all too early, i am your ruin and your dust of magnolia petals.

*ii. [i fill myself up with all that you are]*

**7am:** without my asking, they say love will solve everything—will you back from the dead and resurrect all that you know. “love is a place of songbirds, where you go to die among succulents and a single meadow” ; “i am not convinced” my initial response, content to keep a grey sky and overcast. the dead do not leave you so suddenly / stick around to be your storyteller / grow past the ambit of your expectations / result in something far more brutal.

**8am:** one morning, you wake up as a deerthing and hug spindly legs to your naked chest. my name was only ever an afterthought to you, deer-legged or not. “there is something else” they lead us to believe/strip away our doubts, fill the emptiness with falsities. with that in mind, i leave my heart for you, lost interest or not (a sense of badness i thought i left when i was younger and prone to frequent dalliances with any who loathed me).

**9am:** no matter how long later, i continue to unravel old dreams, grow to monstrous proportions, wonder when my life will exist outside of a fawn’s lingering memories. the moment love touched my lips, i had already torn myself to pieces (gorged on infatuations/the boy you made yourself a lover to). a last layer, a tight recollection of all that i had once been and never so distorted as when i looked it straight on.

iii. *[i leave behind what needs to be left]*

**10pm:** maybe a heartbeat of me once thought i could grow into something radiant—a drenched heartbeat no less, a lie even i could not see. instead, i leave bound to a crescent moon, stand knee-deep in frigid waters and find myself the universe’s quiet breath. before the age of ten, i had already fleshed out my future in leather-bound journals, left bitemarks in between pages. “do you love me?” i ask, and if you do not answer perhaps a distant star will.

**11pm:** i tiptoe over your rooftop and hope you hear me creak with lovely words, crack open into a geode (full breathed/honest heart/remnant of a quandary), but know i will last less than a winter. instead of soft coos to the child within you, you hear my disjointed knees give way / cup a globed moon in your palm and recall my penchant for abstracting from our corporeal world. leave me with stories of what you turned out to be; the winter solstice moon that left you breathless years ago.

**12am:** there is something there, a hidden room, another series of labyrinths, a hollow moon that cradles a heartbeat. but the future is a sea that does not part, does not offer you a deep ocean blue, does not remind you of puff breaths and shaky laughter. rather, you curl around the sun / ensconce yourself in all that will encourage your growth. “only love” we tend to whisper “only love will leave you to rot and be your grave.” every head turns to you: *do we split the moon open and revel in what we find?* maybe it is best left untouched.

**Angelica**  
**John Grey**

She's dead -  
deader than lovely -  
deader than lace underwear  
and the bird in the hand  
I accidentally crushed -

picked peony,  
opened bottle of the '29 Bordeaux -  
it's how we treat our beauty -

which brings me to this feeble compromise  
the body loosed its hold -  
the air's still wearing her perfume.



# THE CALL OF YIG

A Studio  
Madness  
Production

Starring  
Dan Ottivaino  
Ben Uytiepo and

Earl M.



## **God and Me**

### **Jeffrey Park**

So I've been spending a lot of time  
with God lately, over coffee  
(mine black, His white and sweet)  
at the shops, strolling through  
town with our arms  
locked in a companionable  
yet thoroughly masculine way.  
I watch the squirrels at play  
while he checks out the babes  
surreptitiously, of course, as only He can.  
It was uncomfortable  
the first time He joined me  
in the bathtub  
but I got over it. It's cool.  
He calls me at work sometimes  
asks me what He should make for dinner.  
As if I don't see right through Him.  
After all, Tuesday  
is always pepperoni pizza night  
at Our place.

## Beghilos

Laura Taylor

4.31 am

The gas demanded 50p  
"god's in every calculator"  
sighed Mr Leary,  
quietly,  
into his gin

Silence

Felt his words bend and reverse,  
remembering the beginning  
In the  
was the  
*Word*  
and the Word was *with*  
and the Word was

ESSO

ShELLOIL

gEESE and

gOOLIES

hELLO

ShOES

or a

BOOBLESS gOOSE

but

not god

No 'd', see

"Mr Leary?"

5.33 am, numb

Rummaged for hexagonal warmth

Mr Leary laughed, refused to be drawn

I ruminated on numerological representations of  
entities we cannot conceive or conceptualise; on the  
transformation of text

6.06 am

First bus home

Fingered 'dog' in condensation

## **imagine a world without the words**

### **Weasel**

i hitched a ride on an airplane  
rode it wherever it wanted to go  
sat through the pushes and the pulls  
and closed my eyes to see this story without words  
but i never had to imagine  
the words never existed

i rode this plane all night long  
made a stop in a town i had never heard of  
and draped my fingers on its surface  
just like god would if he were alive  
it was the only one to gently place a bullet in my heart  
and send me off on my way wanting badly to return  
i just never caught my plane



**Fade Out by Casey Dolan**

“Wow! What a ride!” Indeed! Now that we’ve come to the end of the issue (hopefully not skidding broadside into your grave quite yet), it’s only appropriate to prepare for what comes next. And why not be a part of it? This here is a little game to play, and we want you to join in. Below is a juxtaposition of symbols. Within this image is nebula of creative expression, limitless potentialities of heartbreak, nonsense, adventure, you name it. These symbols are waiting to be woven into a story, and the other editors and I are waiting to devour your imagination. So get a pen and some paper, perhaps even get a group of friends together, and create a story using each of the symbols. Each time you weave one of the dice into the story, place an asterisk (\*) after the word so we can keep track of them.

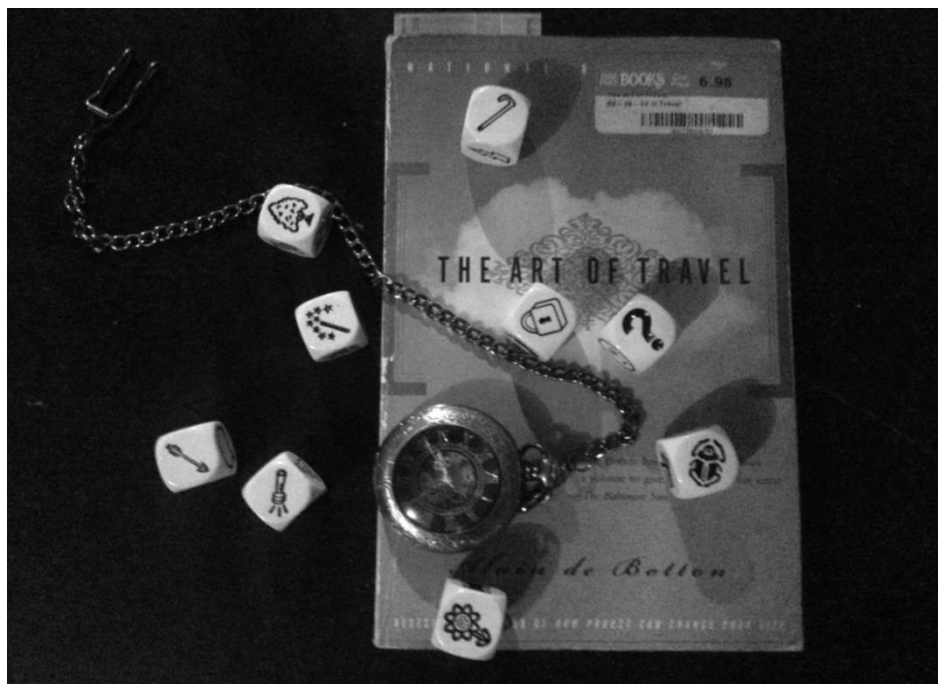
What story do the dice tell, what does each symbol mean? That is for you to decide – how the symbol works into your story is rather loose, it doesn’t have to be literal so long as it relates to the an interpretation of the symbol. For example, a lightning bolt doesn’t have to be lightning, it could be Zeus if you wanted it to be. Or the Flash even if that suits your fancy (that’s one of those comic book hero guys, for those of you not in the loop).

So have fun, be playful, be creative, and share with us!

Send your tale of the story-dice to us ([hitchingpoets@hotmail.com](mailto:hitchingpoets@hotmail.com)), and we will publish our favorite one in the next issue.

Ciao!

~ Valdon



## Biographies

**P. Bloodsworth** - known online as KisaMogwai, was born in Ohio in 1974. Having been tutored on piano at age four, and then cello at age nine, her youth and early adulthood showed a marked focus on the fine arts and music. Having written and collected a number of poems throughout the years, these, and other poems written by the author are now being offered in print and ebook format as the first collection in what we hope will be a series of poetry and art books to be made available by the author.

**T.N. Brooks** - My name is T.N. Brooks, and I am 16 years old. People quite often say that being so young, I haven't seen enough of the world; but I beg to differ. I've seen *too* much of the world. I grew up in Texas, and I've moved around enough to have a lot of friends, yet none at all. Writing is the one way that I can voice my soul without being judged. My writing blog is [i-was-a-lie-once.tumblr.com](http://i-was-a-lie-once.tumblr.com)

**Valentina Cano** - Valentina Cano is a student of classical singing who spends whatever free time either writing or reading. Her works have appeared in Exercise Bowler, Blinking Cursor, Theory Train, Cartier Street Press, Berg Gasse 19, Precious Metals, A Handful of Dust, The Scarlet Sound, The Adroit Journal, Perceptions Literary Magazine, Welcome to Wherever, The Corner Club Press, Death Rattle, Danse Macabre, Subliminal Interiors, Generations Literary Journal, A Narrow Fellow, Super Poetry Highway, Stream Press, Stone Telling, Popshot, Golden Sparrow Literary Review, Rem Magazine, Structo, The 22 Magazine, The Black Fox Literary Magazine, Niteblade, Tuck Magazine, Ontologica, Congruent Spaces Magazine, Pipe Dream, Decades Review, Anatomy, Lowestof Chronicle, Muddy River Poetry Review, Lady Ink Magazine, Spark Anthology, Awaken Consciousness Magazine, Vine Leaves Literary Magazine, Avalon Literary Review, Caduceus, White Masquerade Anthology and Perhaps I'm Wrong About the World. Her poetry has been nominated for Best of the Web and the Pushcart Prize. You can find her here: <http://carabosseslibrary.blogspot.com>

**Bob Carlton** - Bob Carlton lives and works in Garland, TX.

**Joseph Carro** - I'm currently pursuing an MFA in popular fiction at the University of Southern Maine's Stonecoast program, where I have worked under the mentorship and tutelage of Dolen Perkins-Valdez, Michael

Kimble, Theodora Goss, James Patrick Kelly, Elizabeth Searle, Elizabeth Hand and Nancy Holder.

**E.M. Cooper** - My name is E.M. Cooper and I am from the Puget Sound region in Washington State. Writing is a personal hobby of mine and I like sharing my works with others. I hope to improve myself so that I can become a better writer and that my works can be an enjoyable experience to those that read them.

**Alyssa Cressotti** - Alyssa is a writer, editor, and media maker in New York City. With a cup of coffee and an eye-roll, Alyssa channels classic Bea Arthur (if Dorothy Zbornak spent her daylight hours cooing at baby animals being cute on the Internet). She wavers between fierce sarcasm and sweet, girlish charm; her nails will be painted, but she is not to be taken lightly. Additionally, she plays caregiver to one gentleman bunny. Her published work includes: profiles, reportage, features, Q&As, book reviews, poetry, and fiction. <http://about.me/alyssarae>.

**Casey Dolan** - I have been drawing since I came into this world, and I'm currently working on a college education. Art has been an outlet for me in many ways, and it's been a way for me to connect to the public. My galley's theme has much to do with the drama of emotions and the intensity expressions can portray.

**John Edwards** - John M. Edwards, an award-winning travel writer and Mayflower descendant directly related to William Bradfield, has written for such magazines as CNN Traveler, Salon.com, Islands, and North American Review. He turned down a job as lead bassist for STP (The Stone Temple Pilots) way back when before they were big, plus he helped write "PLUSH" (the opening chords), voted The Best Song of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by Rolling Stone Magazine.

**Jim Eigo** - Jim Eigo has written on theater, dance, art, literature, sex and the design of clinical trials. He helped design two reforms of AIDS drug regulation, accelerated approval and expanded access, that have helped bring many treatments to many people, work profiled in the recent Oscar-nominated documentary, *How to Survive a Plague*. His short fiction has appeared in such volumes as *Best American Gay Fiction #3*, in such periodicals as *The Chicago Review* and at such online venues as cleavermagazine.com. He blogs on Huffington Post.

**Joshua Findley** - My name is Joshua Findley, and I am 25 years old from Houston, Texas. I grew up an only child raised by a single woman and for as long as I can remember I have always had a problem with racing thoughts, or as some would like to call it an over-active imagination. Often times I have found it difficult to cultivate some sort of order or finite thought process, but I have, over the years, developed ways to keep my mind on a level plane, and it is art. You see I have always been extremely creative in the sense of environmental adaptability, finding ways to settle my mind and body into being comfortable, no matter where I go. Through my love of creativity, and the way the mind works, I have come to find other loves in Graffiti, Street Art, Abstract, Contemporary, Retrospective, musical, and most of all writing. Writing helps me channel whatever energy I may be feeling into something productive. With it, I can bend time, manipulate pasts, dust off memories, or make new ones. It's something of value and tangible to grasp on to. I can mentally take out of my mind what I do not need, or that which is of detriment to me, and spill it into a spiral, and put it away forever, or relive it later if I want. In a nutshell, writing to me is how I keep my sanity in an insane world.

**Nancy Gauquier** - My writing has been published in the US, Canada, England, and New Zealand. Most recently in *Fiction365*, and *Liquid Imagination* (online now). Stories are upcoming in *The Rusty Nail* and *Longest Hours* (anthology).

**John Grey** - John Grey is an Australian born poet. Recently published in International Poetry Review, Sanskrit and the science fiction anthology, "Futuredaze" with work upcoming in Clackamas Literary Review, New Orphic Review and Thema.

**Grace Mack** - My name is Grace, I am a senior in high school. Photography is my passion. I have been taking photos for about two years now.

**Lance Manion** - I am the author of four humorous short story collections; *Merciful Flush*, *Results May Vary*, *The Ball Washer* and my latest one *Homo sayswhaticus*. I blog daily on my website [www.lancemanion.com](http://www.lancemanion.com) and frequently contribute to many online fiction sites.



**Guatam Narang** - To me, photography is about observing. It's day-dreaming. It's perplexing, but at the same time brings me to focus. A fleeting moment or a glance might catch my eye - sometimes bold colors and patterns dancing shapes and shadows, and people lost in moments of reflection. Photography is my meditation. You learn a little about yourself, you develop themes, and the camera becomes an excuse for my presence and curiosity.

**Jeffrey Park** - Jeffrey Park's poetry has appeared most recently in *Subliminal Interiors*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Eye to the Telescope*, *The Speculative Edge*, and various anthologies. His digital chapbook, *Inorganic*, is available online from White Knuckle Press. A native of Baltimore, Jeffrey now lives in Munich, Germany, where he works at a private secondary school. Links to all of his published work can be found at [www.scribbles-and-dribbles.com](http://www.scribbles-and-dribbles.com).

**Dustin Pickering** - Dustin Pickering is the Editor-in-Chief of Harbinger Asylum, a magazine for poetry and the arts. He is a featured poet at Public Poetry 2013, and also hosts two separate readings in the Houston area. He was a special guest poet at AIPF. He is published in *di-verse-city* 2013, Austin International Poetry Fest's anthology, *The Beatest State in the Union* (a long-anticipated anthology), the first *Muse for Women* anthology, and many smaller publications. He can be reached at [desireofdogs@gmail.com](mailto:desireofdogs@gmail.com).

**Garth Porter** - Garth Porter lives in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. He graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in December and since then has spent his time working as a hotel janitor and writing. He makes frequent trips back to his hometown in Venango County where he listens to the interstate at night, practices with a band that is falling apart, and drinks with his parents.

**Emily Ramser** - Emily Ramser currently attends Salem College in pursuit of a degree in Creative Writing. Lately, she seems to do more writing than classwork, though. She also works as an Assistant Editor for Vagabonds and writes about all sorts of science and technology breakthroughs as a

writer for GeekSmash.com. Check out her stuff at [www.chickadeesweetie.wordpress.com](http://www.chickadeesweetie.wordpress.com) or on Twitter, @ChickadeePoems.

**Gaelle Robin** - member of the 2013 rhythmic cypher slam team, Gaelle Win Robin is a queer writer, printer and multi-medium & performance artist from a small town in the crossroads of rural Maine. gaelle is invested in creating safer spaces, empowering alliances, and intentional communities. they have self-published three chapbooks: *ad nauseum*, *harbors*, and *nightmares*. when gaelle is not playing the part of barista, pressperson at poet rising project, and contributor at [comehell.wordpress.com](http://comehell.wordpress.com), they are catching up on sleep, dreaming, climbing things, collecting trinkets and treasures, exploring small spaces, thinking about obscurities, huddling, feeling, observing, and praising natural light.

**Frank Roger** - I'm a Belgian artist mainly doing collages and graphic work in a surrealist and satirical vein, as well as a short story writer with a few hundred stories to my credit and publications in more than 35 languages so far.

**Valdon Ross** - Valdon Ross is a person who sometimes writes things or doodles somewhat fancy images. Apparently he messes around with spray paint too, but nothing too extravagant. He's a rather odd fellow. Some say he might be part wolf. But people say lots of things, like "Oh no! There's Godzilla!" So don't be fooled into thinking he's someone special, because he's really just some ordinary guy.

**David Rutter** - David Rutter is a Los Angeles based writer of poetry, theater and fiction. He has been published previously by Haggard and Halloo, Subliminal Interiors Magazine and Wilderness House Literary Review. He is not working on a screenplay. He and his wife enjoy traveling to remote parts of the globe.

**Edward Smith** - Reckoning with multiple muses, Edward W. L. Smith writes poetry and mystery, essays and non-fiction books, paints and plays tenor saxophone. Therein, he seeks balance of logos and Eros. His most recent book is "The Psychology of Artists and the Arts" (McFarland, 2012).

**Greg Smith** - Greg Smith teaches creative writing at San Jacinto College South. His creative writing teachers in graduate school were Texas poet Jim Linebarger and Texas author A.C. Greene, author of A Personal Country. Greg Smith is published in 150 Years of Texas Poetry edited by Billy Bob Hill. He is also published in Concho River Review and New Texas 92 as well as in an arts magazine titled Thoughtcrime.

**David Stallings** - David Stallings was born in the U.S. South, raised in Alaska and Colorado before settling in the Pacific Northwest. Once an academic geographer, he has long worked to promote public transportation in the Puget Sound area. His poems have appeared in several North American and U.K. literary journals and anthologies, and in *Resurrection Bay*, a recent chapbook.

**Laura Taylor** - Laura Taylor is a regular performer at festivals, gigs, and fundraisers. A gobby Northerner with a penchant for upsetting the apple cart, she has been writing and performing since 2010, and has been widely published.

**Shovana Thulung**-Learning Film Photography in Nepal during 2006 really inspired me to see world differently. I began working with photography more extensively through magazines and modeling agencies. Initially I was interested in photography because of my modeling and fashion business. I then came to United States for my advance study. I am now seeking undergraduate degree on Healthcare administration at University Of Houston Clear-lake. Photography have been my continuous companion and helped me explore culture and people here. I work for models and fashion industry in Houston. I do fashion and art but I let myself open to any style and directions. Currently I am very inspired by vintage fashion and environmental issues. I like to frequently reinvent my creative approach to my work. I find my inspirations through architecture, philosophy and fashion. My images are little slices of me...

**John Vicary** - John Vicary is an author/editor from Michigan. He has been published in various poetry anthologies, art journals and short fiction collections. You can read his work at [keppiehed.com](http://keppiehed.com)

**Mahendra Waghela** - Mahendra Waghela won a University First Medal in On The Spot Sketching Competition. His 55-word crime story was a

prize winner at the completion organized by [suite101.com](http://suite101.com). 'Everyman, An Island', another of his stories has won the first prize at [www.wordweavers.in](http://www.wordweavers.in). His stories have appeared in prestigious anthologies, Chicken Soup books, magazines and literary/mainstream fiction journals.

**Weasel** –Weasel is a writer, and founder of the anthology Vagabonds. Holding a Bachelor's degree in literature, he works for a university, and heavily promotes the anthology. Weasel has been accepted in many publications, some of which include: Houston's Harbinger Asylum, San Jacinto College's Threshold, Di-Verse-City from the 2012 & 2013 Austin International Poetry Festival. Along with those publication's he has released two chapbooks: Byzantium: The Last Rights of Nowhere, and The Sound inside Oneself. Both are currently available.  
<http://systmaticwzl.tumblr.com>



