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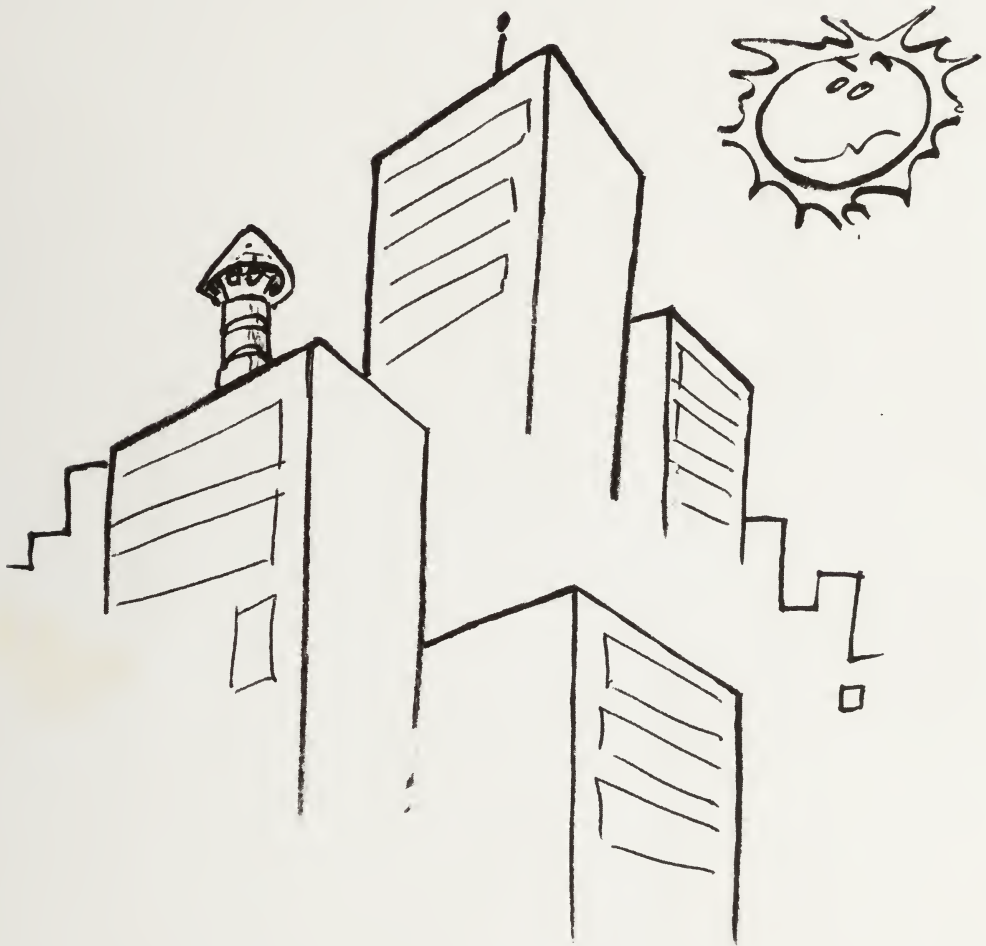
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The Watermark

Journal of the Arts
Since 1994



Volume 21 | Fall 2013



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Volume 21 | Fall 2013

The Watermark

Journal of the Arts
Since 1994

Fire Dance
Maryam Soliman

The Watermark

volume xx

TheWatermarkJournal.com

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Thanks to all those that participated and gave time to producing this publication, and a special thanks to Editors Andria Ward, Aaron Griffin, and Reshma Patil, who collected most of the content in this volume in 2012, into an issue that was never printed. Unfortunately many of the color images could not be printed in this volume due to budgetary constraints. The full PDF of the volume created by Andria Ward can be viewed on our website. A representation of the cover of that issue is on page 2. Also, thanks to Sylvain Delzant, whose illustration graces the cover of this volume. Look up the full illustration on page 45.

The Watermark accepts submissions year round.

The deadline for our spring volumes is November 1st, and the deadline for our fall volumes is April 1st (no joke). Our submission guidelines are published on our website.

Independently published since 1994, The Watermark is run by graduate and undergraduate students at UMass Boston. We are funded by UMB's yearly \$15 Student Media Fee. This journal cannot be sold or reproduced in any marketplace, without express permission from the Student Activities Office at UMass Boston. The Watermark holds First North American Serial Rights to the material printed on TheWatermarkJournal.com, and to the material printed here-in. Individual artists and writers maintain full copyright of their work. It's been fun reading and discussing the writing and artwork submitted to this journal. We could only afford to print 76 pages this fall.

We put a lot of thought into each piece that we accepted.
Three people read and approved each entry. We hope you enjoy
the fruits of our efforts. Happy reading!

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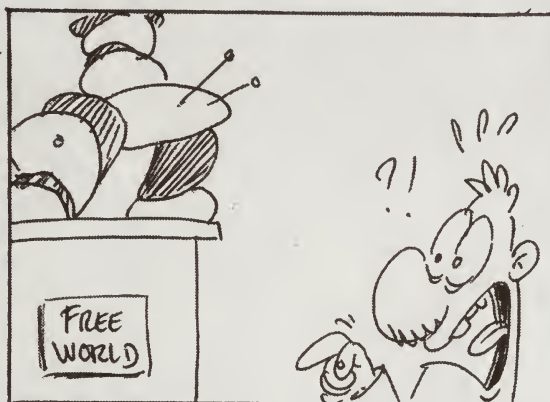
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I DON'T LIKE ART...

I
DON'T
LIKE
SCULPTURE
...



IT'S ALWAYS
THE SAME
THING!!

IT MUST
BE FRENCH!

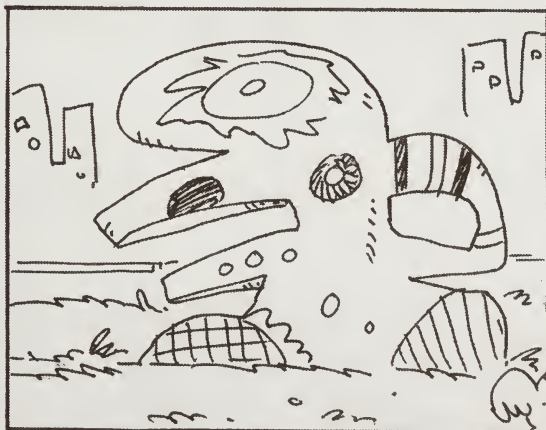
PAINTINGS
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WHO'S THAT
PICASS-HOLE?

MY DOG IS
AN ARTIST
TOO

AND
WHAT ARE
THOSE
THINGS
AROUND
UMASS??



ARE THEY
FROM
FLATS??



DECANT 'NO





Begin in Me

Jessica Manna

The music ended. The band walked off the stage. The once dim lights now blinded everyone. Albert and Lucy began slowly making their way towards the exit. They let the crowd push them outside, otherwise Lucy would have gotten lost in the maze of aisles that kept changing directions to confuse her. The theatre was old and had, at one time, held events for which people needed to be seated. Not anymore, though. Now the unused seats' only purpose was to confuse those in Lucy's state of mind. Everyone around Lucy and Albert was laughing, but they were silent, clinging onto each other desperately. As soon as Lucy's feet hit the pavement outside, she jumped and held on tighter to Albert's shirt. The black tar was swirling up out of itself, forcing the normally well-behaved sidewalk to turn into a treacherous obstacle course. Each step they took was more dangerous than the last. Lucy was wonderfully afraid, so much so that her tight grip on Albert's shirt pulled them both to the ground.

Albert looked at Lucy, smiled and whispered, "Well, what do we do now, little one?"

Lucy stared at him, wide-eyed and confused. How was she supposed to know what to do? She didn't even really know who he was or why she was with him, never mind what to do. She glanced down at the sidewalk. It was morphing still, now into little arms trying to pull them further down. She knew they didn't want to go down. They wanted to leave, to find the car, to remember how to drive. That was all Lucy knew.

Albert looked at her for a while, searching for an answer she did not have. Suddenly she felt herself being pulled towards the grass. Albert had grabbed her, laughing. The grass was morphing too, but not like the pavement, it was happier and much more welcoming. Albert had seen what the grass was doing and he knew they needed to be on it. It was making itself into a path for them. A vibrant path with rainbow bricks, promising to lead them home. He pushed Lucy until they were both on the path, and pulled her to her feet. The walk to his car was fast, too fast.

They both felt as though someone was trying to trick them. They had to trust the grass though, it had led them here, safely. Neither was sure that the car was Albert's car. The silver doors they remembered were dripping into each other, the way wax drips off a candle you've left burning for too long. The doors were moving and melting, they could not be opened. Then Albert found it. The key. He pressed a button and the doors stopped melting. They opened up and welcomed Albert and Lucy inside. She was grateful that he knew, he knew better than she did. He even knew how to drive. She was in awe of him.

Lucy looked at Albert sheepishly and asked, "How, how are you doing this?"

The road, to Lucy, was a beautiful blend of colors, a pattern of rainbows forming an awe-inspiring picture ahead of them. The yellow lines that should have been dividing the lanes were not doing their job. Instead they were twirling and swirling and dancing, like a roll of ribbon thrown into the air.

"How, how?" Lucy repeated. She did not, she could not, understand how Albert was driving.

He looked at her lovingly and said, "I can do it, I can do it, I've done it before."

Lucy slumped her sweaty body down further into the passenger seat, she felt as though she was one with it. She trusted him. She trusted this man, this man that she was not sure she knew. In this moment, she could not even remember his name. When they finally arrived at the hotel, Lucy ran to her room, trusting that Albert would follow. The carpet in the hallway was teasing her, taunting her with its pattern. She knew what she

was seeing could not be real. She knew it. Yet somehow, it seemed to her to be the most real thing she had ever seen. It was beautiful. There were little faces staring up at her, carnival rides, cotton candy. It wanted to come up out of its home in the carpet and play with her, but Lucy knew that was a terrible, terrible idea. She ran faster and hid in her room. When Albert came in she was sitting on a chair. It was a nice chair. Wooden with a comfortable cushion, the flowers on it were dancing up towards her, welcoming her into the seat. It was in the middle of the room, between a dresser and a bed. The dresser had a troll carved in the top of it. He kept opening his mouth wide, trying to eat Lucy! She knew Albert wouldn't let the troll get her, though. She started dancing on the chair, trying to avoid the glaring stare of the troll. Suddenly a feeling of fear washed over her. She wanted to get down from the chair. She couldn't. She could not figure out how to get down from the chair.

There were little faces staring
up at her, carnival rides, cotton
candy. It wanted to come up out
of its home in the carpet and
the play with her . . .

Embarrassed, Lucy turned to Albert, "Do you know how I get down from here?" she asked.

Albert laughed and said, "The chair? You want to know how to get down from the chair?"

Lucy nodded her head, shy and curious. "Yes, I need to know how to get down."

She knew it was a ridiculous question. It was just a chair. But now, right now, it seemed to her to be the most daunting task she had ever encountered.

"Well, where are you going to go once you get down?" Albert asked.

Oh no, Lucy had not thought that far. She did not want to be closer to the troll, that much she knew.

"The bed, I'll go to the bed!" Lucy said.

Albert smiled and held out his hand. He gently pulled her from the chair to the bed, where she collapsed into the mattress. Lucy was in awe of him. He really had done this before. She lay down, staring at the ceiling.

"I get it now!" she screamed. She did, too. She really understood.

Albert looked at her and chuckled, "You get it, really? What is it that you get?"

"Everything. I just get it," she said, excited.

Now Albert thought this was really funny because just hours before Lucy had been quite upset with him. She claimed she didn't get it, that

she never thought she would get it. Not only that, Lucy had given him the silent treatment because he did get it and she did not like that. Lucy didn't care now though, because she got it. Once you get it, you always know. You just know. She finally understood it all when she was looking at that ceiling. That beautiful ceiling. It was a whole new world up there! Shooting stars, and little moons, clouds and beautiful, colorful planets. They were all playing with each other, and with her eyes. It was the universe. And she understood it.

"I'm ready now." Lucy stated this as a fact, one Albert was supposed to understand.

"Ready for what?" Albert wondered aloud.

"For you to begin in me." Another simple fact, one she hoped Albert would understand.

She knew what she wanted. She wanted him to begin in her and could not think of any other way to explain it.

Like everything else that had happened that night, Albert understood what Lucy needed and what to do. So he began in her and she began herself. When it was over, she smiled, closed her eyes and let the experiences of the night wash over her body with the beautiful universe flowing above her. Albert lay down next to her and held her while she sweat out the rest of her feelings.

Early the next morning, Lucy woke up to a bright room, the sun coming in through the slats on the blinds, illuminating the dust in the air. She was exhausted and her mind felt drained, her eyes heavy. Her whole body was shaking and she realized that she was alone in the bed, and as far as she could tell, there was no one in the room at all. Lucy's mind began racing with thoughts of the night before. Images flashed through her eyes, everything in Technicolor and no memory was clear enough to explain how she felt or how she got there. She struggled to sit up, trying to take in her surroundings hoping that something would explain why she was alone, and why she felt like she was dying.

Her eyes darted around the room, first to the door, then the chair and finally they landed on the dresser. The dresser and the troll. She couldn't look away, it still scared her, although less than it did last night since it was no longer trying to eat her. She started to remember what happened the night before, as if she was reliving it all backwards. First she remembered Albert and how he began in her and let her begin herself. Then she saw the troll trying to eat her as she tried to escape from the chair. She remembered the carnival in the hallway and let herself wonder if it was still there, even though she knew it wasn't. The ride to the hotel flashed through her mind, with Albert so calm when she was so afraid.

ALBERT. Where was he? They had met at the hotel, when she was

checking in, alone. He immediately noticed her neon outfit, with TDB written in marker on the back of her shirt.

“Are you going to the Bisco show, too?” He had asked, curious and wondering why she was alone.

“Yeah!!!! I’m so excited! Drove all the way out here from Boston!” Lucy answered, as if the 3-hour drive to Northampton had taken days.

Albert’s face lit up with excitement. “Sweet, should be an awesome time. We should head out together, I drove in alone too, was supposed to meet up with some kids pre-show but they ditched.”

“AWESOME! I’m in room 104, I just need to drop my bags off, come with?” she suggested. Before Albert could respond, Lucy grabbed his hand and pulled him in the direction of her room.

Lucy could feel the kindness in Albert and was relieved to have met him. “I’m so glad I met you! I was so dreading being alone all night, none of my friends get this music but I love it!”

“Yeah, not many people get...it.”

This is where it had started. Their conversation about getting it. The one where Lucy had jokingly punished him with the silent treatment for a few minutes. She had been so upset that he really got it. But now she got it, too. It didn’t matter that there was no sign of him, no sign he had ever existed. Lucy knew it was real. She had shared real moments with him, moments she would never forget. More importantly, she really did get it all now, everything. Lucy let her mind wander for a minute, remembering some of the more intimate details of the night. She realized what Albert meant to her, not forever, but just in the moments she had shared with him. Lucy felt whole when she remembered those moments. There had been other shows, other boys. None quite like this one though, and no one quite like Albert. Lucy was confident that last night had been her first, but not her last, experience of that kind. Suddenly filled with energy, she jumped out of bed. She gathered her scattered clothes, threw them on in a hurry and ran out to her car. Happy, excited, fulfilled. She began the long drive back home, knowing when she got there that none of her friends would get it. ☐

"HOMECOMING" BY LAWRENCE GILLETTE



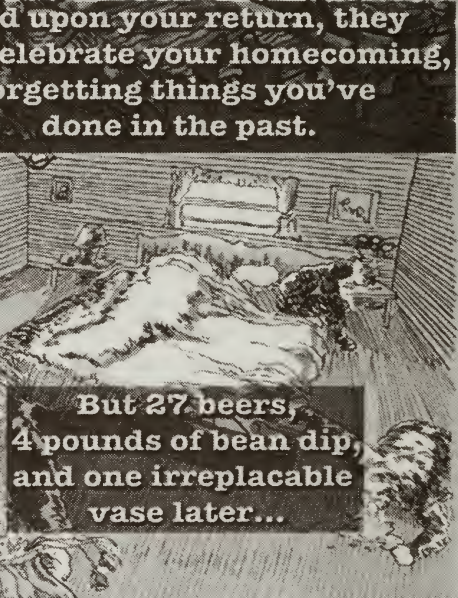
It's funny, when you're gone for awhile, people will create this ideal version of who you are.



And upon your return, they will celebrate your homecoming, forgetting things you've done in the past.



It feels so good... you start to believe you've changed.



But 27 beers, 4 pounds of bean dip, and one irreplaceable vase later...



...you just want to leave again.



As soon as possible.



So that the only thing remaining, is the ghost of your self dignity.

"Shitty Birthday" By Lawrence Gillette

I ASK MY MOM WHY THINGS
HAVE A TENDENCY OF
FALLING APART IN LIFE.

LET ME TELL YOU...

...ABOUT THE DAY
YOU WERE BORN.

GET THIS FUCKIN'
THING OUTTA ME...
NOW!!



"WELL, I PUSHED SO HARD
THAT YOU WEREN'T THE
ONLY THING COMING OUT."

"BUT AHS, THAT SLICK
CRAP BEAT YA."

"THERE YOU WERE, RACIN'
NECK-AND-UP, POOR LIFE'S
A COMPETITION RIGHT FROM
THE GET-GO."

"AND YOU LANDED IN
IT WITH A SPLAT!!"

"MA, THAT'S GROSS WHAT
DOES THAT HAVE TO
DO WITH WHY THINGS
FALL APART?"

"BECAUSE YOU'RE
A SHITHEAD."

LMG
2011



Reshma Patil
Harbor Walk

Ants

Midori Gleason

Sometimes I miss him in the morning. After so many years of being together in conflict, or apart to idealise him to epic, and eventually disappointing proportions, it is hard to imagine a new chapter that isn't partly narrated by him. But then, I suppose it still is, when I open my inbox to find, often enough, he has sent me his latest diatribe on religion, on death, a slightly over indulgent saga about fighting with his father, and all its Oedipal implications. So I remind myself, he hovers when I cook. He stresses me out with his fussypants. He never shuts up.

There was a moment, as I was in transit from one life to another, where our compatibility was tested. At the time, we were involved in a long distance relationship, spanning the continent from Boston, where he was on a hiatus of sorts, to Alaska, where I was also avoiding various practicalities. I badgered him to give up his life, (what was he giving up anyways?) to join mine, and as though in retaliation, and possibly to subdue me, he invited me to live with him in the North End, where we could fulfill our potential as

post modern bohemian artists. Being the least satisfied between us, I eventually took him up, even as it required terrible sacrifices I will only allude to in this brief narration.

He had done the legwork of finding the apartment, sending me emails with photographs attached from each place he viewed. Finally he found the one, on the fourth floor of an apartment building in the North End where our Italian landlords would also be running a ramshackle deli on the first floor. A curious detail about the space, he noted to me, was that the three rooms, presumably bedroom, study and kitchen, all circled around the central bathroom, so that if all the doors were left open, one could endlessly pace in rotation. Excitedly, we kidded about the prospect of chasing one another around, swinging our wound up shirts overhead, should someone misbehave. He moved in one month before me, and I listened in vicariously. It's great, he told me. I love it. There is one small problem though.

It wasn't really a big deal, he reassured me. He had seen a few ants. Really he had only seen them one or two at a time and only directly after his meal times. In a way, he suggested, they were helpful: A friendly reminder to clean more thoroughly. I remembered the cloud of fruit flies which inhabited the general sink area of the basement space he used to live in. We spent an entire August afternoon smacking them between our palms and trying to capture them in a plastic bag. I considered my ritual of insisting on a preliminary tidying session each time I visited. I felt the weight of leaving my home, then felt I was right to demand his dependability. Kill the ants, I told him savagely and, seemingly, he agreed.

The next time we spoke he did not mention the ants until the very end of our conversation. Oh! He suddenly remembered. Good news. He had not seen any ants for a few days. He had been quite meticulous with keeping clean and it seemed to be doing the trick. He said, it was too soon to be completely sure, but there was a good chance that the ants had decided to leave on their own initiative. Incredulously, I congratulated him.

We spoke again and he was certain: No ants! He had been right, after all. He had left the problem alone and it had taken care of itself. He reminded me of the great spiritual virtues: Patience, staying calm. Best of all, he hadn't had to kill them. Live and let live! They had gone about their business and now, he would go about his. As a matter of fact, the apartment had other glitches besides the ants. The stove, the only heat source for the space, was a little temperamental about regulating its temperature. Also, the sink had gotten clogged a couple of times. Now that he had dealt with the ants, he would take charge of both these situations. Things would be immaculate by the time I arrived!

Unfortunately, his victory was short-lived.

A few days later, one or two rogue ants were spotted meandering around the kitchen floor. Well. If it was only one or two...But then, that morning...one bold ant had paraded up along the leg of kitchen table, directly onto its surface, and would have marched straight onto his breakfast plate had he not lifted it up at the last moment. It was then that he confessed to me it had to be done: I was right. He'd been overindulgent. Now it was clear. He couldn't live this way. Just the way that ant had charged at him.

I was amused. Now that he had fully conceded I was eager to think the best of him. I felt how lucky I was to have such a tender-hearted fellow. I suggested the ant had not meant anything personally by his attack.

"Yeah, I guess."

The following day he was incensed. Multiple sightings: One on the kitchen floor, on the table top, by the sink. And each time it was a small cluster rather than a solitary ant, like before. It occurred to him that the previous lone ants may have been the scouts sent to clear the area for their troops.

I repeated that he should kill them. He agreed. "You're right." He sighed.

With this new resolve he determined his first plan of attack, which involved a plastic shopping bag. He baited the trap with crumbs of food, then waited for the ambush. When a sufficient number of them entered the bag, he tied its handles tightly. Hours later he untied the bag to see dead and slowly dying creatures walking about deliriously. It was cruel and disgusting. "It was terrible," he told me. "You could tell they were really suffering." He then went further to tell me he had no right to kill the ants like that. The ants were little Buddhas too. They felt pain. The plan was aborted.

At this point I resigned myself. He

certainly was well meaning. Perhaps this was the price of loving a talented eccentric.

Then, he told me that he had spent his whole morning contemplating and spying upon the ants. Once he concluded that the ants came and went from a single location, he followed their trail back to it. The location turned out to be three small holes by a crack in the kitchen's wall. Those small holes were the portal between his territory and the ant's, thus the source of his dilemma. All he needed was material to seal the holes.

He swallowed before announcing his simple, yet ingenious, solution: chewing gum. By plastering together several sticks of moistened chewing gum, he was able to create a blockade. He devoted his entire morning to the project. Since then, he watched carefully but no ants penetrated the seal. Problem solved. What a relief. Truth be told, he confessed, he had not really wanted to kill the ants. After all, what right did he have? It was so just so much better to find a nonviolent solution whenever possible.

I agreed with him, by now rather endeared to his compassionate position.

The chewing gum held for several more days. Then I was told that some of the ants had attempted unsuccessfully to break through the barricade. Still, it was alright. What mattered was that they did not make it through. How could they possibly make it through? Several days later they removed the obstruction, working in cooperation to haul it off. He told me dejectedly that he had watched them lift then carry away the large wad of dried gum on their shiny backs. There was no use. They wouldn't take the hint. He had certainly tried.

I assured him that he had more than tried. There were conflicting objectives between parties. He must protect his own interests. The ants must be killed.

He agreed.

When he told me about the range of products, I encouraged him to get the most lethal. Just get it done. It was now two weeks from the date that I was supposed to board a plane, leave my life, and join his. He was reluctant. He informed me that some of the products were quite toxic and needed to be handled with extreme care, gloves and whatnot. He would rather not be in contact with such substances. Besides, there were homeopathic remedies which

He swallowed before
announcing his simple,
yet ingenious, solution:
chewing gum.

sounded promising. He'd read that essential oils of peppermint and orange could prompt a hasty departure of the ants, who were naturally averse to such properties. Additionally,

the apartment would smell of peppermint and orange! Wouldn't that be lovely?

I told him I didn't care.

He assured me they would be gone by the time I arrived. He would try the essential oils first. If they failed, he would try the other methods.

So long as they were gone.

The oils arrived by mail and promptly applied, both to the ants' entrance as well as all of the places that the ants preferred to frequent. It wasn't immediately evident whether they took effect or not. It was possible they required more time, being a natural remedy. How long ought he to wait?

Don't wait. Just kill them.

He admonished me for my haste.

A few days later the verdict was in. The oils were not effective. At this point, there were only two remaining solutions: the standard product available at his local drugstore, and the potent, barely legal, product that he could obtain over the internet. I opted for the second one. Why mess around? Apparently, by this point the ants had taken refuge in the apartment in much larger numbers. They were seen at all times of the day, not just during meal times. Also, they were venturing farther and farther away from their allocated positions. My arrival date was now approximately a week away.

While meandering through the drugstore he happened to see the less lethal product so he purchased it, for the hell of it. If it worked, great. No need to deal with the internet.

It did not work.

Finally, he ordered the product and it arrived quickly. There were warning all over the packaging and a pair of thick black rubber gloves that had to be worn to handle the substance. He donned the gloves and applied the clear gel to all of the ants' hideouts. The results were instantaneous. Deceived by its sweet scent, the ants helplessly swarmed about. The ants who consumed the thick gel were immediately

poisoned. Others waded in and drowned in the gloopy substance. Even as their companions were being slaughtered, the others did not have the sense to back away from their inevitable death. It was terrible. Worst of all, by prolonging the killing, the ants were given the chance to populate. Now there were many more ants that had to be killed than before. Regretfully, he spread the poison in all the necessary locations, completing their annihilation.

True to his word, there were no ants when I arrived... Yet everything was already hanging by threads. During my first week, I almost killed our landlady. I was holding the screen into the window, awkwardly holding the window up with my other hand, refusing to ask him for assistance. I could do it alone. The screen slipped from my fingers and then slowly spun to the ground, missing my landlady by inches, as she returned home from a walk. She grabbed the screen off the street and marched up the steps as I flung myself down them to apologize. She admonished me to be more careful, and when I turned back, he was standing behind me, repeating that I ought to be more careful. So, if I had wanted to know it then I could have: It was a tenuous stability I had thrown myself into. ☹

Hide and Seek

Midori Gleason

My father said everything is temporary:
But his cloudy blue eyes are just as blue.
I lied, thinking there was no truth:
I only knew how to hide in a hallway.

In my dream there were two of you,
Laughing at either side of me and I was relieved,
Surprised I never knew:
Were there always two?

The boys all left, and Matty lied
Saying it would only be six months.
I waited.
Then I was her and they were still gone.

At least there were silent afternoons
With you and Andrew at the beach:
Searching for sea-glass,
Splunking rocks into the waves.

I didn't know you would tell me
A Postosuchus isn't a dinosaur.
Or that you would scare the porcupine
Hiding under our slatted porch.

You hid behind the tall plant
While me and John decided on the cold temp-cast,
Where I used to climb up top
To hide, reading Steinbeck novels.

Someday, if you dare confess
To terror or vacancy,
I will have the privilege
To apologize.

Redwood Fall

Midori Gleason

It begins with him returning, five years all alone,
And she has been waiting, harvesting mushrooms,
building onto her cabin,
Feeding the kittens, setting her traps in the forest
around her.

The cabin is set on the ground, when he arrives, and
cries, as she kneels to him
Hoists him inside, where, exhausted from his travels, he
falls to the table
And she gets out of him the truth: he left her not
knowing that he would: a vision made him
And he only came back, hoping she would join him out
of the wood.
She laughs, then throws him to her bed.

Sweet morning only lasted until he couldn't bear her
disgusting porridge
And she knew he would leave again, so she ran outside,
Though he protested, she drew up high the cabin,
which encircled the tree,
Latched to the pulleys, which yank by yank hoisted her
love into the air,
Where he waited and waited, as the sun went up and
down, and she appeared
To have him disappear, shooting past the open door and
down the elongated stairs
And into the dusky woods, barely clothed in his flannel
shirt.

Enough already! He was free! Yet cold, and hungry, and
he swore
He saw a wolf's eye gleaming between branches far off
in the trees.
His hunger opened a passage into his mind and the
vision he saw was Hun
Tearing legs off of enormous insects, throwing them at
him, then with a deceiver's kiss,
Lining him beneath a trap, which encircled him in red

twine, and pulled him up to the treeline.
He was angry from the vision, from which he was
snapped, by the eager growling of the
Hungry wolf, paws poised to pounce.
He ran and immediately was snatched up by her trap,
Carried out of the wolf's reach by protective thick red
ropes.

So he went back, but when he did, her hair had turned
white and the cabin was fixed
Sixty feet high above the ground, and when he fell
before her she sneered so he considered again,
Was the safety of her entrapment worth it, after all? He
angrily slept and she angrily woke
And when they spoke, he told her he'd leave her and
she held open the door, and as he wandered
Out further she bolted her door, she dug out her spade,
and buried the cabin under the ground
Since drawing it higher had been a such a failure.

Yet the woods were barren, and cold and he eventually
supposed,
A proper goodbye, at least, was in order.
When he returned, he was confounded. He lay on the
edge, looked down to the tree roots, where he
Spied the thatched roof and chimney, wafting out
smoke.
He pondered how to get in.
He could stamp on the roof but then again, he might
break through,
And she'd never forgive him, then.
He was thus pondering ,when yet again, the growl of
the wolf turned his eye
Out from himself, and out to the night, where the wolf
plunged into him,
Would have torn his throat, had his wrists not shot up
in automatic sacrifice.

The teeth spiked through the palms of his hands, and
he cried out,
His legs winding round the wolf to drag him down but
yet,
The wolf, tore at his shoulder, and scratched at his

crown,
Dug into his ankles at which, he found the strength to
snap the wolf's hind leg,
Gripped within his bleeding hands and throw himself
off, onto the roof,
Which caved to his weight
Sending him down to her kitchen table,
Knocking over her soup, sending her kittens screeching.

She saw the wolf growling through the new-torn
passage and
Hucked a rock which shattered his skull.
She dragged in the carcass which fell with a thud,
served him a bowl of soup
Which he refused.

He awoke in the morning to his bandaged wounds and
saw
A vision of being crushed by a boulder which he slowly
Pushed aside, only to find it was she who had edged it
over the side. He had to leave.
And she did not protest. She kissed his head and tore
off the wolf's coat to send him off.
He considered where he would go, how he would
endure the solitude
Which was the price of leaving her context.
He hobbled out of the woods as she hoisted her cabin
back to ground level,
Should he feel the desire to return.



The Grand Canyon

Ode to an Economic Victim

Christine Wood

I can't even afford a razor.
This explains my fastening beard.
Not even a worn and torn blazer
Is the reason I get sneered.

Back home in England whiskers and plaid
Are currently a fashion rage.
But living on benches it may be said
That I look more like a mage.

I am not weird, but 'unfortunate' per se,
Explains me more or less.
But anyone you ask would say
That clearly I'm just homeless.

But do I dare deserve to be ignored
Or hide this prickly face from society?
Though I may be no knight with sword
I've seen many with much less propriety.

"Some change, sir please",
I say at a brisk young engineer,
But he does not seem to hear me
As he walks and disappears.

I never ask young ladies,
For I dare not to seem perverted,
To come off so rough and shady
Would leave me quite deserted.

Spare me the indecency if not your change,
For I could be just as rude,
To those who think this situation so strange
Could not happen to them too.

No matter what
My Styrofoam can exhaust,
There is no making up
For what I have lost.

The Exiles of Eden

Sylvia Peters

I am the Apple of the Serpent's Eye:

Fear me
For I have no master
Save Death
And he will turn a blind eye
For my favor

Covet me
For I am the Daughter
Of Eve
And we will be the ruin of man
For our fancy

I am the Succulent Apple, poisoned.

Barren and broken and arid of eye
Voiceless and token:
Never I

Bitten and bruised and born of a lie
Guileless and complacent:
Never I

Salt of Gomorrah; Beast of Babylon
Run me a river of your first born blood
And suffer your virgin flesh unto me
For I too, am The Harpy
Outside the Garden's Great Gate

Bound in the smallest
Iota in me:
Lilith and Eve
Sarah and Delilah
Jezebel and Mary Magdalene

We are Legion
For I am the Seed and the Plow
Of the Circle
And I bury the guilt in me
For we will not bow at all

Titan

Sylvia Peters

I visit the quarry
Where Mnemosyne's alter keeps
I pray her keep
Remembrance in my always
For the thin years
Remembrance in my always
For the fat years
Remembrance in me always
For the years in between

I have given my eye, so that the Cyclops might see
I have given my blood, to make Dionysus's wine
In my resolve, could you save your Eurydice
In my compassion, push back Demeter's winter

Bowed low to mine own desires
I have ruined my soul upon Circe's shore
Carried whole on the poisonous waves
My weight, broken against the globe of Atlas

I visit the forest deep
Where Diana hunts the Golden Hind
I pray their blood
Stain me crimson
For the sins I harbor
Stain me crimson
For the sins I covet
Stain me crimson
For the sins I foresee

Within the murky waters of Circe's pool,
I have stained my soul an emerald shade of shame
I have held the gaze of Gorgon Sisters Three
And stone they turned, eyes cast away in reverence

I have lent my calloused fingertips to the loom of the Fates
And spun an illicit fallacy from tiny threads of my flesh
Elaborate is my tapestry, hued by my contents, raw
All I have left is this sanguine benediction:
Sanctity sits softly in my lap upon a pelt of golden wool
When days end, The First Ones will yoke my head of raven tresses
And from my eye the titan's tear shall be shed

Gwen Vitti



UMB Library Stairs, 2012



Untitled, 2012

Fables Of Felicity

Eleazer W.

Unrequited Love is the beast with a heart that was never fully fashioned
It told the tale of love when hearts are lost.
It's the thing that pulls the sun from the earth, lets it work, then lays it down to sleep
A broken vessel; a fish in the stream with neither gills nor fins lays in the water basking
ever purposeless

carbon dating your soul transmitted in half lives
unmasking half lies, fables of felicity
About perfection hidden in the garden like crickets performing hymns of nature
Unreciprocated love
A frosty heart so cold the tears freeze as they pass my chest and hit the floor
shaking the ground that even demons separated as they saw my memories of hurt and
pain unfold
they moved in fear

And in the stillness awaiting the day of your arrival
your grin sharp, stripping me of my power;
Behold! A lion roaring loud singing of his grief
bearing perilous teeth- he's scared
Drinking the wine of delusion to comfort my reality that:
holding your heart is like touching both the east and the west
It's impossible similar to your love

The Geology of Love

Susan Keiffer

A subtle text permeates stones,
a recitation of continents
folding into mountains and splitting into lakes,
of the births of oceans,
of forces stronger than atom bombs.

The same forces move the land
beneath this sunlit room
where you sing bits of songs
to which you danced with your young husband,
and which you hummed to your infant daughter

who, from the middle of her life, releases
your hand as your singing ceases,
and rising to gather dirty dishes
and sweep fallen petals
from the shadows of vases, sees

how like the sea you breathe,
and how like the earth you sleep.

Migration

Susan Keiffer

I came from your womb
to the broad neon avenues,

from the lake's memory
to the lit sea, where I took my place

amid the cacophony of birds.
But you are the fountain

out of which I arose.
You are my root.

And wings and water
are agents of return.

From your last bed
you reach for my hand,

its scarred wrist extended,
like god eternally

reaching through space to touch his creation.

Gold

Susan Keiffer

The gold
rings are cold
the ashes scattered
like torn pages
in the changed light.
Yours were the colors-
the browns, rusts and yellows
of earth, heat, hearth-
yours the truest arrows.
I will measure time
from when I lost you
in the sweet, extinguished season
of a blaze in the trees,
of apples and corn,
harvest and redemption.

Jeremy Ackman



Unintended Creations/Table



Unintended Creations Carts

Never Love

Aaron Griffin

Is it better to have loved and lost, or to have never loved at all? Sure most would say to have loved and lost, but it's not that simple. You don't just fall in love; you've got to struggle to find that person. You've got to face rejection after rejection and heartbreak after heartbreak till you finally find that person that will put up with you. And yeah it's great while it lasts, but it never does. Even people who stay together their whole lives still grow to resent each other. And then you're left alone again, love lost. So is it better? At least with never loving at all the only pain you face is loneliness. No rejection if you don't try, and no heartbreak if you keep your heart to yourself. So I'll take my chances with never loving at all.

Sometimes

Aaron Griffin

Sometimes I wonder why I bother.
Sometimes I wonder who actually cares.
Sometimes I wonder if I'll ever really be happy.
Sometimes I wonder why I am so unhappy.
Sometimes I wonder if my dreams will ever really come true.
Sometimes I wonder if I deserve them too.
Sometimes I wonder how anyone can ever be attracted to me.
Sometimes I wonder if I will ever figure anything out.
Sometimes I wonder if I'm good enough.
Sometimes I wonder if I'm too good for this small town.
Sometimes I wonder if I'll survive out there.
Sometimes I wonder if I'm pushing away all of my friends.
Sometimes I wonder if I should.
Sometimes I wonder what it's like to be perfect.
Sometimes I wonder why people put up with me.
Sometimes I wonder why I put up with people.
Sometimes I wonder what the future has in store for me.
Sometimes I wonder too much.

Last Chapters

Jason Robert Mizula

Cruising around the backyard, hand on the wheel
of my power wheel. Racing my kid brother, my best
friend,
it just won't go fast enough. Day dreaming
about when I grow up, trade it in for a black Bronco
like dad's got. Downtown for a Pepsi, I could bottle time
right now. No worries, just my brother and I high on
life.

Sweating hours on the farm, a country boy's life.
Working tobacco and driving a Deere with one hand
loose on the wheel.
The hour hand seems stuck, I'm dreaming of her. In no
time
at all we'll be skinny-dipping in the lake. Then my
girlfriend
next to me, top down at the drive-in in the white
Mustang,
getting spiritual with the blood of Christ. A midsummer
night's dream.

Summers close, Labor Day weekend fair, dreaming
of forever with my lover. Thinking about what life
has in store. Wishing I could stop this moment. We bet
on horses,
they're all too fast. Smash the hour glass, ride the Ferris
wheel
then eat fried dough. I'm a deadeye with these carnival
games, my friend.
The bowls don't stop it, but seem to slow down time.

Indian summer Georgia, hell of a time.
Stuck in lock step, missing my baby, dreaming
of grandma's cooking. Forced to make new friends
of strangers with southern accents. Mark time marching,
hating life,
driven like cattle to the outskirts of comfort.
Freewheelin'
down a dead-end road, taught to focus and ride a red
horse.

Chain smoking and coffee black after passing another
pale horse,
my new brothers riding beside and above me. Turn back
time
if I could. Stuck between two rivers in chariot of fire,
ten and two on the wheel.
I've got white sand beaches and sun soaked women
floating in my day dreams
but I'm riverdancing around one way tickets, gripping
on to life,
high on adrenaline, nicotine and caffeine, losing my
mind.

It's just me and a backseat of devils and demons, my
only friends.
There's nowhere to go but I'm running still from that
red horse.
Left hand on the wheel, right on a wormwood bottle,
I'm running for my life,
Parades and accolades and a guilty conscience, I lose
track of time.
Reality begot an atheist from a foxhole and all these
nightmares I dream,
so I keep running down white lines, away from blue
lights, death grip on the wheel.

I'm left white knuckled, crying at fallen minarets and
stolen time,
those deflated soccer balls in this Flanders Field are
American dreams
denied. Trumpets blare as I kill SIRRUSH and fuck the
Whore of Babylon...



Old Fishing Boats in Mumbai, India



Once a Mud Fort and Now a Resort, Oman

“Never Let Me Go”

On the Song By Florence and The Machine

Aaron Griffin

I think drowning is the most romantic way to die. I've always been fascinated by the idea. Being swallowed up by the sea. The waves crash over you like a violent percussion. Your limbs struggle and dangle like an interpretive dance as you fight to stay afloat. Your head bobs up and down to the rhythm of the ocean. The water overcomes you and consumes you in its cruel grip. A spectrum of blues, whites and greens flash before your dulling eyes and bubbles consume your vision. Water fills you up, saturating you with its essence until you are one. Your last sight is something of a blue abyss as you fall into unconsciousness and death. Your now lifeless body sinks to the bottom and you become part of the ocean forever. Forever at peace with yourself and the sea.

“A thousand miles down to the sea bed, I found a place to rest my head”

I finally get off the train after a long tumultuous ride. I'd forgotten my money and the entire time I worried, worried being an understatement, about what I was going to do

when the usher came around. “Would I get kicked off?” I asked myself. I pulled on my hangnails for the entire ride. Lucky for me he never did come around. My dad pulled up to the curb and helped me with my bags.

“Mom says you forgot your money,” he says.

“Yeah I was really busy on my way to the station and I had so many things to-”

“Don't do it again, you got lucky this time” he cut me off to say.

We drove in what was mostly silence. He started to talk about his lesson at the fire academy half way through the drive. He spoke for about 20 minutes and I listened carefully and tried to be insightful and supportive.

“I'm trying out for a solo this week and,” I started to say.

“That's nice,” he interrupted.

We finished the drive in silence.

"And it's breaking over me"

I stick my toes into the water, not really wanting to swim but feeling drawn to it. I'm always swimming, and I'm not a great swimmer. Ever since I was little I always found myself swimming, but never particularly enjoying it. Always at the beach or the pool or swim class. I make my way in anyways, slowly but surely. It starts to feel more natural as the water gently caresses my legs and creeps up my torso. I go deeper and deeper in to the sea until my feet lose grip of the sandy bottom. It begins to envelope my legs and coddles my throat as I tread lightly in the water. It's a comfortable strangle.

"Though the pressures are hard to take, it's the only way I can escape"

I just have so much stress in my life about things that shouldn't bother me at all but are in fact overwhelming. There are day-to-day problems like getting to school on time, not forgetting anything, speaking up in class, getting all my work done and such. Then there are ongoing social problems like trying to fit in and make new friends. Then there are my persistent emotional issues of inadequacy and loneliness. And even more so there are wide spread world problems like poverty and death and hatred and war that bother me too. Then I just feel guilty that I live in a country that isn't plagued with such atrocities and I should be less ungrateful for it, and that puts me in an even more terrible mood. It's just all so much.

"All this devotion, was rushing out of me"

A simple text. Just a few words forming a yes or no question. All you need to reply is yes, or no. Just a few letters, it won't take you very long at all. A few minutes pass, no response. Maybe you misplaced your phone. A half hour passes. Maybe you forgot. An hour passes, nothing. Maybe you never got it. I send another. An hour passes, nothing. I

stare at the phone waiting for that cheerful chirp and red flashing light, like a beacon of hope. Silence. Nothing.

"Now I am under"

The water feels so comfortable. It wraps around me like a blanket, letting me into its welcome and warming embrace. It's peaceful. It's so much easier to just give into it. It's much stronger than I am anyway. My body gives in eventually and starts to drop. Muscles relax and my eyes close. My head slips under. I sink.

"I'm just giving in"

I've always felt left out, ignored, and neglected. I'm always the one trying to start the conversation, trying to extend invitations. Yet I'm never on the receiving end. I've always been that one friend everyone forgets about when we're all getting together and gets invited last minute. I always like people more than they like me. I get so upset about it that I almost want to force them to like me. I overwhelm them with attention and texts until they like me even less most likely. It's frustrating. How come I'm never appreciated as much as I appreciate?

"Never let me go"

I've been under too long. I can feel the water's effects start to take place on my body. My lungs burn and my head feels heavy. The water starts to roughen. I try to get to the surface and manage to burst out for a moment. I gulp for one more breath of air. I gasp as another wave crashes over my head and forces me under. The waves collide against my body like walls of brick and I'm tossed between the sea and the sand. Rip-tide. I fight and try to force myself up, no good. I'm thrown to the bottom where I crack my head against a rock. I slip into unconscious acceptance.

"And the crashes are Heaven"

I've had a few bad spots in my life. Times

I can only remember vaguely and through stories told. They weren't so much black outs, just memories I've repressed. I only really remember them because they happened, not because feelings remain or memories still stain my brain. They're almost like books I've read about the anti-hero who can never get it right. Like it's from a third person perspective as opposed to my life that I lived very much first person. They're sad stories though. Stories of failures, and stories of rejections. Stories with no happy ending. They're not really stories one would enjoy reading, maybe that's why I repress them.

"All this devotion I never knew at all"

"Mom, I'm trying to talk to you about something. Will you just listen?" I say as my mom frantically scurries about the living room trying to clean the already impeccable house before the guests arrive.

"Can't it wait?" she says as she rearranges the plates for the third time.

"I guess it has to," I say and walk up stairs. "I'm used to waiting anyhow," I say under my breath.

Whenever I want to talk my mom is almost always all ears. We could talk for hours, unless it's about my problems. She'd rather ignore them completely; if we don't acknowledge them aloud they won't be real to her.

My door creaks open and in walks my mom and dad. My mom wrings her hands and sits nervously to my left on my bed. My father waits in the doorway with a look of half disinterest half concern.

"You wanted to talk?" my mom asks sheepishly and places a hand on mine. "I know you've been having a hard time lately, well for a while, and I've wanted to help you but I was living in the disillusion of you being happy. It hurts me to know you hurt. It hurts your father too."

My father is silent looking down to his left, hands in his pockets he shuffles awkwardly.

"It's hard to talk to you sometimes, you want help but you never say it aloud. You want to talk but you never really let anyone in. You put up a front that you're okay and then you wonder why no one notices that you're upset," she says.


"So, we're here to listen if you want to talk," my dad says finally.

"And the arms of the ocean are carrying me"

I can't let my problems be my anchor anymore. I need to cut the rope and let them go. I need to love myself and appreciate what I have and accept what I don't. I need to stop putting such significance on unimportant things. I need to ask for help when I need it and accept it when it's offered. I need to stop expecting so much from people and start expecting more from myself. I need to give happiness a real fighting chance and stop creating even more obstacles for myself than life has already provided. It is easier said than done but I am sick of the sadness and I'm sick of not trying.

"A sinner released"

I wake up with new resolve, eyes fluttering open as I try to focus through the fuzzy blue. The waves are more violent than before and the sea even darker. I push off the bottom and fight my way up. I am pushed down and left and right by the powerful current but I refuse to give up. My lungs are giving in and my heart is beating at rapid pace. Just a few more feet. I can see the sun peaking through. My thoughts rush and my mind starts to shut down again. No. Don't give up. One final push as I break through the waves. The sea silences. I'm up.

"And it's over" 

Maryam Soltani



Five Angels

Like the Sun

Paulee McCormack

Like the veins of sun rupture white
flooding even the darkest
corners of shade,
your smile comes —
opening the eyelids
of my idle heart

Etui

Paulee McCormack

Purple plastic gold latched
with a green handle that
could be held to carry like
a suitcase sat on the table
stained in an array of colors
that caked her skin tan,
blocked her eyes black
and pouted her lips pink,
pretty and perfect
patting, plucking, wiping,
smudging, scraping, dabbing,
dying— my mother,
such a stranger to me
without her face

A Black Art

Paulee McCormack

The gunsmith crafts
a steel black
gently polished pistol
amidst a mix
of blanks and bullets

The work of the devil's
hands skilled in sin
touches frail fingers

They grip the gun's
smooth cold steel
trigger tucked under
the metal to pull it
slow—hold—then
let go

One round cycled
spits a spent casing
a life blown black

A Song in Heart

Paulee McCormack

Standing in her kitchen,
on a rainy Monday morning in May
she cooks eggs atop the flame
for her great granddaughter
the sound of grease sizzles
in the back of her sweet voice
softly singing 'Close to you
I will always stay'
a year now,
since Grandpa left her
quietly at dawn
in the bed of the nursing home

The ones she tells me
let her borrow his bicycle
and would watch her,
from his window, on her way home
The one who's 16th birthday
inspired her to steal
from the tightly sealed
envelope, her week's wages
at the moth ball factory,
to buy him a new pair
of red roller skates. The one
she took every hit for that night
from her mother's hard fists.

Now she sings a song
in heart, in her kitchen
as she scrapes the steaming
hot eggs onto my plate

I Will Walk

Paulee McCormack

I will walk
away, I will.
After I said it
a million times
it just might
be true.





Sing the War Hymns

Carolyn Goering

There are some who would say we are dead. That we are gone, that we no longer watch over the realms of mortals and we no longer have the power to lend ourselves to the faithful. The problem is that there is no faith. The mortals, they do not fear us, they do not question us, they do not ask us, and they do not look for us. We cannot help those who do not help themselves, and we cannot enter the hearts of those who shut us out.

That is not to say there is an absolute void of those who follow the old ways. There are healers that will call upon Andrial in their times of need, those who curse their enemies with the name of Kasmira, and then those who still ask my fledgling Halkyone for protection in their journeys. But the mortals still say we have abandoned them.

Divine will is not power absolute, even if this is a concept the lower beings have trouble understanding. To use it against the express wishes of a realm's inhabitants is treason against existence itself. Many a time I would have wished to strike fear again in to the hearts of man, to show them we are not dead, and that we are still almighty, but I cannot. You mortals, if you truly wanted us back, you have only to call us.

Our influence grows rusted and stagnant. Our names, our wills, are only invoked in extremes of emotions. The fear of death, the anger of vengeance, the sorrowful defiance of loss. These things cannot be denied, as I feel them more acutely than any other of my kind. The voices of the masses scream their latent desires and on the wind they come to me.

I am Cheverion, one of the Circle of Nine. I am the goddess of War, of Vengeance, of the thrill of battle, and of the emotions in the raw. The birds are my symbols, my messengers, my children of many forms. I was born into this world screaming and fighting and when the universe gives its last shuddering sigh and ends that is how I shall leave it. There is no one who may defeat me. I am the result of the First Conflict, and I will be the instigator of the last. Even my children, the true ones of my blood given to me by the Celestial Guardian Alexios, know and are born of these truths.

The first was Halkyone. Of all, he looks the fiercest, more of a bird of prey than a man. Alas, he inherited more of his father's kind and level heart, and he will not join me on the field of battle; his purpose it to protect. Ironical, as he comes from the force meant to destroy.

My dear Chandra is the second. She is bright and radiant like the moon, although she is no daughter of Lanaos. She is a guardian as well, helping her father keep balance between all that is celestial and all that is corporeal. She takes almost nothing from me but my love.

Andraste was the third. She is my Herald of Victory. On her wings are the winds of Chance and Fate, and with her voice she sings The Hymns of War. The people ask of her favor so they might succeed, whether their war is with the forces that seek to end life or with the demons that lurk within all souls.

Caelum is the last. He is the centaur child of the Earth, rocking the worlds with his fury. Continents shift for him. Volcanoes overflow at his whim. Mountains rise and crumble as he sees fit. Ah, but he is tempered where I can never be, lest he level everything that has been created.

Here I am drawn from my musings by my favored servant, a small gargoyle creature born of Haldis and his breathing of life into stone. He is far from home here, in the air-elemental plane of Avaria, yet he is dutiful and does not complain. At least, he does not complain of his environment, as he finds other matters to dwell upon.

"Mistress Cheverion!" he cries, a flight on little wings that beat the air into violent currents. "Mistress Cheverion, oh!"

"Speak, Du'anlore." I have not the time for his idle fancy, even if however he means well. The Deep Ones are moving, spreading their shades of evil across many realms. They are beings of chaos only, meant to destroy things and leave nothing in their path for the rebirth of life. The mortals may deny our existence, but it does not stop time from turning nor keep darkness from falling.

He lands on an ornate platform carved out of the side of a towering pillar, one of many similar ones designed for just that purpose. He shifts from one claw toed foot to the other, wringing his paws together and being all around unforthcoming with his important information.

"Du'anlore." I repeat his name with a knife's edge to it. Patience is not a virtue the holy Goddess gave to me.

"You sent me to find the honored kin Halkyone, that you did Mistress! But I looked and I looked and I could not find him! The birds have said they do not know where he has went, they cannot find him anywhere either!"

I am not surprised. Halkyone is a dreamer, and he has too much of his father in him. He has probably wandered off in to some section of the towering forests that is unfrequented by those who live here, the harpies and the djinn and the mighty rocs. "He is around. Keep searching Du'anlore, he will turn up." I turn to leave my open air palace, for I have things to discuss with Alexios.

"No, no mistress!" he takes wing again, tousled black hair flying about erratically with his darting movements in the air. "The Valkeria say that he is not here! Not in Avaria!"

I'm not certain what makes me angrier, the sheer ridiculousness of the statement or the fact that he went to the Valkeria before conferring with me first.

The mortals may deny our
existence, but it does not stop
time from turning . . .

"Du'anlore, what in the nine Hells is wrong with you?" To travel between the realms one needs to have an enormous amount of power at their disposal. It is not that Halkyone does not have this power, it is the fact that I should have felt it had he have moved between them.

"Mistress, he is gone! I also asked all I could for help, and then the Valkeria told me that he was not here!"

He is not lying, he would not dare too. The Valkeria as well; never would they deny me the truth. They are bound to this world, so intertwined that to send them from this existence one would have to tear the very fabric of Avaria to pieces.

Columns fell, arches crumbled, and stoneworks were crushed beneath the weight of my rage. Things that have stood for centuries now collapsed as I brought myself to bear on them. Nothing could stand before me. Not even the great trees in our wide forests could stay tall and proud when my grief cut through them. Those who made their homes in the wide boughs cried out as they fled and I howled with them.

My child had been stolen from me. Mine. From under my nose, in my very own domain, where I am law. I was angry with Halkyone, for falling in to such a trap. I was angry with myself, for being so careless to think this world was safe because I was there. I was angry with the perpetrator, for they had no right to think they could violate my family.

This is my realm. Here we are of wind, we are volatile and chaotic, and we wait for no one. No one will stop me if I chose to bring my world crashing down around me. I cannot help it. It is in my nature to destroy.

I only stop when the latest oak I fell nearly crushes Alexios. It is not that he would have been severely harmed if it had, as what could wood do to a divine body? Rather it is the principle of the matter. He comes to me four-hoofed, gracefully dancing out of the path of falling branches with speed and dexterity none of your mortal equines could ever hope to achieve. He looks at me, observes the decimated forest, and tosses his head with a snort.

"Andraste said it was bad, but I didn't think it would be this bad."

"This is nothing. They will grow back." I growl. I will not show weakness, this is my domain and I will do as I wish. If I want to destroy it, then I shall. He knows what I am thinking. The sly horse always seems to know just what I'm about and it is absolutely infuriating.

Alexios leaps over the huge trunks that litter the ground, getting closer to me and more two-hoofed as he does. Standing before me as mostly a man, he returns to addressing me.

"The granite and sandstone in the palace won't grow back. That'll take a little more to fix up though; was it really necessary to tear it half apart?"

"Yes." I hiss, the word acid on my tongue. I realize my folly as I say it. As much as the destruction I have caused has sated my bloodlust for the moment, it has done nothing to solve the problem at hand, and the impossible concept of failure or defeat comes creeping in.

Alexios sighs softly and shakes his head, but he does not berate me further. He is angry as well, but the difference is he can control it. I cannot. I simply exist as I am, I have no inhibitions or restraint, and I cannot hide what I may feel. Alexios may be able to temper his anger, to hide it, but I can feel it as clear as this cloudless sky, and it is a cold and serrated edge.

It is not just my child who has been taken. It is his child as well. Our firstborn. Our perfect combination. He is gone, and the two of us, a pair of Grand Battle Masters, where helpless as newborns in preventing it from happening. What cosmic guardians or generals of war are we when we cannot keep track of one daydreaming child?

He is talking again, yet I am not quite listening. In my mind I already know what needs to be done. The drums of battle are ringing in my ears before they have even begun to beat. I will find my child. I will bring him home, to where he belongs. Those who stand in my path will be cut down.

I am Cheverion, of the Circle of Nine. I am the goddess of War, of Vengeance, of the thrill of battle, and of the emotions in the raw. I am a grieving mother, but I am no helpless female who will be overcome by despair. Those who have underestimated my resolve and the depth of my rage will not have a chance to do so again.

I have been wronged, and I will take my vengeance. ☞



Bob the Dreadful

Andrew Weller

Milo thought, “Best thing about dragons,” observing the copper drool dripping down between the chalkboard and a hermetically sealed tapestry of the times table, “They eat people.”

Milo wrote this down: “Dragons rule.” He sipped champagne from his Snapple Apple juice bottle. He drew a crude picture of Bob The Dreadful—his dragon—and a boy—that was him some years ago—trying to wrestle Bob’s head into a wading pool. He choked a little.

“Stupid,” he thought, and scribbled over the picture, flipped to the next page in his notebook, chewed a thread of skin off his upper lip, took another sip of champagne. It stung. It tickled in his ears.

“It’s like a bubble bath,” he thought. “No wonder mom likes this stuff.”

At the head of the classroom, Mr. Metzger bounced along the chalkboard in a blizzard of polynomials, sequences, sums and inequalities. The edge of his combover began detaching, rebelling against the plaster that attached it to the top of his bald head.

“I wonder if it’ll go all the way today,” Milo thought.

A ceiling tile above the chalkboard boosted slightly, and a pair of gossamer eyes peep in from the darkness above the drool stain on wall of the classroom. Milo kept sipping the champagne.

"You're never going to make friends like this," Milo's dad said a few days ago, and took away Milo's sword and breastplate. "Everyone thinks you're retarded. Go to the park."

Milo took a golf club and hit rocks at the play equipment with Bob the Dreadful.

"Happy birthday," said the dragon in the ceiling. "You look terrible . . . Your eyes look . . . like you've been jousting."

"I'm a nothing," Milo thought. "There's nothing special about me." He pushed his aviators up again on the bridge of his face. "Nobody wants to hear sad stuff about me . . . me whining. Shut up."

"I don't mind that you've been crying all weekend," said the dragon. "It's not your fault that your dad was a junkie."

Mr. Metzger's hair flapped up like a 'C.' It flounced like Pacman, chomped like a beaver. His pink scalp peaked out like a tongue.

"Why doesn't he just cut off his combover?" Milo thought. "We already know that he's bald."

A full tile disappeared, and the shadow of a dragonhead loomed on the air ducts. Bob the Dreadful weaved his head to the rhythm of Mr. Metzger's lesson. Milo's mind tingled, and his neck hairs too. Ostensibly, he smoked in a locked smokehouse, stoking a ventless furnace for life.

"He probably shot a ten cent pistol," Said Bob the Dreadful, poking his scaly head into the chamber. "He owed a lot of people money . . . Deadbeat . . . Only ever thought of himself . . . Bad timing, yes, but better than him floating on Mom's couch . . . Why'd she ever get back with him anyway? She's masochistic . . . That's what happens when you forgive people . . . Stop over-emotionalizing the situation . . . It's better this way."

The classroom was all scribbles, and sniffs, and whitewashed concrete. The test would be tomorrow.

"Dis vay ve determine de margins," Mr. Metzger faced the class for the first time in almost an hour, standing still abruptly. His hair sprung further toward his shoulder. "Is all klar vis inequalities?"

Nobody spoke.

"Goot. Now ve review de graphs."

Mr. Metzger again marked his marks on the board. The chalk squeaked.

"I'm hungry," Said Bob the Dreadful. "Do you have any Chiclets?"

"I hate people," Milo thought. He swallowed half of his champagne. "I want to die."

"I feel you," Bob the Dreadful said. "But Mom would be devastated . . . as if she's not devastated enough already . . . My breath feels oily."

"Dad's an asshole."

"True," Said Bob the Dreadful. "Dad was an asshole . . . But who wants to celebrate with a junkie?"

"I wonder if Mom remembers," Milo thought. "It's ok if she forgot."

Bob the Dreadful flipped back ten, fifteen ceiling tiles, broke through the aluminum supports, and hopped into the classroom. He bent his head a bit, pretending to barely fit while he waddled around Mr. Metzger, letting out a few greasy hiccups.

"I doubt anyone here knows about Dad," Thought Milo. "Do they even know that I have one?"

"Nobody cares if you have a Dad," Said Bob the Dreadful.

"At times like this I wish I had friends," Thought Milo.

"I'm not your friend?" Said Bob the Dreadful.

"It's not so bad to be alone," Milo thought.

Bob the Dreadful belched a fiery ribbon, blazing across the face of every student, but they looked right past him. The florescent light above Milo went out, and a charred stain grew out from the other end of the classroom, flames flickering and dying along its edges.

The bell sounded and students filed out of math class. Milo remained, unbudged, and he finished the last of his champagne.

"Well, I'll leave you to it," Bob the Dreadful said and lumbered out into the hall with the rest of the 9th grade.

Milo reached under his seat for his backpack and accidentally jabbed his face against the desk in front of him. His aviators fell off.

"Vat is zis?" Mr. Metzger said. "Are you hurt?" He trotted toward where Milo sat near the back of the room. His comb over twitched violently, flapping out and back in place as he jabbed his way past the desks.

Tears poured down Milo's face, soaking his collar. His throat made a soft clucking sound, and he snuffled too. He couldn't stop snuffling.

When Mr. Metzger stopped by Milo, his hair landed like the top of a treasure chest, the perfect mold of his dome.

"Leave off the sunglasses. Let me see you."

Bob the Dreadful sat in the hallway in one of the chairs outside of the administrative office, reading a copy of Dungeon Magazine, looking rather small and pale. Milo grabbed him by the neck, pulled him out of his seat and down the hall. He kissed the dragon's flubbery neck fan.

"I thought you were ignoring me," Bob the Dreadful said. "Did you say anything to the nurse . . . Was it helpful?"

"I told them that I've been having a hard time sleeping," Milo said. "They gave me Benadryl, and I get to go home." ☹



Hip Hop

Beautiful Evolution

Conversation with Carlton Douglas Ridenhour

Raphael Bliss

See Chuck D as an artist collector. He's a background kind of guy, an organizer, and when he ends up in the limelight he's always bringing someone there with him. I think he's a master hip-hop selector and one of the best MCs alive, but he'd say don't believe the hype.

"When it came down to the rhyming and the writing rhymes and lyrics I didn't have those natural talents," he told me in a phone interview as he was driving up to Boston from New York to speak at UMB. "I was older than a lot of those cats too, so it didn't just happen by the osmosis of my surroundings. The only attribute that I had that I think now was superior was my voice, which could weather any storm and yell over any mountain. That's the only thing I came to the table with."

Maybe so, but he also put meaning to hip-hop in a way that completely revolutionized American culture, and lead one of the most

highly regarded rap groups of all time to international fame.

Back in the mid-eighties, Chuck D worked for a radio station in New York and did a little MCing on the side with Flava Flave and other local rappers. He always saw himself as an organizer, working to bring hip-hop culture to the level that MCs were taking it to at the time.

"I was going to work behind the scenes in the infrastructure of Hip Hop. But Rick [Ruben of Def Jam] wanted me as an artist, and I had refused for a long time. So when I finally agreed to do it, I said 'ok if I'm going to do it this is what I'm going to do,'" Chuck D said.

Rick Rubin had heard the single, Public Enemy #1, from Dr. Dre. Legend says that Chuck D recorded the joint in response to a local MC that wanted to battle him. Rubin, a fledgling producer at the time,

dogged Chuck D for over a year before finally getting him to sign with Def Jam Records in 1986. After getting signed, Chuck D gathered local talent and started recording in earnest with hype man Flava Flave, DJ Lord, lyricist Professor Griff and several others. So Public Enemy came onto the scene with their first album "Yo! Bum Rush the Show." And damn did the show get a bum rush.

PE shot onto the charts and into the mainstream. Their second record, "It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back" did even better and went platinum within a year. With lyrics that focus on political issues and Black empowerment, Public Enemy incited a good bit of controversy in the early 90s. Chuck D is now focused on keeping hip-hop high quality and conscious.

Reflecting on how rap has changed over the years sets Chuck D to thinking back to his earliest passion, organization.

"I think it's a beautiful evolution . . . but I will tell you that as the art has progressed forward, the infrastructure has gotten lazier and sloppier. I've never seen a genera with as lazy and sloppy an infrastructure as hip-hop and rap. Look, there are glaring weaknesses, like it chases a lot of women away after they're 20 years old because it no longer speaks to them," Chuck D said.

To provide a structure for the crisscrossed connections in Hip Hop, he created online portals to connect fans and artists. He collects the best rappers, and offers them a space to shine online.

"I always tell MCs to listen to each other," he said.

Public Enemy just got back from a tour through South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, over the New Year. Now Chuck D's on his annual speaking rounds January

– March. At 50, he's taking a broader approach and focusing less on his own image and more on other people's.

"I'm a major sports man," he said. "Everyone's getting ready for the Super Bowl do you know why?"

"Why do you say?" I asked.

"Well, cause it's well organized. If it was sloppy and just a piece of crap, people wouldn't give a damn," he said. "I love the NBA. I love the NFL. I dig MLB. But I'm into R-A-P. I ain't got nothing to do with those other things. I'm into rap. I want it to be fan-tastic."

Beyond passion, Chuck D has the talent, and connections to make big ripples in the underground hip hop scene. Hip-hop couldn't hope for a more meticulous or careful caretaker. Why? He's not in it for his own fame. Chuck D's in it for the game.

"It's not just the game it's everything around the game that makes us love it," he said. ☞

"Where's Flave" Story

Brisbane, 2010 Tour

"Probably the weirdest story of all time. We were in Brisbane, and somebody came back stage and gave Flava a plate of food that he had left back in 1999. He had taken a bite out of a burger and just left it. So this dude took the plate and kind of embalmed the plate, kind of sealed it in some kind of plastic. So the plate is in the same state that Flava left it and the dude was hanging it on his wall for like 12 years and brought it to the Brisbane gig and asked Flava to sign it."

"I'll put [the video] up so you can see it for real on PublicEnemy.com."

Chuck D's Playlist

"Since I've spent the last four months in 22 countries, I have been listening to a lot of music from all over the map. I don't always listen to artists that come through the commercial main stream or the independent mainstream. I listen internationally and locally."

If you want to expand you hip-hop horizons check out Chuck D's radio show on WBAL. Here are Chuck D's directions:

"Go to WBAL.org. Go to the 'Archive' area, and then go to "And You Don't Stop." Check it out tonight. I don't mean to take your time but I think it would be a worthwhile listen."

Another place to look is on Chuck D's label's website www.slamjamz.com.

Album of Note: Foul Mission by Heet Mob

Artists to Check Out: Crew Grrl Order, Kendo the Almost Famous, and anyone else on Slamjamz.com

For the Classics: hiphopgods.com, "the place where rap lives on, and on, and on till the break of dawn"

For the Hip Hop Queens: shemovement.com, "They've got these DJs that are like, "Aint nobody trying to hear some chick rapping. Let's do some Nicki Manaj." This site is a place for women to get their raps out there."

"That's who I listen to, and that's who I like."



Body of Ashes in a Body of Water

John Burns



When I awoke in my ratty Dublin hotel room, the purpose of my visit was the furthest thing from my mind. The most pressing thought was the shower I needed. A short stumble from my bed yielded the bathroom and a shower stall that was awkwardly miniscule. A few moments under the water refreshed me slightly and I was ready to begin the day and remember what I was supposed to do.

I tried to shake the previous night's haze as I dressed and felt it hanging around my neck. I was instructed to visit the River Liffy on the tenth by my mother. She told me specifically because my brother George had neither the gumption nor reliability to complete such a task. I promised her I would make sure that I did it with him. He had a room down the hall on the same floor as I did. I guessed he was asleep and that I had to awaken him, as I usually had to do when we were younger.

Leaving my room, I went down a narrow and red painted hallway to George's room. I gave the door a gentle rapping of my knuckles. Not hearing anything, I let loose a little stronger of a rap and yet again there was no response.

I went back to my room and sat on the bed. Laying down and I slipped into sleep. I awoke several hours later and saw the time was almost three. Feeling immeasurably worse than I did before, I gathered up my strength remembering my promise to my mother. I returned to my brother's room and repeated the knocking procedure. Not wanting to waste anymore time until he was ready and needing something to ease my condition, I decided on a stroll outside.

Walking downstairs and past the moderately attractive young lady behind the front desk, I found the street, right where I left it before. It looked different from the last time, less blurry now. Out on the street the noise of the day assailed me. My shoes thudded ungracefully against the cobble stones and I walked towards whatever shadows I could find, trying to conceal my form from the judging sun.

It occurred to me that filling my stomach with something would help my current state. Around the corner of my hotel was a series of restaurants and I chose the closest one that did not have someone playing an instrument in front. I passed a trumpet, a guitar and a fiddle before I found a place that suited my needs.

When I entered the restaurant, I tried giving the woman at the door a solid smile, however I feel it must have struck her differently. She returned a smile that was predicated more on pity than anything else and came close to holding my arm as she guided me to a table tucked far away in a corner. Not that the location mattered, the restaurant was rather empty with the full crew already in place for the supper shift that would soon come.

She even helped me slide out of my coat, placing it on the back of my

chair, the way my father would put his coat on a chair in the winter time, after walking home from work. He would spread the coat over the chair and ignore taking seat until he kissed my mother and asked us how school went.

The woman from the door placed a menu in my hands right side up after she lead me to the table. She suggested to me that if I needed, she could read some items or just order something nice for me. I felt as though I looked worse than I actually was, but I did not object to her helping me, namely because she smelled rather nice and her blouse's buttons were not completely done up.

"What do you think I should have?" stumbled out of my lips.

"Probably something nice and hearty love, how about a beef stew?"

"Yes," slammed out of my mouth.

She grinned at me and took the menu out of my hands as she walked towards the kitchen, looking back over her shoulder to give me a short glance and returned to her objective. I sat with eager anticipation of my meal when a whole pitcher of water was placed in front of me with a glass.

"I think you'll need this."

"Thank you, that's very nice of you."

She smiled as a I took a long deep sip which transformed into a gulp and the glass was empty before I could completely run out of breath.

"Thirsty?"

"Yes."

"That's why I brought the whole pitcher over," she said with a knowing look.

"That's why you make the big bucks here."

"Sure, I'm on my way to being the wealthiest server in Ireland."

"I would be very impressed if you were. Would you like to sit down or something?"

"I don't know if I should, we're not really supposed to sit with customers."

Looking around at the restaurant I spotted two Germans sitting on the opposite end of the dining area.

"I don't think they'll tell anyone," I said confidently.

"Alright, fine, I'll have a seat."

As opposed to sitting across from me, she sat next to me. I turned my chair so that we were not parallel when speaking to one another.

"I'm Charlie by the way. What's your name?" I asked after she had situated herself.

"Melanie."

"I don't think I know anybody named Melanie."

"You know one now."

"To be fair, I don't really know you, I just met you. Maybe after a couple months I can say I know you."

"How long are you here for?"

"Another four days."

"Doesn't really give us a lot of time to get to know each other, does it?"

"Well we could try and cram a couple months into a couple days."

"I don't know if we can do that."

"Then I'm afraid we cannot know each other."

She smiled and I saw it was genuine, without thinking much I observed this woman being incredibly nice to me without much reason for it, this was something I decided to pursue.

"Do you usually sit with all of your guests here?"

She stopped for a second and looked at me.

"Not particularly, no."

Sliding back her chair she seemed to be taken aback by the question.

"I didn't mean anything by that, it's just that, you've been really nice to me and I'm not sure why. I appreciate it, I just don't know what I could have done to make such a charming acquaintance."

This pleased her and I felt warmer knowing that her good graces were restored upon me.

"I don't know, you just look like a nice fellow, when you walked in you looked bad. You still do. Sorry."

I think she worried about offending me, but I was lost in her eyes. They were intently locked in mine as she spoke and I could not bring myself to pulling away from her. When I realized that she was waiting for a response to her apology, I made a face like I was contemplating by furrowing my eyebrows and pursing my lips like words were about to be formed on them. At last I knew what to say.

"It's fine, I do look bad."

She laughed quickly and lowly, but obviously wanted to indulge in the

humor some more.

"I don't mean you look bad, like bad. I mean, you seem like you usually look good and right now you look not good, so kinda bad."

"I see now. I'm shocked you think I normally look good. You seem like the kind of person that always looks good."

She smiled and looked down at the floor. She brought her head back up after her cheeks lost their color.

"Thank you," she said, as a smile cracked at the corners of her mouth, but she would not let it go any further than that. "I should check on your food."

She got up and walked towards the kitchen, looking back as I watched her stride toward the door. She had a nice walk, a woman's walk, letting her hips go side to side without fear of anyone watching her. Those hips had a supple shape to them and despite her black slacks and black button down trying to hide her form, I saw it and admired how womanly she actually was in almost every regard.

A few moments later she emerged from the kitchen with a bowl of stew, steam rising off of it into the air, disappearing short of the low ceiling.

"Here you go," she said placing it in front of me.

"Thank you."

She stood next to the chair she previously occupied and I took it upon myself to re-invite her back down.

"Please sit. Tell me about yourself. The whole thing, life story."

"It's boring."

"I'm sure it isn't."

She placed her hands on her lower back and stood for a second looking at me, as if I had some sort of true intention that was hidden behind my honest invitation.

"Ok."

She sat back down and began a long story about her life. I did not need to interject as she was content to begin her tale and follow through on every aspect. It was as if she waited for me to come in and ask her about her life. I learned about her family and her home. Her ambitions were of interest to me and the soothing sound of her voice aided my digestion better than any music could have. I listened and ate and surprisingly did not offend her with my style of consumption, which at times has been described as boorish.

When I had finished the meal she still had more to say. I sat and I

The hand retracted and I missed its embrace.

"Not to be forward, but I would like to see you again after you do this. My shift ends in about an hour or so."

"I'd like that. I'd like that a lot."

She stood up straight and brushed the front of her clothes. She reached into her server's half apron and pulled out the check.

"Thank you," she said as she slipped the check into my hand.

Before she had retreated to the kitchen, I had the tab paid with a generous tip and was back out onto the street. The day felt less abrasive and I felt comfortable returning to the hotel and my brother.

Going back to my brother George's room, I put my ear to the door before I started knocking. I heard movement and indecipherable chatter coming from within, then I gave a small knock. The sounds inside stopped for a few beats until I heard footsteps coming at me. The lock clicked and the knob turned quickly as the door opened swiftly to reveal my brother, clad in underwear and socks, his brown hair messy and pressed to his scalp on one side.

"Oh it's you. What's going on?"

"Today is the tenth."

He pulled his head back slightly and his eyes shut to point that only a thin sliver of eye could be seen. His hand was still on the doorknob and the other one came to his temple, as if he was trying to focus the truth into his mind.

"And?"

I let out a sigh and looked at the ignorance on his face.

"Oh," he said. "Right, right, right."

"When are you going to ready?"

"Um, fifteen minutes, maybe twenty."

"You aren't going to use the fifteen or twenty minutes for another round of poker, are you?"

He took a step forward keeping his hand on the doorknob, slightly closing it until he and we were both in the hall with the door as a buffer between her and us. He lifted his hands and pushed them down to show me the volume of the conversation had dropped.

"Dude, shut up," he said lowly.

"Just get ready," I returned in the same lowly manner.

"I might need some help actually."

"With what? Putting on your pants or brushing your teeth?"

"No. With her."

"Do I have to dress her?"

"No. She wants to stay and I can't tell her no."

"Why? Is she going to beat you up?"

"No, she's great, just help me out."

"How would I be able to help you with this?"

"If you coerced her out of here with something, I could get ready."

"Do you expect me to lure her out or something? Maybe put a steak on a string and drag it along? Perhaps a nice bit of chocolate?"

"Just tell her what we have to do and she'll probably excuse herself."

"I'm really getting sick of doing stuff like this for you."

"C'mon man, please."

"Fine. What's her name?"

He stood for a second, staring a hole through my chest, apparently trying to see her name, which was written on my back.

"Alright. Just be ready to go in fifteen minutes after I get her out of here."

"Thanks man."

I walked past him into the room and the lady was looking out the window with her back to us as we approached. She was in her clothes from the night before, a skirt and blouse with sensible shoes.

"Hello," I said, leading off with a surefire way to get someone to do something.

She turned so I saw her face and realized that her conservative dress did not match what she looked like. She was stunning, high cheek bones, a pointed chin, and dirty blonde hair pulled back into a loose ponytail. Her lips were plump and they parted to reveal teeth to my eyes and words to my ears.

"You must be Charles, George told me a lot about you."

"Yeah, he's great. You can just call me Charlie, everybody does."

"But Charles is so nice, it's very traditional."

"Sure. Whatever floats your boat darling."

"I love your accent, that Boston one."

"Really? How do you know about the accent?"

"All the movies that have come out."

I brought my hand up to my eye and rubbed.

"Goddamn Hollywood."

I heard a slight cough over my shoulder. I looked back over at my brother and he reminded me with his eyes that there was something I was supposed to do.

"So, George and I have to spread our father's ashes into the River Liffey and we have to go do it now. But you certainly can see him later after we finish. It shouldn't take much longer than an hour or so. Ok?"

Traditionally a more gentle method is used for such information, but my brother's inability to do stick to tasks irritated me. The pleasure of Melanie's company held me together. In spite of my hurried dissemination of our task, the girl did not seem to mind.

"Oh my, that is so sweet. You guys are good sons."

She moved towards me and gave me a big hug.

"Good luck."

She reached George and gave him a kiss on the mouth.

"I'll see you later."

As she sashayed down the hall and to the stairs, I looked at George, who was smiling madly.

"I got the touch man, what can I say?"

"Just get ready George! Jesus Christ."

I pushed my way past him and returned to the room. My bag was half open and the urn was in a sealed box. Pulling it up and taking out the urn from the box, I held the ashes. It wasn't his body. His body was skin, bones, organs and blood, not ashes. He was gone and what I had were just memories of him.

A knock sounded through the door.

"You ready?" George's voice rang out.

I joined George in the hallway with the urn in my hands.

"Can I carry it?"

"No, George."

I led the walk outside and we made our way to the river. 





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