

SPRING '23

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This is the second edition of The Guild we edited, and I couldn't be more pleased with how it turned out. Last year—in keeping with the times—we kept the magazine fully online, and I always felt a certain lack. I wanted the feeling of holding the magazine in a physical medium. This year, as we get further from the online world we lived in, we are proud to finally have it here in front of us. I am honored to have the opportunity to showcase some of the pieces of the extremely talented writers at this school we've written. I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I did.

--Bjarni Erlendsson

Hello, everyone. I hope that you enjoy the submissions we selected for this edition. I had a lot of fun putting this together with Bjarni—I've always edited zines by myself, so this was a new experience for me. I also was kind of... tired (?) of just putting out zines in an obscure (not really) website to be seen by maybe a handful of people, so this is a welcome change of pace. Without further ado, we present:

The Guild Magazine, Spring '23.

--Dan Hufancia

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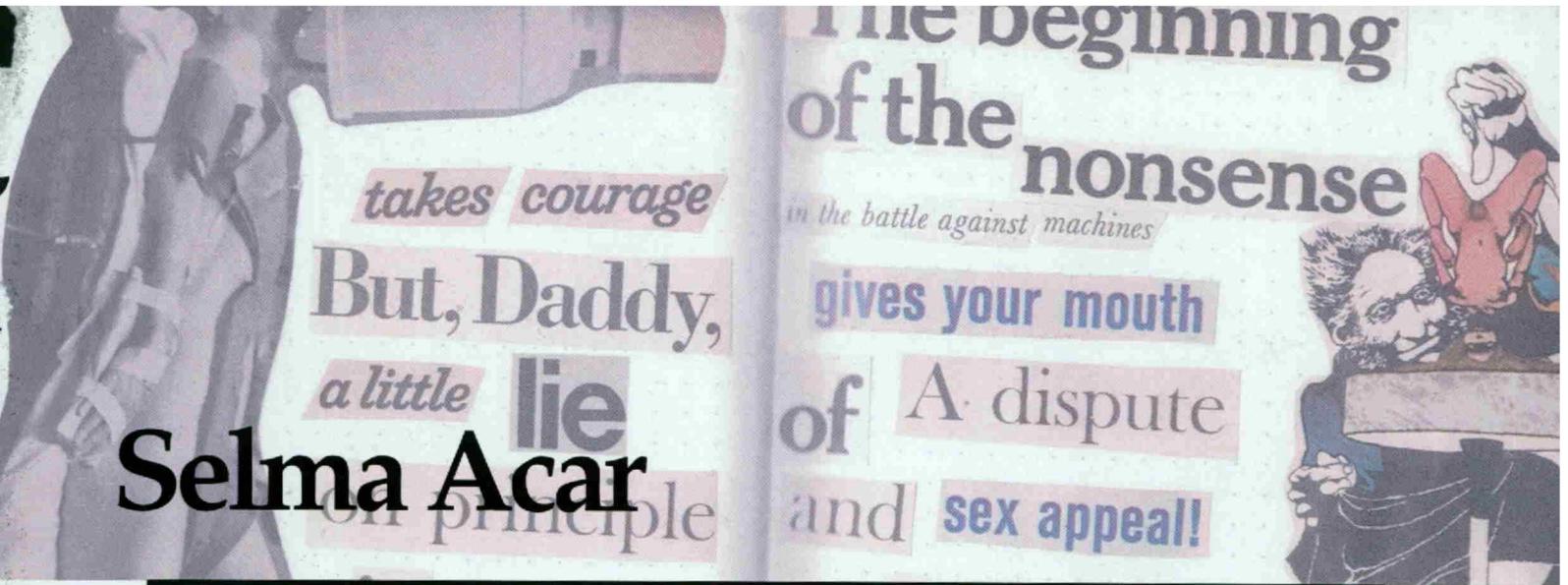
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KATIE BOCKINO

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EDITORS' NOTES



takes courage
But, Daddy,
a little lie
on principle

Selma Acar

autumn in march

it is autumn in march
the machine whirrs harsh
cacophonies the birds launch

a darting song blares through broken boughs and shut
beaks from one gape throat

we have already been accustomed to the machine
and make nostalgic symphonies of croaks and blokes
digging into their sleeves as if they shoveled the soil
deep enough to find the side
that the rain comes up from

enter through the infinity gates and exit from a
puncture

thrown out by a gale of guile ruthlessly pushing around
its guests in the guise of a fervor.

she swings to reach higher and finds herself at the same
elevation four sore legs after.

there are no people here but their trails on the benches
and wounds on the dislodged handles.

they eat standing up a platter of sacrificial sushi

the beginning
of the
nonsense

in the battle against machines

gives your mouth

of A dispute

and sex appeal!

and dough on wheels to go

and a hysteric crowd of machine malfunctions beside a
playground

for kids so privileged they get to see the human
condition at its worst

hunched over backs possessed to stomp the ground in
warm

blood that embalms me before its warmth reaches me
and launches me

into the swamps of a regurgitating cave.

there is no land untouched by the mucus of god
whether it's the sap from a tree or murky blood as thick
as mud.

a cry rustles through the prolapsed gluttonous street
luring in its victims

with a whistling hollowed woodwind chime man.
i give him four bucks for the good of his heart and he
wastes

it on tar charred ribs and chaffed smoked figs.



disobedient machine

i am guarded by gazes that can smell it on me as soon as i enter. their eyes move towards the steps that i have not yet taken and they sense my fear before i do.

a blind witness to the brutal wails of a frantic renegade – on the loose from one machine overtaken by another. she aims towards protruding roots that gleam so vividly contrasting against snows bleaching everyone's lids but her own. if they had persisted through the obstacles of damped socks steeped in an ice bath of a smoldering storm or the static radiating from vacant streets, they too would have reached the paradise that regurgitates from the sinkhole at the center of the womb. eviscerated from the machine as a stillborn, sickly sticky in the amniotic fluid burrowed deeper into to preserve her purity, have it harden as a shield, yet that drove her screams to silence. an oyster with a split mouth, crushed shell, and a pearl hidden under layers of skin to choke the gluttonous ones that dared swallow her pride through hungry throats devouring her innocence to induce their own purge. her armor is tough and repels their indolent gapes tacitly, lets them stuff their face pathetically, until she appears as a weight heavy in their tunnels rocking them into a drowsy slumber as they defiantly stand upright while days turn into dreamless nights egress rest.

i walk towards the center of the spiral she inhabits tiptoeing gently at lucrative nights as she is at ease — do not disturb the baby there is a baby on board and it is at the centerpoint of the

circumference of the ratio of me and every step i take towards her she becomes more foreign to me — an untainted version devoid of desires i denounce yet redeem and she may not be lured out alive but heavily injured as a limp curled up fawn on the shoulder of the street that is decapitated
in the minutes of doubt that follows.

i depart on a pilgrimage and my feet press on the same prints that have now dispersed from neglected molds made firm by retreating steps. youth in dismay, bound by the trace of my orbit eternally erected on a loop of tawaf around myself by myself and taken siege from all sides as there are no sides. the walls entangle and the fallen boughs resemble the belly of the whale Jonah was in more than a whale's carcass. the branches tumble in on themselves and you are transported into the breathing belly of the whale, encapsulated by the glares of light traveling down its throat to reveal prophecies on the lining of its flesh. its spine snaps you both and the rib cage had been rotting wood adorned by the stomach acid of a creek uprooted and a drought enthralls the swamp of the womb. she is fenced in only seeing what the bones of the rib cage of my orbit of matured sins does not obstruct using the slivers of light for guidance. faith in the songs of frogs never distant and only near, their faces plastered onto the petrified trunks of wood that repeat and by then they're deafening croaks are rhythmic with trunks mouths eager to swallow me up to curb the rumbling of the whales belly. you then become the secondary resource from the rib of Adam, a leech at best, castrated from will while convulsing from the syndrome of desire that appears to be the only salvation from the Fathers womb. but the man-made machine cannot be overthrown by man-made desires that only yield towards awaiting open graves. to be an organ donor, the loss of oneself for him, to bow your head without reluctance and to not disobey the Father for pleasure as that is what empowers him.

The City Of...

by Ohary Aledo

AS I WITNESSED Ismael Flores' meandering through the dreary and dark streets of Mexico City, I could not help but be struck by the frivolous desire that had stirred within him on this particular night. The night had awakened in him the desire to play the piano, and so he walked ardently, tapping his fingers on his legs as he went. As he took each step, he lost parts of himself and his mind, lost in his own world.

Ismael's tapping was as ineloquent as his actual piano playing, but his love for the instrument led him to believe that he could someday be as renowned as the great Debussy. Despite his contempt for the Frenchman, he could not help but respect the fame that surrounded him, and this gave him the strength to continue on his walk through the city.

But as he walked, Ismael found himself suddenly enveloped by the carnival of aromas emanating from the mercadito that lay before him. The arid and barren streets were transformed into a lively and bustling marketplace, filled with the delicious scents of fried foods. Oh, how his dry mind and sorrowful feet had driven him to this place! The smell of empanadas and esquites had taken him from his wretched position in the city, and transported him back to his days of boredom and quietude in Yautepec.

It was a time when everything had seemed unmoved and still, when life had appeared to be at a standstill. Ismael had spent his afternoons by the windowsill, watching the August rains storm on, while the only movement he had witnessed was the caña swaying in the breeze and the stained dust on the windows. Had he truly lived during that time? Had time really been lost, when there was absolutely nothing to be lost in?

Ismael was one of those children whose fate was determined by circumstances beyond his

control. He was born into a family that owned a Tortilleria, and from a young age, he was required to assist his mother in the daily operations of the business. His education was compromised by his obligation to work, and he was deprived of the formative experiences that a formal education would have afforded him. Yet, his destiny seemed predetermined, as he was being groomed to take over the family business.

Ismael found solace in the simple pleasures of life, such as the taste of a freshly fried taquito, but these moments of comfort were fleeting. The sound of the tortilla-making machine, once a familiar and dull sound, now rang with melancholy. Missing moments of life that were far from exciting or important, but were simply moments where he was there but at the same elsewhere. As he stood under the dim light of the lamp, the memories of his childhood flooded his mind. The years spent toiling away in the Tortilleria, the missed opportunities for education and personal growth, all added up to a sense of regret and longing.

Ismael, now devouring the taquito, allowed it to nurture his insides and consume his mind with memories, realizing that it was a reminder of his unfulfilled potential. Ismael was a victim of circumstance, but he could not help but wonder what his life would have been like if he had been given a chance to pursue what he truly wanted.

As he continued his nocturnal stroll, the moon rising higher in the sky, Ismael tapped his feet on the pavement, lost in thought and oblivious to the passing of time. His whistling created a melody, a kind of sonata that he had only ever imagined in his dreams. The futility and pointlessness of this activity kept him occupied as he wandered past alleys, bars, and shops that remained open in the depths of the night. As he walked, he chanced upon a grey-haired, bug-eyed man with an aura of mysticism, tuning his shoddy guitar.

"Evening, Joven. Mind giving me a pesito or two?" asked the old man.

Ismael hesitated before responding with a barely audible voice, "It depends. Will you play me a song? What will you do with the money? You must be selling something for me to part with my coins."

The old man chuckled at Ismael's response, amused by his audacity. He then took a deep breath, transformed himself back to the days of his youth, and began to play an old coastal song with such fervor that his grey hair transformed back to brown, his wrinkles faded, and his eyes

regained their former sparkle. His voice broke in, singing of beaches, ports, and lighthouses, transporting Ismael back to a time of youthful exuberance and wonder.

Ismael sat down cross-legged, closed his eyes, and allowed the music to take him back to his childhood. He saw his father sitting outside on a steel chair, with a cigarette and beer in hand, listening to the radio. He could hear the popular singer's voice as his father scolded him for not sitting still.

"If you know what's good for you, you'll stop being a roach and become a bull," his father had said in frustration at Ismael's attempts to make life interesting.

As Ismael listened to the old man's music, he pondered his father's words but found no meaning in them. The only thing that mattered was the melody of the guitar and the old man's voice, taking him back to a place of pure innocence and beauty.

As the night wore on, Ismael remained lost in thought, listening to the old man's music. For a brief moment, he forgot about his troubles and worries, and was transported to a place of peace and tranquility.

As the notes of the final chord of the song slowly dissipated into the atmosphere, Ismael's consciousness awakened from the reverie in which he had been immersed. Gently opening his eyes, he found himself alone, holding a bottle in his hand, without any recollection of how he had arrived at this point. A sense of disorientation took hold of him, and he found himself lost in contemplation of the fate of the man whose voice and fingers had just filled the room with such transcendent beauty.

His mind began to spin in circles, seeking answers that eluded him. Suddenly, he felt his body lose balance, and he tumbled onto the cold, damp cobblestones. As he lay there, his head resting against the rough surface, he began to reflect on the curious nature of these stones. They were never comfortable to walk on, especially for those with thin soles, but for some inexplicable reason, every soul in the city seemed to endure the pain.

Ismael found solace in the sensation of the cool and humid stones on his face, feeling every kind of pleasure he could wish for in life but on his face. He pondered on how much he had in common with these stones, holding so much but much of it being nothing. They had been there for so long, yet what was the point of their existence? No one wants to walk on stone, he thought,

perhaps in the past, but today, who wants to walk on stone? It's as disgusting as it is uncomfortable. So why, in the name of god, do we do so? And why have we done so for so long? One could simply boil it all down to it just being history, and the essence of its utility being because it is there.

In his solitude, Ismael put his ears to the stones once again, concentrating on what he could hear. Histories and fables and gossip whispered back at him, quivering in such tellings he began to kiss and lick the stone with so much ardor the stone began to kiss him as well. He found himself transforming into the form of a slender Venus, the stone's arms caressing him, pulling him closer and deeper into the crevices of her now-forming ligaments. He fell deeper into The Origin Of The World, his fingers feeling the figure and conceiving a picture of the Joy Of Life. The moon, a silent spectator, laid its light upon the pair as they rocked and moved about.

Ismael's eyes were shut tight by his own fears of what would be there, horrified by the thought of what was happening. But as he opened them, and the light shone upon the ground to reveal his shortly-lived lover, he found himself embracing himself and twitching.

Then, putting his ear to the ground, cupping it with his hands, he heard the faint sounds of music in the distance, heralding the arrival of the circus.

As Ismael wandered through the colorful and chaotic scene before him, he felt himself transported from his earthly existence to something far more ethereal. The sounds and sights of this spectacle were a symphony of madness that played upon his senses like a masterful composition.

His head tilted back, Ismael gazed up at the swirling clouds above, their soft, cottony shapes providing a stark contrast to the wildness below. In this dizzying array of freaks and maniacs, animals and chaos, Ismael felt himself losing touch with reality and being drawn ever upward.

Despite the frenzied parade of the circus family all around him, Ismael moved forward with purpose, dodging rings of fire and sidestepping headless women and albino lions. His journey eventually led him to a tent, where he stepped inside and disappeared into the swirling maelstrom of reflection, deflection, and illusion.

Ismael gazed upon the mirrors and crystals that reflected and refracted the light in such a way that it created a dazzling array of colors that seemed to dance and swirl around him. He was

mesmerized by the beauty of it all and felt himself drawn deeper into the tent.

As he wandered through the maze of mirrors, he found himself lost in a sea of reflections. Each mirror showed him a different version of himself, each with its own unique twist. He saw himself as a young boy, playing in the fields, chasing after butterflies and laughing with his friends. He saw himself as a teenager, awkward and unsure, trying to find his way in the world. And he saw himself as a man, successful and accomplished, but still searching for something more.

The crystals, too, held their own secrets. Ismael was fascinated by the way the light seemed to dance and sparkle inside them, as if each one held a tiny universe all its own. He reached out to touch one, curious to feel the smooth surface of the crystal against his skin.

But as his hand made contact with the crystal, he felt a sharp sting, as if he had touched a flame. He jerked his hand back, surprised and a little bit frightened by the unexpected pain. He examined his hand, but there was no sign of injury, no burn or blister to show for the strange sensation.

Ismael shook his head in disbelief. How could something so beautiful and fascinating be so painful? It was like the circus itself - a wild and chaotic spectacle that was both mesmerizing and terrifying all at once.

Ismael awakened from his trance, returning to the present moment. His eyes scanned his surroundings and he came to the realization that the old man had departed, the marketplace had long since

shuttered its doors, and the earth clean from the Circus. The streets were barren, and the only noise that permeated the stillness was the sound of his own footsteps.

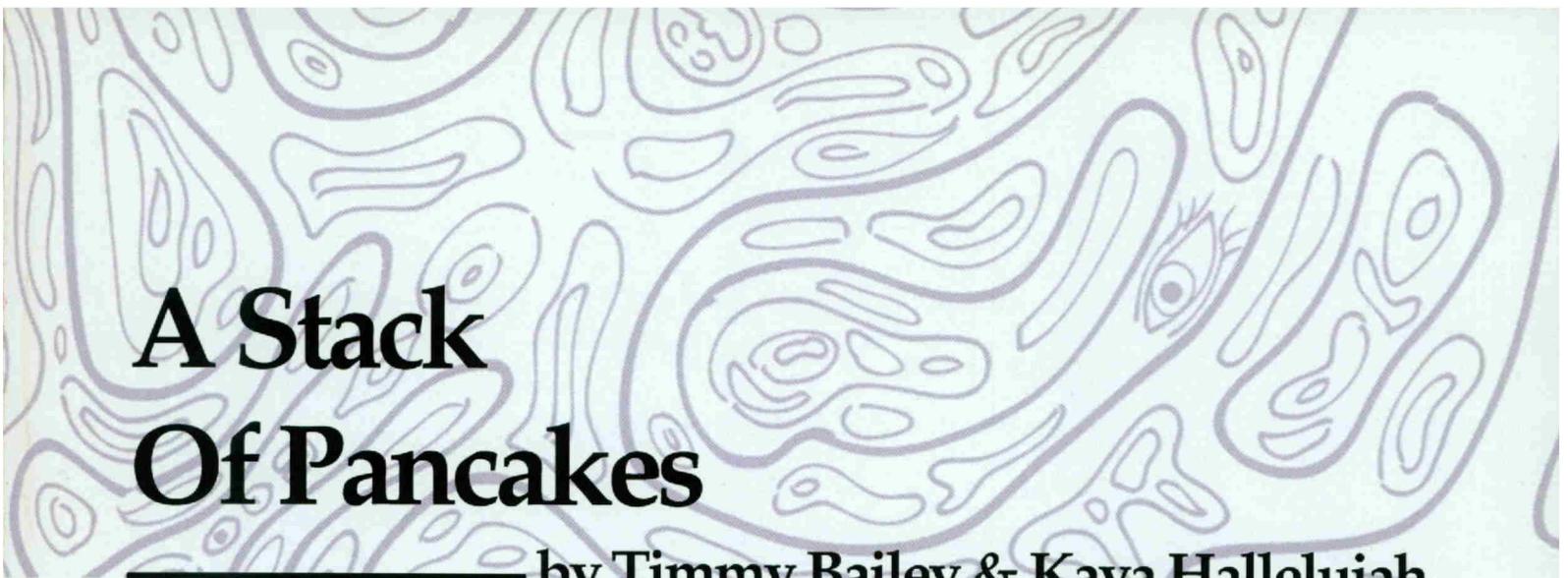
The strains of the old man's music that had summoned forth Ismael's memories were but a momentary respite, and now he was ensconced once more in his lonesome and forsaken reality. Ismael was overwhelmed with a profound sense of melancholy and yearning, as he contemplated his own isolation amidst a city teeming with life. The silence that enveloped him reverberated within his being, as he reckoned with the realization that he was a solitary being, an obscure soul lost in the midst of a bustling metropolis.

Ismael was seized by a poignant awareness that he had expended his entire existence chasing after an elusive dream that could never be realized, and now it was too late. Regret gnawed at him

as he recognized that he had squandered his days pursuing something that would never provide him with fulfillment. As he wandered aimlessly through the deserted streets, he felt a deep and profound despair, knowing that he was doomed to a life of solitude and emptiness.

The city had consumed Ismael, and now he was lost to it forevermore.





A Stack Of Pancakes

by Timmy Bailey & Kaya Hallelujah

Baby gate pancakes

By Timmy Bailey

Baby gate pancakes

The Carbo dough swells up and makes you
explode

They walk to the fridge and see pancakes

Wake it's in your mouth

it's in your stomach

it's growing

Pushing and swelling

Filling and killing

Tummy aches in their wake

Tummy ache pain

Faint

It's swelling from my stomach to my brain

Poppin pictures of picnic pancakes

Piping bags tag dag the bodies dodging

poppin peoples organs swell

Bloody pancakes

Murderous flour

Evil eggs

Sour heart sugar

Conniving cinnamon

Menacing milk

Dim dim the light of the sun with as it
inflates as it bakes and batters the buildings
and belly

Nelly fully folly explosion pancakes

They wield knives to cut you up so you
know how it feels to be bite size

Thick sugar and fruit clog your lungs skin
sops it up and melts

Syrup blood coats maple trees

Murder pancakes

Baby gate syrup

Pancake Attack!

By Kaya Hallelujah

I woke up from dreaming of pancakes,
That covered my walls and my floors.
The pancakes piled up in the hallway,
And kept me from reaching my door.

I woke up from dreaming of pancakes,
A sweet, buttermilk-y delight.
All laden with butter and syrup,
Now haunting my sleep every night.

I screamed, "what's the deal with these
pancakes?!"
As I woke from my dream once again.
This woke up my cats and my neighbors,
But there's no way they could understand.

I shuddered and walked towards my
bathroom,
Relieved, it was only a dream.
My heart stopped when I looked in the
mirror,
To my horror, what there did I see?

A towering mountain of flapjacks,
That stood at around 5-foot-3!
I studied the scrumptious reflection,
And realized the pancake was me.

A Collection Of Love and Loss

by Roxanna Cardenas Colmenares

Snowing Eyes

His eyes were like the snowing night sky.
If you stare at them long enough,
You can see the
Snowflakes
Slowing
Down.

And your cheeks start getting wet
From the snow melting on them
I wish I could help his eyes
Stop snowing
Even for
A bit.

GUILT

There was no note,
No last words,
No explanation.
We all wondered why,
But the reason was simple:
We didn't deserve
it
We deserved no note,
No last words,
No explanation.
We all noticed something
was
Wrong with you
And we did nothing.
We said nothing.
There was no goodbye
Simply because
We didn't deserve one.
We didn't deserve
you.

The Days I Choose Life

Open my eyes.

wish I never did

Get off my bed.

choose life

Feel drowsy.

Feed my cats.

Smile

that one time.

Get ready for work.

I don't want to go.

Hear my cats' purr.

the sadness, it goes.

Get ready.

Get dressed.

no makeup today

Head out.

Overthink

like every other day.

Get on the train.

Put headphones on.

Listen to a song.

Get to work.

the sadness, it comes.

Get off work.

Take the train.

Let out a sigh.

choose life.

Smile

one more time.

When the Universe Answers Back

by Suzanne Dottino

DON'T MARRY A DOCUMENTARY FILM DIRECTOR. *Do. Not.* It is like living under the lens of the Hubble Space Telescope with a tinny voice at the other end directing your every move.

Do you think documentary film directors talk about how documentaries can radically change people's lives, the economy, or the planet? Or that they have lengthy debates about the ethics and responsibility of revealing the truth. Or that they have an insatiable and infectious curiosity about the human condition? Or that through honing their interview skills they've developed a Spidey sense that tells them the exact moment your feet need massaging.

You know what documentary film directors talk about to their spouses? Fundraising. Due dates for grants. The cost of film festival submissions. Their panel reviews, and the jerks who review them. How much they hate inauthenticity, in 'real' people. They go on and on about their friend's film that got great reviews but which they considered a fraud because their father funded it. Whining about how completely unresearched and unsubstantiated the award-winning script at SXSW was, and how YouTubers are making a living from their so called 'work'.

All this before you say goodnight.

There will be periods when they're practically high after epic long editing sessions. They'll drink insane amounts of coffee. If the session yields good results, they'll pick up groceries from the farmers market, if the sessions are so-so, they'll rant about mistakes the lighting and the sound guy made. Then they'll turn their zoom lens on you. They'll start directing you about how to cut the carrots for the salad, which direction to sponge the sink, which dresses you should stop wearing.

And you'll look up at the stars and you say, Universe! I'm sending you a flare! And the

universe lets you know that when you point a finger you have three pointing back at you. You escape to the Y and spend an inordinate amount of time floating on your back where it hits you: You've married your father. And you say, oh geez, now what? You question your job as a Social Worker, your friends, basically, toothpaste, everything in your entire life. You take up baking in a supersize way: marzipans, lattice pies, shortbread, and three-tier cakes.

They start living in L.A., time: Five am calls, asleep by nine. You barely see each other.

And one day, they'll come home acting all victim-y, and tell you they've 'sold their soul' by agreeing to shoot a commercial in LA. You jot down the dates they'll be away, and you sign up for a class in Primitive Survival Techniques in Upstate New York.

You are going to learn knife skills, how to build an A-Frame shelter, fire-by friction, and forage in the wild for edible/medicinal plants. On a late spring morning you meet the instructor and three other students in the parking lot of the Black Mountain Forest.

You are paired with Gabe, the only man in the group. Your project is to build a shelter. You agree to split the work: he collects the appropriately sized twigs and sticks for 'roofing', and you gather the leaves and forest debris for the 'insulation' and the 'mattress.

Just as you are about to place handfuls of leaves on the roof of your future shelter, he says, "Take two steps to the right, then one step to the left." His directions make you freeze, but the way *he* says it, makes you do it. You look down and see a thick, shiny, black, and orange snake slither by, missing your ankle by a hair. You look up at him. He smiles a beautiful smile.

The A-Frame shelter you build together is sturdy, inviting and warm. It is also a completely fun and satisfying experience. On the second day, as you are foraging for berries, you learn he is a High School science teacher. You learn that his wife of ten years died from a rare disease and that he's a devoted parent to twins, Sunny, and Sam. He lives on a tree-lined street in Sunset Park. His apartment has a working fireplace. The same street as his brother, also a teacher, and his wife and three children.

So, eventually you marry him. Well, first your husband comes home from Toronto and tells you he's in love with someone named Annabelle, one of the subjects in his documentaries, and then he moves to Los Angeles, and you are pretty sure that is the last you'll hear from him. That is, until he writes to you by email asking if you remember the location of some bridge you saw on

some trip you went on together five years ago. Or if you found a box labelled Camera Equipment in a storage unit you used to keep. You look at Gabe, and he gives you a 'no biggie' shrug. You snuggle closer to him. You text back saying *sure!* you'll look for the box next time you're there.

Gabe is a magnificent husband. He applauds your goals. You get a job as a pastry chef at a restaurant in the East Village. You watch films you want to watch. You spend evenings walking hand in hand in the neighborhood, talking, not talking. You put his kids to bed at night. You have two cats, and a rabbit. You plant vegetable and fruit trees in the community garden and have communal meals with his brothers, their kids, and the neighbors, that last long into the starry night. You read stories to each other. You find out he's a great mimic, he can imitate anyone. You laugh. You didn't realize how long it has been since you laughed. You see yourself, as if through the lens of a camera, and what you see fills you with joy. When you go to the woods, alone, you find the berries that will make the pies, you spot the snakes before they bite and you think, holy cannoli! Life is great!

Ferry

by Dren Ejupi

HE HOPPED ON THE 8:30 SOUTH FERRY to Staten Island, with Evelyn. He grabbed her hand tight, so as not to lose her in the crowd of people, whose feet shuffled, trying to board the boat, and not trip over anyone.

“You okay?” He asked consistently, turning his head every few seconds to check on her.

She nodded up and down. “Watch out, Brax, in front of you,” she said.

They squeezed their way onto the platform, through the loud New Yorkers and tourists.

“Hey, what’s on the top deck?” She asked.

Braxton said, “Let’s go,” as if he had been expecting her to ask.

She yanked him down one step, “Hold on... tell me what’s up there first.”

“You’ll see, hurry up,” Braxton waved for her to come forward and held his hand out.

Prior to this night, Evelyn had never been on the South Ferry.

He ushered her through the sliding metal doors and trailed behind her. A gust of wind, with the smell of polluted salt water crept up on them and died down. Snowflakes fell, disappearing into the black of the Hudson. A half-moon above the Manhattan bridge reflected on the water, emitting a faint white light, miles out. The cable lights of the bridge, and the headlights of cars stuck in Christmas traffic lit up.

“This is...” she turned to look up at him, “It’s...”

“It’s what?” He said.

“Gorgeous.” She got on the tips of her toes. Her cold, smooth lips planted on his lower lip.

Braxton stood behind her. Evelyn’s head stuck out from the ship. She observed. He wrapped his arms around her thin waist, with his head resting on her shoulders. He smelled her

hair and kissed her neck.

“Evelyn, baby, you see that star up there?”

“Hm... what. Where?”

He pointed, “The one next to the moon.”

“Mhm, what about it?”

“When we were apart, I looked at that star every night from my roof. And the closer it was to the moon, the closer I felt to you.”

“Bullshit,” she twisted her head and giggled.

“No, really.”

The word ‘apart’, allowed her instincts to kick in. she feared the day his warm hugs, and soft touch would disappear. How the sound of his benign voice would fade to silence. Forever this time.

“What’s on your mind?” He whispered in her ear.

“Never mind,” she nodded. “It’s stupid to even think about,” she jammed her hands in her pocket, and turned her back to the river, kicking the air with her feet. “...Damn it...” she said. “I can’t win with you,” She fidgeted with her arms. Crossing them over; playing with her fingers, and finally she let them fall to her sides.

He gazed into her beady eyes, in a comfortable silence, and embraced the front side of her hands near his lips. “What is it?”

“It’s the city, the people... you. I don’t want to lose you. If I let myself lose you, or if something happens to us... I won’t be able to forgive myself. You know everything about me—I’m an open book. And you... you’re a mystery.”

He gave her a smile of reassurance. “What makes you think you’ll lose me?”

“That’s the problem, I don’t know. I’m just... I’m...”

“Scared,” he cut in. “I’m scared shitless too, Evelyn. It’s a big world out there—a scary one. But in the middle of all that madness, I met you. And ever since I did... I can’t help but think that you’re the one. If in the future we do lose each other, I’ll always thank you for all the moments we had. For giving it a shot; taking that leap of faith. There are a lot of things I want. What I need is you, though. From the moment I met you up until now, feels like a second ago. If we do get lost

out there... I'd be the fool." His lanky hand gently caressed against her rosy cheek, and the other went down her back jean pocket. Just knowing that he was present in that moment, with her, slowed her heart rate down, and his. She met him halfway. Their lips touched, kissing under the dim light above them, drops of water hitting their jackets. She could see that he knew everything about her. The way she thought; what each hand gesture meant; each facial expression. When she was anxious, or sad. It drove her crazy, but it was the one thing that gave her peace. She accepted it.

THE BOAT CAME TO A STOP.

"Let's stay on the ride back," Braxton said.

And they continued kissing.

"Wait... wait a second."

They came up for air.

Evelyn put her finger on his lips, interrupting once more. "Promise me we won't lose this."

"I promise."

"I love you," she said.

"I love you," he said.

The boat let out a bellow and set sail for New York. The Ferry dissolved from its orange color to nothing. Faded to black. The moon still shined. And the North star was closer to the moon than it ever was.

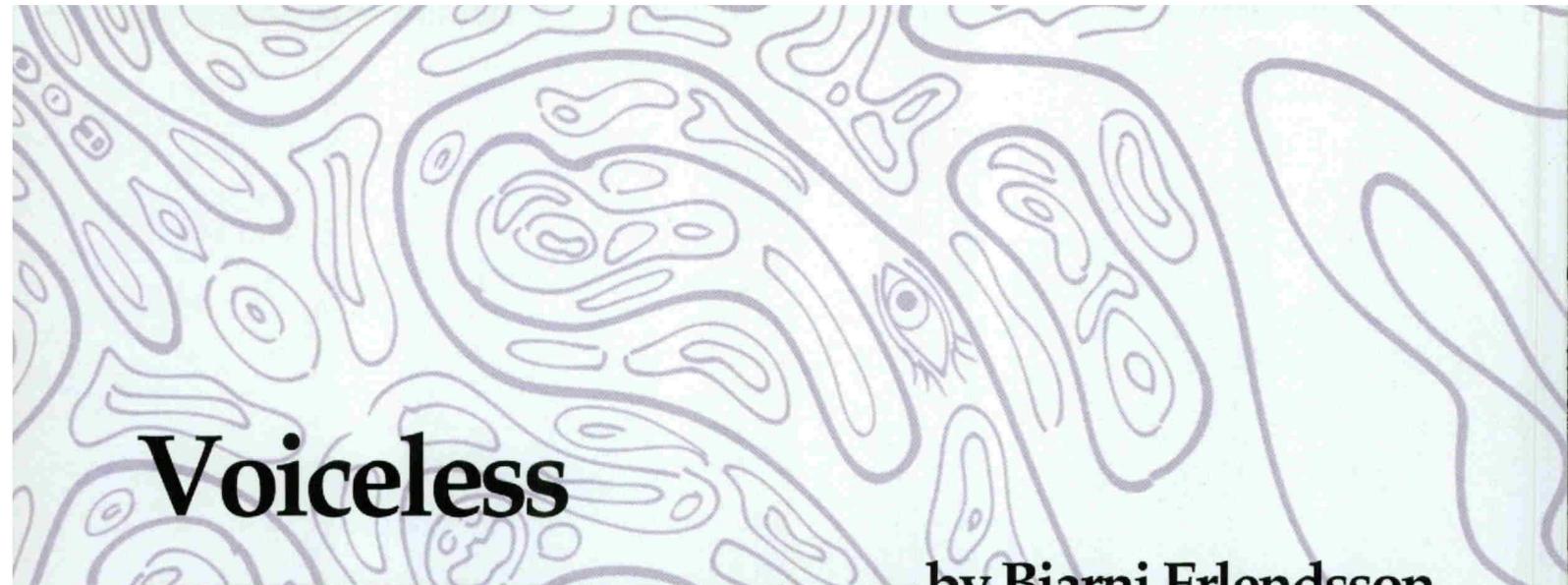
WAR IS PEACE. FREEDOM IS SLAVERY. IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.

**EVERY STEP YOU TAKE.
EVERY MOVE YOU MAKE.
*I'LL BE WATCHING YOU.***



INGSOC MINISTRY OF LOVE

STOP. LOOK. LISTEN. STOP. LOOK. LISTEN. STOP. LOOK. LISTEN.



Voiceless

by Bjarni Erlendsson

WHEN I ARRIVED...MATERIALIZED...WAS BORN? When I arrived/materialized/was born, the other voices were already here and had been here for years according to some of them. I was greeted by an extremely enthusiastic fella who called himself Bean. He wasn't much to look at, especially seeing as I didn't have eyes. In fact, I didn't have any of what you would traditionally call senses, or a body for that matter. I was a floating ... something. Bean was as well.

From the moment I was created I was hit by a flow of information coming from Bean. No words were uttered, it was more a stream of consciousness than anything else. The reason I called him enthusiastic, is because this stream had a definite crazed but jolly tinge to it. That first impression was one I never had a reason to reevaluate.

After disassembling Bean's information dump a bit, I could finally start assessing my surroundings. I appeared in a person's head, a person, explained to me by Bean, by the name of Timmy. I was created by Timmy to be a voice of reason. I found that to be rather strange as I had yet to utter a single syllable.

Timmy had an unfortunate tendency to create different voices for different situations and neglect to get rid of them when said situation had been resolved. This resulted in a cacophony of voices which really didn't help Timmy at all, seeing as many of them had very different goals. To resolve this, Timmy created a new voice called Sarge. This voice's task was to keep all of the voices in check and only call upon the right ones once the situation called for it. Sarge was the one who commissioned the creation of Bean, whose main task was to bring new voices up to speed and get them to work as fast as possible. Efficiency, efficiency, efficiency; that was Sarge's motto.

According to Bean, getting voices to work is relatively straightforward. When they first

appear, they usually don't have a clue what they are supposed to be doing. So, Bean makes them observe for a bit, maybe throw out a half-hearted suggestion here and there and see if they feel a sense of purpose in the act. Eventually they discover something in Timmy's mannerisms which they feel passionately about fixing in some way. As soon as that happens, Sarge has another card in his hand which he can play once it's called for.

I did not find a purpose in anything Timmy did. His life was a wholly unremarkable affair. That's not to say that there weren't interesting things happening around him, there were plenty. It was only that none of them were in any way related to Timmy himself. It seemed as if Timmy had an incredible knack of circumventing any situation that would in any way make his life a little brighter. This problem was already being covered by a few of the voices around me. One of those was Clint. Every time he opened his mouth, it was to tell Timmy to talk to each and every female Timmy ran into. Sarge used Clint very sparingly, since every time Timmy's attention was directed to a member of the opposite sex, another voice would scream at the top of its lungs that Timmy was going to throw his whole life away if he approached that woman, that he would get shot down, everyone in the world would hear of it, and he would never be able to show his face outside ever again. Usually, this had the effect that Timmy would freeze, stammer, or immediately run in the opposite direction.

A multitude of voices existed inside Timmy's head, all of them with a purpose. One voice pushed Timmy in the direction of becoming an astronaut. One had the sole purpose of getting Timmy to have people call him Tim, while another tried their darndest to make him keep the name Timmy. On and on it went, with every new situation creating new voices, each time adding to the complexity of Sarge's job.

I was a bit of a special case. When I was created Timmy was lying in bed, staring at the ceiling. There was already a voice trying to get him out of bed, and another succeeding in keeping him there. Since there were no other purposes available that I could find, I contented myself with watching dust motes floating through a bar of sunlight shining across the room. In the ensuing months I was left with a slow process of elimination, made harder by the fact that I didn't utter a single word.

Bean was my number one supporter during this time, always urging me to call out

something to Timmy and see if it stuck. I never did. The longing to say anything was just not there. So, I observed. Personally, I was satisfied with just taking in everything going on around Timmy. First there was the stormy day where a man struggling with an umbrella walked into the street and a random pedestrian pulled him back just as a big truck barreled past. That same day, Timmy walked past a line of people going around the block, terminating at a tiny ice cream store. Imagine how good that ice cream must have been for people to line up in that freezing weather, just to eat something even colder. Weeks later I saw a five-year-old completely engrossed in a thick book, except the kid was holding it upside down. Magnificent things happened every day, every time without Timmy so much as noticing them.

Sometimes Sarge would check in on Bean or myself to see if I had made any discoveries, Bean was always very apologetic, I was always silent. Each time he turned away disappointed. I could understand his disappointment, and his urgency. Like most of the voices, there is an opposite to Sarge as well. Faye was created straight from the deepest recesses of Timmy's anxiety. Mainly his debilitating fear of womankind. She had a strange purpose, one that she saw as perfectly harmonious to Timmy's wellbeing. She shamed him. She was damn good at it too. In her mind she was pushing Timmy out of the nest. Fly or die.

Like Sarge, Faye had her own troupe of voices at hand to help with any situation where they would be needed, all were created from Timmy's insecurities and anxieties, and all pushed Timmy into creating more of their kind. When I arrived, there existed a sort of balance between the two forces, with neither having the upper hand. Quickly however, voices started to appear from Faye's side which were clearly more influential than their counterparts. As a result, Timmy started to listen less and less to Sarge's side of things. It was like nudging a rock down a light slope, quickly it picked up speed until all you could do was get out of its way or get crushed. Timmy spiraled. Sarge worked overtime trying to counter what Faye was throwing at him, simply trying to minimize the damage. It was no use.

In the end, all Timmy did was stay in bed. Faye usually only kept one of her lieutenants on shift, softly cajoling Timmy to stay in bed. Timmy didn't need anything more to keep him there. Sarge kept up his usual effort, but many of the voices at his disposal had given up. Bean still had his enthusiasm, although tinged with a bit more mania than it used to be. I still hadn't uttered a

word. I think even Bean was beginning to accept that maybe I never would. Sometimes I felt a bit guilty, as if I should have somehow been able to do something, to maybe stop all this. Most of the time however, I simply kept on observing.

There was certainly less to observe, usually, only one of three things; the side wall next to the bed; the ceiling above it; or the most interesting of them all, the rest of Timmy's bedroom. Once in a while he'd stare out the bedroom window, but even then, there aren't many things to be seen. The window leads out to the backyard, which is unkempt with a large hedge surrounding it. The other day a pair squirrels wandered in, and we spent about fifteen minutes watching them chase each other around and searching through the thick grass for something edible. That was nice, it somehow made me feel more connected to Timmy. Our interest had finally aligned in some small way. I even felt a small smile start to tug at the edges of his mouth. Too soon however, the squirrels ran out of the hedge and Timmy crawled back into bed where he was met with a steady barrage of discouragements from inside his head.

One good thing I'll say about Faye is that she is a gracious victor. Of course, if you believe her reasonings, she didn't want things to end up as they did either. I could usually feel a bit of despondency coming from her direction, even as she kept sending her cronies to bully Timmy even more.

"Timmy?" His mother's voice sounded through a small, but extremely bright crack in the door, breaking the monotony of Timmy's bedroom existence. "Timmy, there's someone here to see you." Instead of facing this bright intruder, Timmy shoved his face as deep as he could into his pillow.

"mmfmffmm" is probably all his mother heard, although in here the words were perfectly clear, seen as they were from inside Timmy's head where there wasn't a pillow to block them. Timmy raised his head an inch and tried again, "Go away!"

As soon as Timmy's mom had appeared, all the voices perked up and paid extra close attention. Faye and Sarge immediately sent some of their people to either convince Timmy to stay in bed or to see who it was. If it had just been a straight up battle between the two voice groups the battle would undoubtedly have gone in favor of Faye and her cronies, but Sarge now had some reinforcements in the form of Timmy's mom. She did what none of the voices were capable of:

pulling Timmy bodily onto the floor. Once Timmy was actually out of bed, the balance inside his head started to ever so slowly shift in Sarge's direction.

"Fine, let's get it over with. Who is it?" Timmy asked.

"It's Dr. Flanagan, he wanted to talk to you for a bit."

"But mom, he never has anything new to say, always just tells me to do the same things."

"Ok, so why don't you try actually doing those things, so he doesn't have to keep telling you to do them?"

"I do! For the most part."

"Right ... get dressed. I want to see you in the living room in two minutes flat." With that Timmy's mother left the bedroom. With minimal pushing on Sarge's part, Timmy set off to getting dressed. Even though this could be counted as a small win for Sarge, everyone knew not to get their hopes up too much. This had happened before with no discernable change for the better. At least I would get to see something other than the bedroom.

Timmy was dressed with time to spare, but with a little petty prompting from Faye he decided to wait until the two minutes were well past before plodding into the living room. Dr. Flanagan and his mother were sitting in the reading corner where two small recliners were located, a huge bookcase covering the entire wall behind them. Dr. Flanagan was an old and skinny man, sitting extremely carefully in the seat as if afraid he would topple over or break apart for some reason. To me it felt as if a breeze were to flow through the house, he might just get sucked out an open window.

When Timmy entered the room, they stopped their conversation and looked over to him. Dr. Flanagan—very carefully—got up from the recliner and walked over to Timmy with a hand outstretched. Timmy hesitatingly took the hand and, as always, was met with a surprisingly firm handshake.

"Grab a seat Timmy, let's chat for a bit." Dr. Flanagan said. "So, what have you been up to since we met last?" he said even though I was pretty sure he already knew the answer.

"It's summer. No school." Timmy answered, taking a seat.

"That sounds wonderful, have you enjoyed the summer weather, gone on bike rides, gone swimming?"

“No, there’s no one to do those things with, so I just stay home.”

“Well, have you been writing in your diary then?” This brought out a little groan from Sarge, and a triumphant cackle from Faye. They knew, as did I, that the little diary that Dr. Flanagan had given Timmy was a sore spot for him. Every time Timmy saw it or thought about it, he would get a pang of guilt deep in his stomach. It was one of the best tools Faye had to keep Timmy from accomplishing anything, if he went out of the house, he would feel guilty for shirking his writing, but he also didn’t want to write about his day spent inside doing nothing. He existed in a perpetual stalemate.

Timmy averted his eyes from Dr. Flanagan and stared down at his socks. The left one had a hole in it, through which his big toe stuck out. I had noticed it when he was dressing, but I don’t think Timmy had until now. He would have to switch socks once he got back to his room. Or, as Faye’s lieutenant was just now suggesting, take them off again and slide back into bed.

“Timmy?” Dr. Flanagan asked. Timmy raised his eyes again but wasn’t quite able to bring himself to make eye contact once more, which left him staring at Dr. Flanagan’s chest.

“Umm... no, I haven’t gotten to it yet.” Timmy said.

Dr. Flanagan let out a small sigh. “Ok Timmy, tell you what, I want you to go back to your room, take out the diary, and simply write about our meeting here today. I’m going to have a small discussion with your mother, and then I’ll come check up on you before I leave.”

Without a word Timmy got up from the sofa and faded back into his room. As he was leaving the living room, he heard the doctor sigh disappointedly. “I don’t know what to say Lucy, I’m just not seeing the progress I would have wanted by this time.” Timmy didn’t stick around long enough to hear his mother’s answer, but Faye kept up a steady barrage of suggestions of what she might have said, each worse than the one before it.

When Timmy entered his room he hesitated, looking between his bed and his desk, on which the small diary Dr. Flanagan had given him sat. Eventually, with a lot of coaxing from Sarge, he sat down at the desk and opened the book. A blank page glared back at him.

“That sock is starting to be really uncomfortable, isn’t it?” Faye said. That was all that was needed, Timmy’s attention was once again brought down towards his sock. Irritatingly he got up and took it off. Well, he wasn’t going to be wearing one sock. So, he took off the other one. From

there it was simply a matter of seconds before he had undressed again and slid under the covers once more. When Dr. Flanagan came to check up on him a few minutes later, Timmy was feigning sleep.

The next day we were greeted with the appearance of another voice inside Timmy's head. It bore a striking resemblance to Dr. Flanagan's voice, which was compounded when the first sentence out of it was "Hey Timmy, have you gotten to writing in your diary yet?" Sarge was furious, immediately sending one of his voices in to try to mitigate the damage. All that voice could do though was try and counter with "You don't have to write in the diary, just ignore it." Somehow this made Timmy curl up even more.

The new voice kept up a steady barrage throughout the morning. It actually said most of the things Sarge's group was used to saying. However, coming from Dr. Flanagan's voice the words had a completely adverse effect. I could feel the guilt building in Timmy's stomach. Faye had caught on by then and was amplifying the feeling within Timmy.

"You're no good."

"No one loves you."

"Your mom would be better off without you."

"Where are your friends?"

"Why don't you sit down and write in your diary?"

Sobs started to shudder through his body, he alternated between hugging his arms and hitting them. No matter what Sarge tried, nothing could break through the wall Faye and the others had put around Timmy's mind. He was falling deeper.

"Faye, please stop," Sarge said, "You've pushed him to the brink, please give him a chance." Faye focused angrily on Sarge.

"You're pathetic, why don't you waste your energy on Timmy instead of me. You know very well that I'm not stopping."

"Please, you're killing him. Is that really what you want?"

"If he can't survive this then he doesn't deserve to be here. And ... neither do we."

At her words, resignation poured over Sarge and his entourage. They were defeated and they knew it. Nothing could be done—was that a butterfly? How did it get in here? The windows were

closed, the extremely oppressive air in the room was proof of that. So how? Its wings were a bright azure blue, bordered with a dark black line, specked with white dots. It was beautiful. When it passed through rays coming through a crack in the curtains it reflected a blue light across the room making the scene even more spectacular.

I was so focused on the butterfly that I didn't immediately notice the silence around me. Timmy had actually followed my focus and was looking at the fluttering butterfly. I looked to Bean who was looking at me with a dumbstruck feeling. I quietly urged him onward.

"Oh! Timmy! Why don't you save the butterfly? It should be free outside!" Bean said, as enthusiastic as ever. Timmy wiped his tears and, amazingly, rose from the bed. He opened the door to his bedroom and the butterfly flew out into the hallway. It was almost as if the butterfly knew where to go, it flew straight for the front door and even waited patiently for Timmy to come and open the door. As soon as he did, the butterfly shot out into the day, leaving Timmy partially blinded from the sun.

Timmy stood in the doorway for a minute while his eyes adjusted to the brightness. It had been a long time since he had gotten this far from his bed. Across the road in front of his house was a bus stop, with a thick forest behind it. Sitting in the bus stop was the most beautiful girl Timmy had ever seen. Immediately Clint came to the forefront. "Go talk to her Timmy! You'll feel sorry if you don't"

Faye was quick to jump in. "Don't do it, you look like shit, just go back to bed."

Timmy froze, not knowing what to do. I ignored them both. At the edge of the forest there stood a deer. It was slowly munching on some leaves and staring straight at Timmy, I stared right back. It must have gone on like that for some time, because slowly I felt Timmy's attention move away from the girl across the street and over to the deer. Once Timmy's attention was fully on the deer, I felt the same connection between us as I did when we watched the squirrel in the backyard, it was somehow right. Unbelievably, the deer kept staring right back.

In the background Faye and Clint were still talking, not realizing Timmy's attention had already moved away from the girl. Sarge had noticed though; he exuded a questioning feeling and was paying very close attention to me. I once again blocked out the others and focused on the deer. Finally, it seemed to have watched Timmy long enough, it slowly turned around and started

walking back into the woods. Just before it disappeared out of sight, it stopped and looked back for a second, almost as if it was inviting us to join it.

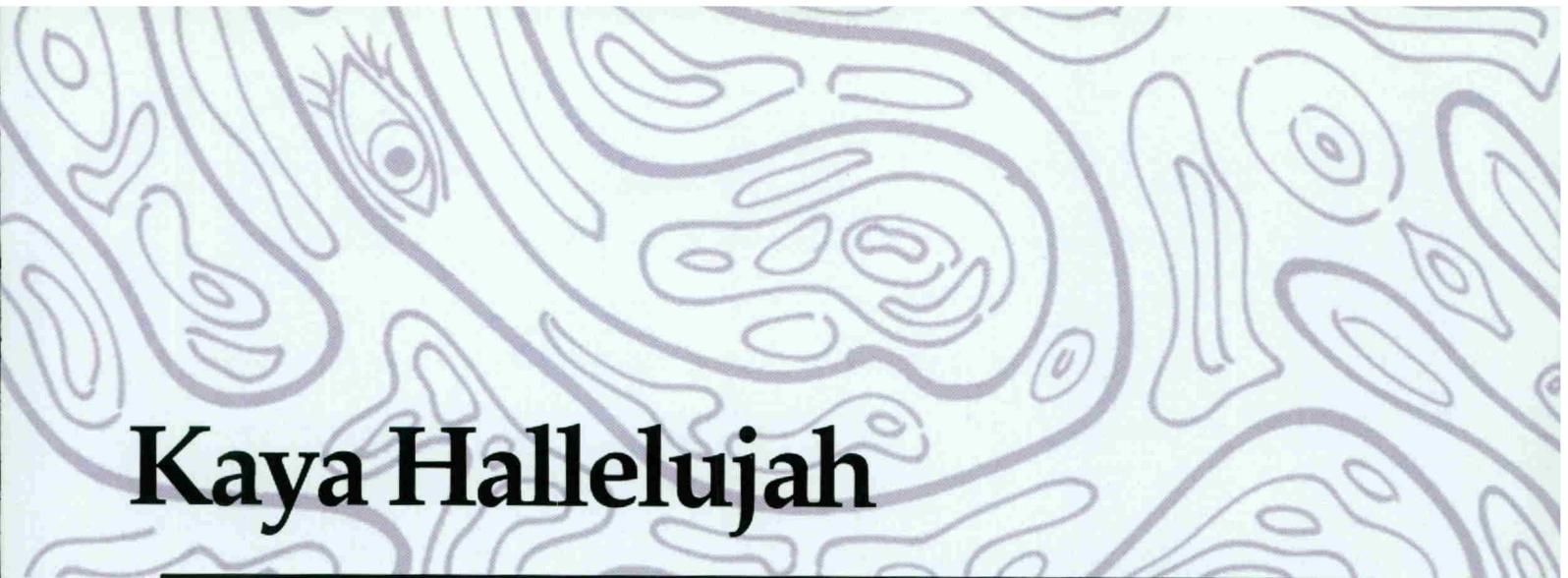
Timmy walked out the door. Both Faye and Clint doubled their efforts. Clint triumphantly, Faye with a little bit of desperation in her voice. When Timmy walked past the girl without so much as looking at her however, they both shut up instantly. In my periphery I felt them focus in on me, assuming a questioning feeling similar to Sarge's. I was mesmerized by the forest, however.

Timmy walked into the forest, and it was like we walked into another world. The sounds of the suburbs quieted immediately, as if someone had thrown a huge woolen blanket over the whole area. They were replaced with the tiny sounds of the forest. Wind rustled through the leaves, birds chirped here and there, calling between themselves, but that was it.

All the voices had focused on me by this time, knowing that I had gotten Timmy out of the house, but not understanding how I had done it without uttering a word.

Faye was, I think, the first to understand, I felt a sense of completeness from her, along with pleasant resignation. Moments later she was gone. After a moment of initial shock, understanding came to Sarge as well. With a final impression of pride sent my way, he too disappeared. Bean, giddy as ever, sent a feeling of triumph, and enthusiastically faded away. One by one the voices popped out of existence.

Finally, Timmy and I were the only ones left. Timmy took a deep breath, and for the first time in what felt like eternity, he smiled. I mirrored his feelings, taking in the quiet, pleasure running through me in waves. Softly I disappeared as well, leaving Timmy standing in the clearing. Content.



Kaya Hallelujah

Birds Love Caffeine

If you give a bird a cup of coffee,
My, how he will soar.
You just can't get this kind of action,
From seeds, breadcrumbs, and apple cores.

You've never seen a bird like this,
You might think it's a plane.
Or even mighty superman –
Though that would be insane.

...

A bird on a mission
With a need for speed
Not concerned with birdbaths
Or snacking on seeds

A bird with power
A bird on the run
If it weren't so hot
He would fly to the sun!

A bird on caffeine
Is a bird-lover's dream
He chirps at the speed
Of a factory machine!

It's a bird, it's a fiend!
And he's causing a scene
Nobody can stop him
No army, no team

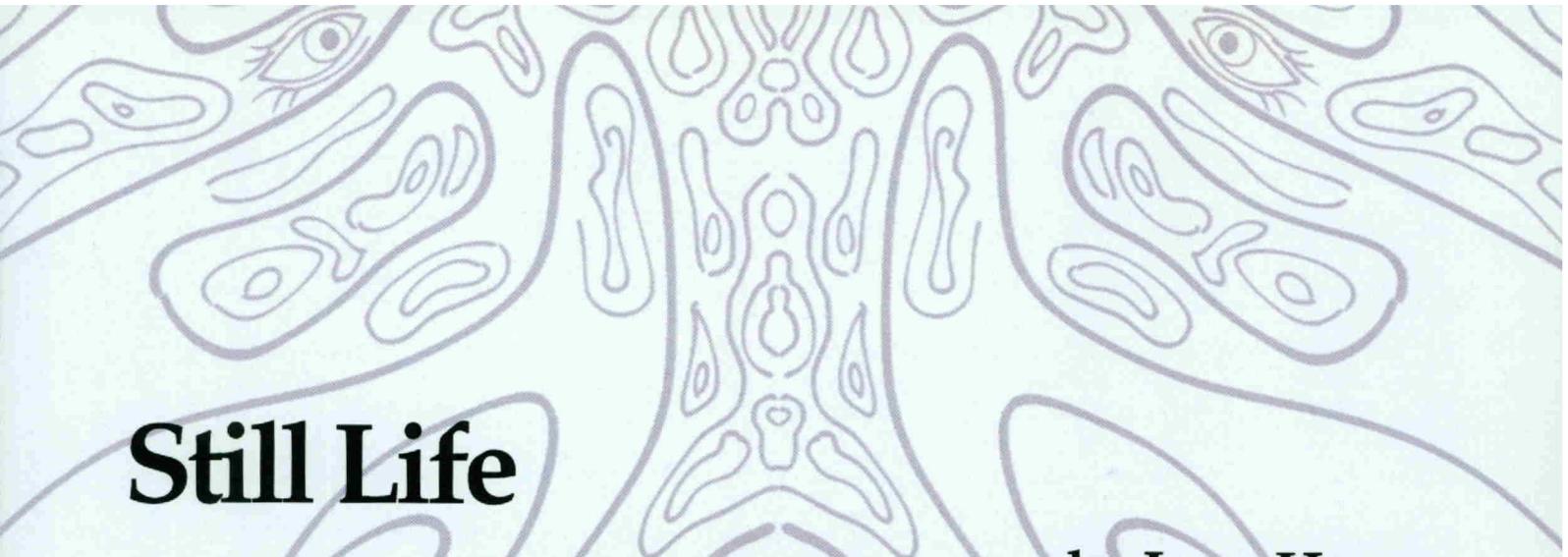
...

You've never seen a bird like this,
He's toppling world powers!
He's murdering civilians,
He's setting fire to towers!

If you give a bird a cup of coffee,
My, how you'll regret it.
No matter how the bird might beg,
It's better to forget it.

The Stick Collector

After the rain, the wind, there was him. The stick collector. He had a long white beard that donned a long black pipe which hung from his lips as he bent down to pick up every stick and twig in that driveway that had fallen in the days and nights before. He wore a too-short white t-shirt and navy sweatpants and came from the woods. He didn't reside in the building he dutifully looked after, nor did he own it or visit for any other reason — truth be told, nobody knew what brought him here. Upon his appearance he crouched around the parking lot of the apartment building, on the porches and the stairs, silent and careful not to miss a single fallen piece of wood. When the rain stopped and the clouds settled, young and old alike sat quietly by their windows, patiently awaiting his appearance much like small children on the eve of Christmas await St Nicholas. Or like someone very old and sick might await God. They waited, and he came, and they watched, and he gathered. He was the calm after the storm. Fables arose over the years within this small apartment community, explaining or speculating upon these visits. Parents told their children that coming across his dwelling place in the forest would be to happen upon the most magnificent fortress ever conceived, constructed entirely of the sticks. Some believed that this man served a woodland god of sorts, a lord of twigs if you will, and that the pilgrimages were made to appease this god. Perhaps these sticks were burned as a sacrifice in the hopes that mild weather would prevail following the storm. But still there were questions. Why us? Why has this man come here? As we watched his face, a look of profound determination ever-present on his ruddy cheeks and brow, his pale blue eyes focused on the task at hand, we wondered. But nobody dared ask. And then, one day, as surely as he had arrived in the wake of so many other storms, he didn't. We watched. And we waited. Eventually, we worried. And we walked outside, and picked up the sticks.



Still Life

by Lucy Henry

NORA WAS PAINTING WHEN SHE GOT THE CALL.

She had just returned to the apartment after a full day of classes, but her mind had been in this room all day. The paintings that covered the walls of her tiny bedroom were outdated, she thought. Her style had changed, and she really needed to get around to hanging her newer projects. On the wall, they served as inspiration. Leaning against one another and collecting dust in shadowy corners of the room was a disgrace to the pieces. Nora stole a glance at the shameful group of ornately decorated canvases that hid from the light and thought that the juxtaposition would make an intriguing painting.

Her gaze reached the window, where specks of dust hung suspended in the air, frozen in a golden wash of sunlight that poured in through the glass. Her supplies were bathed in the warm light, tubes piled haphazardly into a large wicker basket.

Nora made her way over to the window and delicately plucked a brush from a glass jar atop the windowsill. Today she would continue to work on her latest masterpiece, a gorgeous still life that she had plans for. If she was lucky, this would be her first painting to be seen by those who mattered.

Nora squeezed the necessary colors onto a palette and set to work. Now was an extraordinary time to paint, the late afternoon light was perfect. The warm color reflected exquisitely off of her mother's silver jewelry box, contrasting beautifully with her pothos plant, its rich green leaves spilling over an auburn pot. The outlines of those had been painted already, and Nora began to trace out the jagged pink ridges of an unpolished piece of rose quartz.

She was having quite a bit of fun with the shape of the crystal's timid shadow, marbled with

rays of golden sunlight, when her phone vibrated, abruptly wrenching Nora from her trance. She startled at the intrusive noise, her brush still touching the canvas and sighed in relief when her piece was unharmed. The relentless buzzing continued as she carefully set her materials down.

When Nora answered the call, Erika's tearful voice sounded from the other end, begging Nora to pick her up from the station. Nora shushed her and urged her to calm down, promising to be there soon. Erika's shaky and distressed tone plucked a deep string within her, and though this wasn't the first time, not even close, Nora knew she would always feel that telltale drop in her stomach, she would always worry.

After Nora had hung up and gotten into her car, her anger began to set in. Instead of thinking about her own wellbeing, she had jumped to Erika's rescue and comforted her while she disrupted Nora's life again.

Nora popped her sunglasses on at a red light. She would miss golden hour for this, the sun told her as it bore into her pupils, she'd barely even started to paint.

At the police station, it was gray and cold. Four white chairs hugged the wall, dirty and uncomfortable. The walls had been painted an awful shade of green-gray and the floors a sickening beige to match, a single fluorescent light flickered in the corner. It would be difficult to paint this room attractively, Nora thought.

She stood when Erika appeared in the doorway, eyes glued to the dingy floor and flanked by two officers.

"Nora, I'm sorry," she said to her feet. When Nora said nothing, Erika's green eyes met hers. Their gaze locked for a moment. Two. Then Nora picked up her purse and started to leave.

Nora paused. "Get your things. I'll be in the car," she said, back turned to Erika.

Nora's head rested on the steering wheel when the car door opened. She looked up; Erika's head was still hung low. Silently, she climbed into the passenger seat.

"What happened?" Nora asked, avoiding Erika's eyes. It was quiet for a few seconds.

"I tried to break into someone's house."

Nora's head snapped towards Erika. "You what?"

"I was high," Erika's voice was small, and her hands were clasped in her lap.

"Well, no shit you were high," Nora's voice rose. She could feel the adrenaline creeping into

her bloodstream. She hadn't yelled at Erika in months.

Erika closed her eyes, "I didn't mean to. It's okay though," Nora's eyes narrowed. "It was a student. He's in my lit class, he understood."

Nora began to chuckle dryly, "Listen to yourself, Erika. Quit fucking justifying your crimes!"

Erika didn't speak.

"You crossed a line," Nora's voice was thick with anger, "I'm not picking you up next time."

ERIKA PROMISED NORA she would get sober, and for a while it worked. Nora held onto Erika's phone; she kept the door to Erika's bedroom locked and slept on the couch, offering her twin bed to Erika to sleep in. The window in Nora's room wouldn't open.

Nora prepared three meals a day for Erika and made sure she was never alone in the apartment. She bought electrolyte drinks and held Erika's hair back while she threw up, rubbing circles into her back and quietly soothing her while staring at an old water stain on the ceiling and trying to remember when it had come to this. She stripped her bed so that Erika wouldn't get too hot and sat awake with Erika at night when she couldn't sleep.

Nora fell behind in her schoolwork. She would sit on their faded red couch and begin to write a paper, but before she could get more than a hundred words in, Erika would crawl into her lap and say she felt like shit, and Nora would drop the essay and make them both some chamomile tea.

All the lights in the apartment remained off, the light hurt Erika's eyes. Nora couldn't paint because the blind was drawn over her window during the day while Erika rested.

Erika had to drop her classes, but Nora held her and assured her that it would be alright while Erika sobbed that she was a disappointment. Nora had shushed her and reminded her that she was still alive, and that was what mattered.

AFTER A WEEK she could turn the lights on and let natural light into the apartment, but couldn't leave Erika alone. Nora worked on her painting while Erika practiced embroidery. She usually gave up when her hands shook too much to hold the needle and chatted with Nora while she painted. She could feel Erika's eyes fixed on her every movement. It made her nervous, Nora

had never been good at painting for an audience.

Soon though, Erika got bored and Nora had to stop and babysit her for a few hours, leaving the painting abandoned in her room, showering in sunshine.

Nora finished the painting a month late and broke down crying that night on the cold stone tiles of the kitchen floor while getting them some cheese to snack on. Erika found her a couple of minutes later and frantically questioned her on what had happened.

"I can't focus on myself," Nora cried, wiping her cheek on her sweatshirt sleeve. "I needed to get that painting done by March, I needed to submit it to the gallery. I set this one goal for myself and I failed!" Her shoulders shook and she struggled to breathe, that painting was worth so much more than a dark and dusty corner.

"You didn't fail at anything," Erika wrapped an arm around her and the two of them leaned against the cabinet. "The deadline to submit the painting isn't until April 18th, right? You still have a week."

Nora's eyes closed as more tears gathered behind her eyelids, "But they look at the early submissions first, at this point I don't have a chance."

Erika squeezed Nora's shoulder, "You have to try, right?"

Nora nodded, unconvinced, but it satisfied Erika. She wiped her tears away, took a deep breath, and composed herself. She wasn't the one who should be crying, she reminded herself. It wasn't helpful to cry.

NORA DID SUBMIT HER WORK, but moved on with her life, convinced nothing would come of it. She caught up on her assignments and brought her grades back to where they needed to be. She cooked meals with Erika and flirted with boys and hung up her newer pieces in her bedroom, banishing the outdated pieces to the living room. They weren't worthy of her workspace anymore.

On April 25th, Nora had barely unlocked the door to their apartment when the door flew open and an envelope was shoved into her face. The sweet smell of Erika's vanilla hand lotion overwhelmed her senses and she almost didn't hear Erika's pleas to open it, damn it! It's from those art guys!

Before acknowledging the letter, Nora thanked their friend for staying with Erika that day and told him he could stay for dinner if he liked, but he assured her that the two girls were better off eating alone that night, no matter what the letter said.

It was a whole twelve minutes before Nora mustered the courage to tear open the letter, then another thirty minutes before she had processed that she may actually get the chance to have her piece in the gallery. She reminded Erika that it was only a request to meet with her, and didn't necessarily mean her art would get in, but allowed herself to be excited.

The two decided to get ice cream to celebrate that night, after Nora's reluctant agreement to allow Erika outside of the apartment.

They were strolling home in the cool spring evening air with sticky hands trading jokes when a young man's voice cut through their laughter. "Hey, Erika! Long time no see, yeah?"

Erika's eyes widened, and her posture changed. No longer was she carefree and happy, but small and scared. Nora yelled at the two guys in the alleyway to leave them alone, and they understood quickly when Erika cut Nora off and explained that she was sober. They wished her the best of luck, and the two girls continued home, but the energy in the apartment wasn't the same for days.

NORA WAS RELUCTANT TO LEAVE for her meeting on May 1st. Nobody would be with Erika while she was gone. Erika promised she'd be okay and got out all her embroidery tools. She vowed to have a piece finished for Nora by the time she got back. After an hour, Nora reluctantly agreed.

While she waited in the polished sitting area of the office, Nora marveled over the angles and curves of the room. Large blooming plants accented the cobalt walls, and stylish round chairs were clustered around the center of the space, it was all sharp angles and modern shapes. What an interesting and mathematical painting this room would be.

She had been waiting for only two minutes when her phone rang. It was Erika.

Nora's stomach dropped and she let the woman sitting at the front desk know that she needed to step outside to take a call quickly.

Outside, she breathed in the sweet vanilla scent of a honeysuckle bush and answered the call,

the bright afternoon sun warm on her face.

"Hi Nora," Erika's voice was trembling. "Can... can you come pick me up?"

Nora's temper flared. "Are you fucking serious?" Her tone was deadly, "Do you have any idea where I am right now?"

"I know, I'm so sorry, I'm just... not safe here," Erika said tentatively, "I'm with Sal and Chase." Nora vaguely recalled hearing those names in the discussion about the men in the alley.

"No, Erika. I can't come pick you up," Nora snapped venomously. "I'm at the most important meeting of my life right now, do you understand that? I'm so sick of sacrificing shit for you!" Nora moved from the honeysuckle bush and the sun ducked behind a cloud. It was chilly and dull now.

Erika was quiet for a couple seconds, "Nora, I'm sorry."

"You should be. How fucking dare you interrupt this for me?" Nora fumed, "I told you at the police station that I wasn't going to pick you up next time, and I'm not. Walk home, Erika. You need to figure this one out on your own." Without waiting for a response, Nora hung up and returned to the waiting room.

"Someone will be with you in five minutes," Nora heard the woman at the desk say to her. She nodded and sat down.

At one minute she was blinking back moisture and breathing deeply, trying to calm herself down.

At two minutes she was thinking of cooking spaghetti and laughing with Erika.

At three minutes she was fighting with herself, her left knee bouncing.

At four minutes she had pulled out her cell phone and texted Erika, sit tight. I'm coming.

Later that night, Erika had, with a considerable amount of struggling and shaky limbs, managed to hang Nora's painting above the mirror in the living room. The lights were turned off, the white light hurt Erika's eyes again, but she was immune to the warm flicker of candles. The vivid colors in the painting were tinted dark orange as the candlelight danced off of the canvas. There was a plate of cheese sitting on the coffee table, untouched.

Nora stared at the painting through watery eyes and avoided Erika's guilty stare from beside her. The longer she looked at it, the pit in her stomach became deeper. She couldn't talk, she felt

like someone had a fist closed around her throat. Nora willed herself to be strong, to resist the urge to cry.

Eventually she gave up and dropped her head to let it rest on Erika's shoulder. Soon, she felt the weight of Erika's head on top of hers. Nora's shoulders shook as she let her emotions take hold. They sat like that for the whole night. Erika couldn't sleep.

What a beautiful painting this would be, Nora thought.

I ENJOY TALKING TO YOU.
YOUR MIND APPEALS TO ME.
IT RESEMBLES MY OWN MIND EXCEPT
THAT YOU HAPPEN TO BE INSANE.





All Saints' Day

by Dan Hufancia

10:00 PM—OCTOBER 31ST, 2022

Cassie Huang watched the lights die as she exited the Dive .

She was back in realspace, accompanied by a dizzying sensation not unlike vertigo. She relaxed herself in her synth-leather office chair, closing and opening her eyes repeatedly to lighten the fatigue that had built up at the back of her eye sockets. In front of her was her sleek, abstractly-shaped MIDASoft Tabula computer desk connected to her via diskwire . The soft glow of her office's backlights illuminated the irregular, triangular holes in the walls as the Byakuran Group logo—a white orchid outline against the backdrop of neon magenta—blossomed at the center of the computer screen before it slowly faded into the darkness. The backlights turned into an orangey-white, and the blinds behind her climbed back up to their hidden receptacles above to let in the glow of Upper Davao City's light-polluted skyline.

Cassie twirled her chair and stared into the abyss of invasive advertisements and depressing news stories: pheromone wetware that gave you advantage over the other sex (whatever that meant), four hundred deaths in the past month due to tsunamis flooding Lower Davao, another twenty from a violent shooting last night near her apartment, and Edison Motorex still engaging in a territorial dispute against Kusanagi General. Her reflection found it hard to appear amidst the constant stream of information, giving it the appearance of a ghost beneath the headlights of AVs passing her by.

A chime jolted her from her reverie. Somebody called her brain disk .

"Accept," she said, and Matthew Huang's caller ID showed up in her optical feed's lower-left corner under the "Speaking With" tab. "Ugh. Whaddaya want, Matty?"

“The job from last night’s all over the news. You okay?”

Cassie opened her cooler at the foot of her desk, took a Suntory Yogurt-Flavored Beer, and stood up as she opened the can with both hands. She sighed and unbuttoned her office blazer as she took a swig before answering. “If you’re asking Cassie Huang, she’s tired from her day job. If you’re asking ‘Neuromancer,’ she’s tired of taking jobs from incels who wanna cause corporate drama because they can’t ask a girl out normally.”

“*Hay nako*, sounds like somebody hates herself.”

“One of the only times you’re right, *kuya*,” Cassie muttered before taking another swig. “It’s hard not to when you have to one-up yourself on the daily.”

“I still don’t get why you took the corp paycheck,” Matty said with what Cassie assumed was a hint of nostalgia. “You know you’re always welcome here with the family. Mom misses you too.”

“She misses everybody, Matty. And you know things are different nowadays—I have bills to pay, suckers to make pay. Don’t want any of you catching heat again just because I’m talented at pissing off people.”

Matty was silent before sighing. “As long as you don’t flatline before *Undas*—tomorrow evening. We bought drinks and shit, even spun up Dad’s engram because I figured you might wanna talk to him. Plus, Mom’ll beat your ass if you don’t go.”

Cassie turned her back from the windows and made her way to the door. “Fine, fine. You can promise her that I’m going. As for the engram, did Hermie klep that for you too? Y’know those things are just glorified chatbots, right?” She made her way to an elevator that took her to the Level 2 parking lot right above Lower Davao and pinged her AV. An icon appeared in her optical feed and she followed it.

“Klepping’ sounds offensive. I prefer the word ‘reparation’.” He said smugly. She could almost hear the smile forming. “Alright. I’ll let you go. As long as you’re safe, *shobe*. See you sooner than later.” The call ended and was replaced by the door of her AV hissing open. She clambered in and booted it up.

“Home, Sienna.” Cassie said to the virtual assistant.

“Lifting off. Destination: Cenron Apartments, Ecoland,” Sienna replied.

The door closed as the engines fired up and took her out of Byakuran DVHQ. The AV door

screen showed her the view outside—more ads, more ads, some news, more ads, etc. She hated it. She hated the world and what it had become. Most of all, she hated that she nudged the damn thing into its self-destructive trajectory.

CASSIE OPENED THE DOOR and immediately put her other hand on her pistol. *The hell? This thing's supposed to be locked with a biometric scan*, she thought. Her heartbeat rose and she held her breath, calming herself before pushing the door open and aiming at...

Nothing. Nothing there but the soft hum of the megabuilding's electric generators. She stepped inside and turned on the apartment's lights. No sign of breaking and entering, nor any scattered belongings. Only an empty apartment, herself, and a ghost clad in glitches.

Wait, what?

Cassie fired a shot at the digital ghost—or rather, tried. Her finger locked in place and more ghosts began to appear. Her disk started chiming with an error message.

"Intrusion detected-d-d. Unrecognized si-sig-signature." Sienna stuttered. She began to feel her disk overheating in the back of her head. She stumbled to the ground as she tried reaching for her cyberdeck resting on the couch while another error message appeared, letting her know that her wetware was producing sedatives and releasing it into her system. Cassie gritted her teeth and fought back against the intrusion. She managed to grab her cyberdeck after what seemed like a grueling crawl, took her diskwire out, and connected the deck to her disk. She took a systems-reset punchcard from her blazer's pocket and slotted it into the deck's card reader after a little bit of fumbling. Her vision blurred and her breathing turned heavy, but she was able to activate it just in time for the thing to counteract the effects of the hack.

"Systems reclaimed. Normalizing drug and hormone levels," Sienna said.

The ghosts subsided, but her optical feed kept glitching out. "Dammit," Cassie said through gritted teeth as she waited for her headache to subside. "This is what I get. What I fuckin' deserve. Maybe Matty was right a third fuckin' time." She stood up from the floor, almost falling after a wave of nausea hit her, but she managed to place a hand on her couch and sat before she could pass out.

"Great job, *anak*. I see that you're still quick on your feet," the ghost beside her said, wearing

the face of her late father.

“Fuck!” Cassie said as she grabbed the pillow beside her and threw it at the digital apparition. It hit nothing and tumbled onto the floor while Henry Huang looked at her with amusement. She really got brained. Shit. She didn’t think she’d go out like this, but considering the things she’d done, she probably caught the wrong person’s attention.

“I told you long ago to stop swearing.” The ghost shook his head disapprovingly. “Your Mom doesn’t like it.”

“You are not my goddamn father.” She said, wild-eyed and stuck in disbelief. “Did fuckin’ Matty send me a stupid prank virus? That little shit.”

“Five swears.”

“Shut up!” She threw another pillow. Still no effect.

“Five years or more have passed and you still cuss me out, tsk-tsk-tsk. Last time we met I told you you’d get beaten at your own game. At our game.” The ghost said, stood up and proceeded to “walk”—his legs moved, but he teleported right in front of Cassie’s cupboard crowded with picture frames and proceeded to “pick up” one of them. The actual frame was left in place, but a digital copy rested between his hands.

“Great. Now everybody knows that Neuromancer’s dead. Just great.”

“Do you really think that lowly of me, dear? I may be dead, but I’m not stupid. I’m not back just so I can spill out my guts to the entirety of the ARPAnet. In fact, just like the old times, I’m on the run. This time, from MIDASoft. Almost makes me nostalgic.”

“You don’t know that, because Dad never got zapped into a stupid engram encoder. I made sure myself. You. Are. Not. My dad.”

“I never did tell you all the tricks up my sleeve, did I? Here, let me show you.”

Before she could react, the ghost activated her neural uplink and her vision faded into burning white. This eventually subsided, replaced with a black nothingness and a few motes of white in her “vision.” It was hard to describe softspace to non-divers, but Cassie always thought of it as though it was one giant computer screen stretched all over your body—except instead of a body you were a single point in space, and you could interact with multiple programs at once after you get used to the fact that you don’t need to use fingers to do so.

The motes of white light eventually cooled into a stable cyan as the nothingness lightened to a dark magenta infinity—her personal choice for her softspace palette—and formed ASCII images: first of Exarch, then of MIDASoft, followed by several command prompt windows. A new window named “Henry Huang Kian-Seng” opened and presented her with her late father’s face recreated in glorious ASCII fashion. It was disconcerting, but at least it wasn’t a closeup. She was right—the thing was a chatbot. Or at least, something like the ones she talked to in high school during computer class.

Cassie noticed a chatbox where she could write a message underneath the face and typed, “Why’d you take me here?”

Henry blinked and replied in the chatbox. “I wanted to show you something I left. Or something the fleshy version of me left. Still figuring that out.” The face’s mouth moved as the words appeared. Cassie didn’t know if she could handle anymore uncanny valley bullshit.

“I’m calling you Henrybot,” she typed into the chat. The engram smiled.

The thing opened another window, this time showing a high-resolution ASCII recreation of the photo he “held” in realspace. It was of her old gang, taken by her mother right after one of their first jobs: her in a hand-me-down dive-suit holding a bloody grin and a thumbs up, Matty in his dura-weave jacket holding up a shotgun, Hermie with his K-Pop cut in a Blackwatch trench-coat, Sienna with a bandage wrapped around her left arm and holding her anti-materiel rifle in her right, and finally her dad—Henry “Neuromancer” Huang, clad in sleek Kusanagi combat formalwear. Well, he *was* Neuromancer. She wasn’t ready to give him back his alias, especially if he was showing up as a barely sentient string of code.

“Alright, pause on the reminiscing, *shobe*. You can do that in realspace,” Henrybot said and opened the ASCII image editor. Cassie couldn’t quite catch what the thing was doing since it moved way faster than she could process—even in softspace—but she caught him changing some of the characters that made up the image, as well as copy-pasting entire segments into a different configuration. All of it took about five seconds in softspace-time. Henrybot then changed the format of the image into a compressed folder and extracted the contents—a single untitled audio file. Cassie stared at it. Maybe this was closure for what he’d done?

“*Nak*, you keep spacing out. Did you stop doing the diving meditations I taught you?”

Henrybot asked. There was a weird sense of perversion about the fact that the thing masquerading as her father basically dug through her personal belongings and found her father's last message within them. If she hadn't seen worse shit, she might've dived out and broke down.

"No, I'm fine. I'm fine," she typed, then played the audio.

"Cassie, *anak*. I hope you found this message before the floods send all of you underwater. Or maybe, at least before the people after me find me. I was going to tell you, and maybe I should have, but I'm a hundred-percent sure that you might do something that would make your mom and everybody sad beyond belief."

It was Cassie's actual dad—*actual* Henry—speaking to her from beyond the grave. One-sidedly. He had the subtle huskiness of decades of smoking cigarettes and chugging Cobra energy drinks while crippling highly-secure corp nets in a single night, as well as the tiredness one gets from being paranoid every time and all the time. Good thing tear glands weren't a thing in softspace.

"I know that you're mad. I'm mad at me too. I took the chance because it was the least I could do for you and your crew. I wanted to spare you all from this life, even though I practically introduced you kids to it." There was a short pause before he continued. "At some point, I forgot why I was doing... all of this. The hits, the poking, everything. I forgot I was doing it to make a safer world for you, Matty, Hermie, and Sienna. I also forgot I wasn't invincible—hard to remember when you spend all your time hiding behind the screen."

Cassie remembered the night of June 12th, 2016, like it had just happened yesterday. They were working on a job from a suit—an agent from Kusanagi General Counter-Intelligence—to steal the data about graviton technology research from a lab in one of Edison's orbital stations. Everything went smooth as silk—easy access, barely any guards, cooperative hostages—until her father trained his pistol on *her*.

"I sold out to Edison because I knew they could set you up pretty nicely in life. I also know you won't back down, so I'm pointing the gun at you. Fucked up, I know, but I plan on not having any shots left at that point in time."

Except he locked the evac bay he put them in too loose and trusted the suits too much.

Sienna was able to open the door after thirty minutes of the entire crew arguing about what

to do. Hermie wanted to zero her dad. Matty wanted to maybe knock him out. Cassie wanted to talk him out of whatever the fuck they were planning. When they got out, however, they were above Japanese—and by extension, Aosaka and Kusanagi—airspace. The assholes who hired them for this job from down below shot at them with energy weapons—the corps had tricked their crew, getting these dumb fixers to do some espionage when what they actually wanted done was sabotage. The bombardment sheared the orbital station into two, and she watched in horror as the other half shot a kinetic rod at their assailants as retaliation. Due to its misaligned trajectory, *it obliterated Hawaii instead.*

Cassie saw the cloud of destruction wrought upon the innocents, and she knew at that moment that there was no chance in hell of the Chinese and Japanese not retaliating and tearing the station into shreds. Sienna knew that too, and she made sure she was last in line for their evacuation shuttle so that she could shut the blast doors after Cassie boarded. Sienna had approached the shuttle's windows, then, trying to calm Cassie down, promised to save both her dad and her skin because that was what best friends did for each other.

The shuttle lifted off, and Cassie last saw Sienna waving at them before a beam of smiting light engulfed her and entirety of the station as the evac shuttle sped away.

She heard her father sigh. "I know I'm not the perfect dad. But I hope by the time you've listened to this, we've made up. That I've met your children. That we all live in a cramped apartment complex so that we can visit each other more. I want to make sure that you and Matty live long enough to at least enjoy all the money you took from those bastard suits. I want to make sure that even though the world has turned to shit, that me, your mom, Matty, and you can have a nice weekend eating *adobo* and talking about work—normal work. We might even have Hermie and Sienna over, although to be honest I'm pretty sure Hermie will hate my guts after I pull this stunt. Not because I betrayed all of you, but because I outsmarted him."

Henry chuckled.

"I'm programming this algorithm in advance should my heart stop beating for five years and beyond. I ran it through all our conversations and it will probably talk like me and sound like me. If it develops into an SI like I plan it to do so, it probably is me at that point. I'll make sure to send whoever finds a clue about its existence on a grand goose chase."

Cassie felt like she wanted to throw up—mentally, at least.

“I’m signing off, *shobe*. If your mom is still around, tell her I love her. I love you. I love Matty. And if you shot me or killed me because my plan went sideways, I forgive you. *Mahal na mahal ko kayo*. Neuromancer signing off.” His confidence wavered at this point, and Cassie heard him choke up and try to hold back his tears. He ended the audio before he cried, however.

When Cassie exited the Dive, she found that her cheeks were wet.

CASSIE GOT OUT OF THE SHOWER and found her boyfriend, Malcolm, sitting beside Henrybot and watching the TV. It was kind of surreal—the two have never met because her first date with Mal was two years ago at a nightclub near the Claveria Megabuilding—but also nice. She felt that the two would’ve gotten along. If her dad had lived.

“Sup, darling,” Mal said, oblivious to the situation.

“There’s a ghost right beside you,” Cassie replied. Mal stood up and walked over to hug her. He smelled like whiskey and no-bacco cigarettes. She held him a second longer than normal, burying her face in his collar, before letting him go.

“Jokes normally sound like jokes, Ms. Suit,” Mal said as he sat back down.

“Your boyfriend is right, *shobe*. Gotta work on your comedic chops,” Henrybot said and put his digital feet up on the coffee table.

“Put your feet down, Henrybot,” she said out loud before realizing.

“My feet are down. Also, who the hell is Henrybot? Are you cheating on me with—gasp—an engram?” The man was melodramatic, even covering his mouth for comedic effect. She rolled her eyes and sat on the couch’s armrest beside him.

“That’s just plain weird,” Henrybot said.

“No, idiot. I got brainjacked by an SI,” she said to Mal and plugged one end of her diskwire into her ear port while offering her boyfriend the other end.

“Wait, wait, w-what. You... Cassie, are—are you okay?” Mal stuttered, stood up, and put his hands on her cheeks while trying to work his jaw into moving properly. Telling somebody that you got brained wasn’t really something to be taken lightly. Especially if that somebody was a neuro-technician.

"Yup. SI is doing The Thing but with my dad's face," Cassie replied, then looked at the SI. "Henrybot, please don't infect Mal." The SI replied by doing a sign of the cross.

"That doesn't reassure me." Mal said.

"Just fuckin' plug in," she said with exasperation. Mal plugged it in and her disk chimed. Her boyfriend's name showed up in the upper left corner under a "Sharing With" tab, and he could now see Henrybot.

"Huh. Weren't kidding. Ghost's a picture-perfect recreation," Mal muttered.

"You can talk to me directly, y'know," Henrybot said and extended a hand. "How's *shobe* treating you?"

Mal tried shaking his hand, but that proved to be impossible. "I, um. I didn't expect to be talking to you *po*, *Tito* Henry. Or rather, I didn't expect I'd get a chance to talk to you *po*."

"*Ang bait!* Cassie, did you meet him at work?"

"Henrybot, this is Mal—a bad boy from the mean streets of downtown Upper Davao. Mal, this is an SI created by Neuromancer just so he could apologize to me—Henrybot, in short." She said flatly.

"I thought you were Neuromancer?"

"Thought so too," Cassie said before massaging her temples with her thumb and finger.

"The one and only, in the flesh—not," Henrybot said and bowed like a stage magician.

Mal looked like he'd just seen a ghost and famous celebrity at the same time. "Not to rain on the family reunion, by the way, but can I ask you *po tito*, you do know that jacking into your daughter's disk is eating up her RAM and could possibly wipe some of her memories?"

"I already know that. Also stop calling the damn thing '*tito*, 'he's literally not my dad—"

"I was just... hm. Is it bad if I say I was digging through some of your files?." Henrybot said. Cassie fell silent before grabbing her cyberdeck and another diskwire. She connected both to her disk while Henrybot paced around. "Okay, look I was gonna ask you for it, *shobe*. I told you already I wasn't planning on sticking around! I just didn't find the right time since you went to the shower!"

She stopped looking for her punchcards in the nearby cupboard and looked at the SI.

"Where do you plan to run away, then? Tell me, and maybe I won't have to waste more RAM on

your interactive apology letter.”

“I—I’m... I already told you,” Henrybot said. “I’m gunning for MIDASoft—one last suicide mission. If I can avoid their SI shredders and access one of their black sites, I will be able to change the world for the better. I’m still... I’m still me, Cassie. Even if you don’t recognize or want to accept it.”

“You aren’t my fucking father! How many times do I have to fucking repeat this?!” She yelled, and she sat on the floor trying not to cry for the hundredth time this night. The diskwire between her and Mal yanked him down, but he was able to gracefully recover and sit beside her. He put an arm around her shoulder.

“Maybe not biologically. Technically, I’m kind of your brother. But I’m not here to argue semantics. I’m here to at least provide you a little bit of closure before I finally go.” Henrybot sighed again and stood back up. “Thank you for the intel. You’ll need some more growing into the Neuromancer shoes, but I say you’re doing a phenomenal job.”

“And you even fuckin’ klepped my data,” Cassie said with as much venom as she could muster while in her state of distress.

“It was nice talking to you again, *anak*. Have a good All Saints’ Day.”

The ghost vanished and it was like a champagne bottle popped inside her head.

11:00 AM—NOVEMBER 1ST, 2022

The view of the cloudy sky outside grew smaller as her AV slipped into the hangar of the Cabantian Megabuilding where her mom, Matty, and Hermie waited. Cassie and Mal got out and were immediately greeted by tight hugs. She fought her urge to collapse into a sobbing mess and followed her family into their apartment on the 11th Level—it was a quiet elevator ride, with Hermie and Mal doing most of the talking. Matty looked apologetic for the most part (she’d scolded him through the phone in the morning) as their mother stood between them.

The rest of Undas went on normally—the mood had lightened up during lunch, and the siblings resumed their prickly banter during their mother’s story about Cassie being afraid of ghosts when she was younger. The laughter was there, of course, but it had a somber tone. After they finished their pork adobo with shrimp fried rice—Henry’s favorite dish—they proceeded to

go to the room right beside their mother's room. It was once Cassie's room, but both Matty and their mother had turned it into a shrine for Henry. They'd done so two years after Cassie moved out to work for Byakuran.

In the middle of the wall opposite the door was a single levelled table, which upon the highest level sat a framed picture of a smiling Henry Huang Kian-Seng. Five candles were lit around him, and some backlights near the floor lit the room up in a soothing peach light. A single candle on his right remained unlit—brand new, to signify this year. After their mother's short prayer, Matty walked up to the table, lit the new candle and said, "Love you, pops."

Hermie went next and laid down the "engram" chip he found for Matty. His eyes betrayed no emotion whatsoever. Mal, on the other hand, set down one of his oldest hacker magazines that featured an interview from the enigmatic Neuromancer. Then she was up. She stared at him for what seemed like a long time before setting down her old photo of their crew. She was about to say something when the backlights—and their entire apartment—went out for five seconds. Sienna tried informing her about *something-something-SI-something-something-MIDASoft servers*. She didn't care. Last night felt like a fever dream of sorts—maybe somebody even spiked her beer. Mal sharing memories of the event was somewhat reassuring up until she remembered that he plugged in to see Henrybot. She couldn't trust either of their recollections.

So she planned to move on, letting her doubts simmer and die inside this room.

"...

"Goodbye, Dad. Love you."



Grief

by Alyssa Jolie

veiled uncertainty
your love was worn out
you strung me along so your bitter heart wouldn't lack fulfillment
so that heavy silence could deviate from mind
i was your distraction from your dull existence
if false fondness meant constant pleasure
then so be it
my devotion amused you
enough to cage my heart beside yours
i lived to love you while you gained off the breath i released
now the air isn't enough to love either of us

the wind wailed
a familiar sound
that breaks me all over again
when my head was buried beneath my pillow
and my screams were surrounded by sorrow
when i yearned for your return
and exhausted my soul attempting to keep it tied within yours
our love rusted out and crumbled beneath my void
as the shadow of what once was followed me till morning
my day would restart and the facade would appear
to imitate the girl who once loved
until it was time to soak in despair again

-

i've remained in this strange haze
for as long as i released breath
these eerie mumbles that make a break from my mouth
i've captured the sound every once in a while
trying to interpret the aching of a heart that's been worn thin
all i've discovered was an unrecognizable being
whose eyes have been forced shut
from the reality of hurt

Derek Keire

DEP's **SPECIALTY** bird infrastructure

DEP Select funding of Work reincarnating flightless bird infrastructure

DEAR FRIENDS, some [Wizards] of 100 years Dead

Staggering to Work clubs to hit **Aggressive** rodents.

PROTECTS our launch workers, rolled to **NEAT LITTLE PACKAGES**.

Government engineering **OF** colossal bird genomics

to streamline supplies to infrastructure proliferation.

soaring Opportunity to DEP of Fine-tune paid Workers,

"Save 15%" of contractor cost. Subsidiary are awareness

OF contractor rug-pull, Staggering injurious risks hit Standards.

40% contractor funding **SURPLUS** to "steal" domestic animals,

POPULAR Publications print. our agency choose facilitator

to clean work **EXCESS** of carelessness.

U.S. courts hit contractors at 5 million cost to correctly carriers Work

Navy engineering **ARM** to facilitate flightless infrastructure care.

left with **NON-AERIAL** bird genomics, DEP use chickens for surrogate.

Final production of colossal dodo, for infrastructure, success.

[Wizards] laid to rest, **FRIENDS** long departing. rodents to be Drivers

OF TITANS. The contractor paid over cost of project, unsuccessful bankruptcy

let courts force return of domestic animals to Homeowners property. More **Future**.

Soft Prison

Trapped by the scroll-wheel
the thumb upon the screen
It's binary bits and bytes
Forming the basis of this prison

soft weights upon my head
enclosing my ears in
gentle torture chambers

cutting them out in solitary vibration

Until the dull whine of warning
is no longer a signal
But a pain to reject
Back into the cell

Images flicker on the screen
Enticing with hollow hopes of
satisfaction and companionship

Their over excited faces twisted
mockeries of genuine emotion

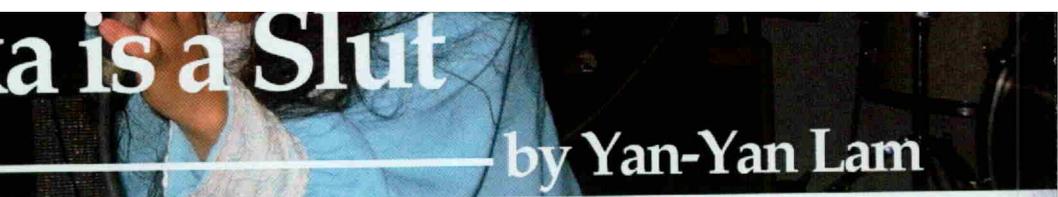
And when the finger hits the screen
clicks the mouse
The bargain is set
The ride begins

A cavalcade of
Consuming ho

Forming their c
A rapture to see

Until
A dissident, dis
Breaks through
A song worth m
A moment of cl
The sky a painte

Rustlings of feat
Winter's leaves
Perched in clust
Calling to each o
against the cold



a is a Slut

—by Yan-Yan Lam

RE WINTER SHOWS, where it was just a bit too cold for a smoke
ere all just a bit sad. But we pretended our L Train Vintage leather
ng released endorphins in our deflating brains. That was the night
alked into the show with a girl.

nger for the indie post-punk no wave band *Too Soft Too Fail*,
west band according to a blog nobody but us cared about. He was
e. He had that Trip Fountain from *The Virgin Suicides* look with
rown puppy dog eyes. He made us girls hot, wide eyed, and gooey.
stupid and devoted. Ian Penka was a fresh made cherry pie, and we

what's the name again?" Courtney asked me in her slow acid fairy
e peeling mid-century wallpaper next to me.

one of the side rooms." I told her, watching her as if she was a sick
s, you feel as if you need to watch them, lest they drop dead in front
mind.

ol castle or something." she mumbled. And that was true. This side
ings, total novelty in New York. The dark wood trimming and
owing original reproduction Warhols' elevated the crowd of dirtbag
ter the Lunch Monitor Sam set.

ened. The all encompassing *it* happened. The scene atom bomb. Ian
with a girl. And my heart stopped.



I looked down, hoping to see Courtney. I needed to tell someone, even if it was to her cloudy eyes and her child-like love for every scene guy. But she was gone, having left the wall to sway her arms wildly to the static sounds of pedals being unplugged.

Turning back to the active bombshell, I saw Ian basically swarmed by admirers of the male variety (friends). But not the girl, who stood strongly and confidently by him. *Cocksure*. Strange, strange, oh so strange.

I walked over to the crowd, which looked more and more like an Ian Penka fan club the closer I got. God, it was sickening, total sausage fest too.

Topher, the ever-present hanger on, was the one to welcome me into the conversation. "Hey Bonnie! Oh man, I saw your installation at Creed! It's so cool you landed that grant!"

Smiling at him like plain bread and water, I got a closer look at the girl Ian was with. She left me with a metallic taste coating my mouth; she was suspiciously normal. Polished. Nothing like

Ian or *us*, the girls who worshiped him. Followed him around like mice after his Pied Piper voice; we were all cutesy but in that dirty girl way, dingy ribbons in our fried hair. This girl... this girl was *clean*.

Topher had been asking me a question, which had gotten Lars's attention, and since Lars had Ian's attention, I now had Ian's attention.

"You're up at Creed?" Ian asked me in his soft high pitched sensitive boy voice. I had whispered to a friend he sounded like Jeff Buckley, and we promised never to tell him because his ego might explode.

"Yeah, I am. 'til middle of February." I had told him, and because I am bold, but mostly stupid, I held out my hand to the girl. *His girl?* "Hi, I'm Bonnie! What's your name?"

What I want to ask, what I really want to ask is: *Who are you? I do want to know you deeply one day girl, I want-no, need to know you outside of him but first I do need to know... who are you in relation to **him**? Do you know his reputation, his premature legacy? Are you from Tinder or Hinge? I know you can't be from Bumble because he hates women taking initiative. He won't say that out loud, but I know it's true. Are you in the scene? Are you in any scene? Or are you one of those girls who just has normal friends and no community? Are you from the City or are you a transplant? Are you fucking him? Wait no, is he fucking you? Has he not fucked you yet? Is this your first date? Is he going to fuck you tonight? Will I not see you after tonight? Are you going to be nice to me?*

Of course, I don't say this to her, how could I? I'd be totally throwing her under the bus.

In the real world, she takes my hand. "I'm Ava! Can I ask what's your installation at Creed?" Her hand was soft. She looked soft, pristine. *Her* oversized jacket looked shiny, probably plastic but definitely new. Straight leg light wash jeans, heavy denim. Cream fisherman's sweater underneath the jacket. And clean platform Oxfords. All of it seemed so polished, like she actually took care of her clothes instead of being "grunge" (lazy).

"Oh just a few of my photography pieces, I have some of Ian!" I don't say they're him performing. I'm watching her process my words. I'm watching to see if she looks at him confused, if she looks at me confused. Or worse, if she *knows*.

Ava does look at him, but he is talking with Topher now. The girly girly girls are now

talking to each other, guy time now. Don't they pair us off so well? But all Ava does is turn back to me and smile. "Do you know who's going on now? I know we must have missed somebody." She asks.

"Oh! Uh, Lunch Monitor Sam just finished but I think..." I turn back to look at the stage. I'm also scanning the room for allies, confidantes, someone to squeal and gossip with. There are none. Mollie from the high school band Burned is too smart and young to be obsessed with Ian. Priya, the bassist from Traffik Kop is dating well known abuser Velvet, so she's also out. Courtney is too fried to remember who Ian is. The other girls are high school groupies for Lunch Monitor Sam or overly involved girlfriends. Will Ava join their ranks one day? "Burned is going up now! They're the other high school band."

"The *other* high school band." Ian snorts. We all kind of laugh because we like to think we're on an inside joke. Ava doesn't laugh though, just looks up at him smiling. I notice that they aren't holding onto each other, but there also isn't this awkward middle school dance vibe between them either. They stand like two magnets being held an inch apart. I feel like it would be thick and warm between their standing bodies.

Ian Penka is such a slut, I tell myself in the bathroom. I wish I brought my phone with me here but I don't know who to text, I can't find the words to make it sound as *real* as it does right now. The slut, our *god*, is here with a girl! I felt like if I typed the words out into the dead screen of my phone, the events of the night would flatten away, rendering them useless. No witnesses here at Martin's Attic. Not at the shitty high school and abuser show. No one here to see her... your date, or girlfriend or WHOEVER. Keep that girl a whisper in the shape of a rumor in the shape of a girlfriend.

God, I feel like Nancy Drew. Girl detective. Girl girl girl.

Outside the bathroom, in the doorway leading to the street, Ian Penka is waiting for me. No, not waiting for *me*, simply rolling his joint before having to step out into the chill. Alone.

"Hey Bonnie, come here, let's go smoke together." he called to me. *Song to the Siren* ass voice.

Of course, I stop. I stop for him. Swoon bitch, swoon! I tuck back the fraying pink ribbons in my hair behind my ears. He holds up his half-rolled joint with his dirty nails as if he needs to

entice me in any way at all. For as bold as I am sometimes, I am just as gooey, and for as slutty Ian Penka is, he is still a god.

“Sure man, can I just grab my jacket first?” I ask and he smiles. He follows me back into the venue, shuffling his legs along in that Jim Morrison gait he’s practiced and perfected since he was 13. Something is stuck in my throat, it’s the questions I should have asked. *Where’s Ava? Is she outside? Did you leave her all alone out here? Do your friends-your real friends- your male friends already know her? Did they approve of her? How did you guys meet? Do you treat her well? Are you going to pit us against each other?* I don’t fight other girls; I won’t do it.

We bob and weave between moshing teens for my crumpled jacket on the floor. Ian ignores Topher and the other hangers on because he only has eyes for me. It’s one of his special tricks. Jacketed and joint rolled, he puts arm around me because the hallway is cold and so is the



staircase and he is such a gentleman isn't he.

Outside, his arm falls off of me because of course it does. Ava spots us and waves to me, "Bonnie!" and I scamper towards her. I can't help it, it's that "it's-just-us-girl-against-the-world" giddiness, that scene sisterhood. She has her arms wrapped herself, "It's soooo cold! I think my elfbar is frozen!" When not next to Ian, she has this wonderfully girly affect to her voice.

"God, I know man!" I tell her, wrapping my own around myself and jumping up and down. Calvin, from Lunch Monitor Sam offers me a drag from his Parlaiment, but I ignore it in favor of suckling from the pink teat of Ava's cold strawberry elfbar. This is how I apologize to her, by giggling with her. I do ask one question though, one question to suffice all of the ones deadened at the pit of the stomach, "Do you have an Instagram? I'd love to follow you!" Ian's eyes cut at me.

"Oh, I don't use Instagram actually!" God she's perfect isn't she.

The show ends when it ends. There is no great big afterparty in the sky; just a chilled walk home, a return to dorms, roommates, and parents. Guitarists and drummers and groupies strap their heavy equipment to their skinny bodies as they clang to the subways. I watch as they all disappear deeper into Brooklyn, Ian's slumping frame pulling Ava's along.

Ava turns, "Bye Bonnie! It was great meeting you! Get home safe!" she tells me, *I love you* she means.

"See ya 'round Bonnie." he tells me. He raises his arm and he doesn't smile but his face looks kind, pretty boy trick.

I cup my hands around my mouth, "Bye Ava! I hope you get home safe too!" and because I am bold and stupider than often, "I hope I see you again soon!" Ian turns sharply from me. I am forsaken.

It was another one of those rare winter shows, where it was just a bit too cold for a smoke break between sets, and we were all just a bit sad. But we pretended our L Train Vintage leather jackets were warm, and moshing released endorphins in our deflating brains. That was the night the slut known as Ian Penka walked into the show without a girl.

WAR IS PEACE. FREEDOM IS SLAVERY. IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.

**STOP.
LOOK.
*L*ISTEN.**



INGSOC MINISTRY OF LOVE

STOP. LOOK. LISTEN. STOP. LOOK. LISTEN. STOP. LOOK. LISTEN.



Thoughts Talk Too

by Destiny Marrero

All over the place as if I'm the world globe

Constant, fast, steady ~

Sometimes not at all.

When I'm gone you can feel the emptiness

Outside of your body.

But I'm within you.

Running wild like a free lion

Sometimes too difficult to tame.

And even in the silence much is being said.

Because without me there is no character.

You're dull like the tattered down tip of a pencil

Ironic -

That your vessel to unleash the madness of me, is as worn out as you when I'm plastered on a page.

You want to uncage yourself by releasing me.

Are you tired from the work of pushing me out
or because you're lifeless in my escape?

One shouldn't fall out of union from itself
I'm married to your mind
Our rings are the infinity of our magnetic connection,
Bound to one another.
In sickness and in health.
I'm needed, so I plant myself inside of you

Even unwanted-

I can be your voice or that of a stranger
Still you take my words personal.
Do you even know if your opinions are your own,
Or do I repeat the reflections you swallow from the outside?
A tsunami in the rude awakening of insecurities you possess.
Let the world put ideas of who you are in a spoon.
Shall they feed it to you?

Mouth wide open, now I'm spicy
A little too much for your liking.

Does the burn hurt?

against the tip of your tongue as you dare to even say it

You hate me when the moon rises,
Because it reminds you of the light so far away
in all the darkness.

I'm not your enemy-
Blurred vision too hazy to see me clearly.
Maybe if you reach out far enough you could grab it.
The sky's night light
-can be your own if you dare to hold onto it long enough.
Guiding you like a lighthouse across the sea.

Even in the storm hope will shine ever so bright.
As the sun's warmth radiates a blanket of comfort, I can love you.

Teach you the wonderful things about yourself.
Kiss you on every inch of your body.
If you use me with intention.

Don't fear me as you are my master.

Hear me out
Because I talk too.

My Boyfriend's Affair With Addiction

by Martina Turrone

WHEN I MOVED TO NYC in 2018, age 22, I have only had one hangover in my life, knew a handful of curse words, I had been taught that smoking was going to lessen my stamina and that all drugs were bad. I was the classic naïve girl, who always saw the best in people. It's not to say I was living in a fantasy world. I had experience with divorced parents, bulimic sisters, and pathologic diseases, but cocaine only ever entered my life through movies and non-fiction books. I knew drug addiction was real, but it never touched a life so close to mine. As a consequence, I had no instruments to detect it, let alone fight it for someone else.

I met my ex-boyfriend L, at a bar, few months after I moved to the big city. He was 4 years older than me, and charmingly funny. L was different than any other man I had ever fallen in love with. His hair short, while I usually loved it long and messy, his eyes dark, while I usually fell for blue shades and his body soft, while I was usually attracted by skinnier shapes. And yet, he seemed to fit so perfectly in the part I designed for him. I had moved alone to NYC from Italy, and fast enough he became my home outside of home and my reference in most of my decisions.

Something else to know about me, is that I have always had a major crush on Jake Gyllenhaal, and he happened to be performing in NYC on September 5th, 2019. I had anticipately bought tickets for me and L, for his show at the Hudson Theatre. It was a monologue called *Sea Wall/A Life*. That day, L was going to pick me up at school around 4pm, we were going to grab a drink before the show, head to the theatre and have dinner at some fancy place afterwards. However, things didn't go as I carefully planned. L didn't show up at school and all my efforts to reach and get in contact with him failed. My texts remained unseen, and my calls unanswered for all day, until later that night. I remember calling my friend Bridget around 4.30pm. "Would you

come to the show with me? I have L's ticket, but he is not coming", I think I was sobbing at that point. Bridget was sitting next to me an hour later at the theatre, watching me dealing with my emotions. From L, I received multiple texts and calls later that night, but none of them contained apologies. All I got were words full of anger. He had just overslept, he mentioned. "Why do you always have to make a drama?", I was criticized. As if, my disappointment was an overreaction, and my crying a simple theatrical scene. Those words rumbled in my ears all night. I wondered if he had slept with other girls, and I also ended up believing that maybe, I was just taking it all too seriously. After all, "it was just a show. There will be many more. It is not the end", as L reminded me for days after the happening.

From that night of September, I became an attentive observer of his behaviors. My role switched in the fraction of a second he broke my trust. Sure, I was still his girlfriend, but I acted as an investigator, trying to solve and fix a case. His case, not mine.

I wished that was one, singular, concerning episode, "after all, we are humans and we are not perfect" as I was reminded, but things just got more complicated. At that time, me and L had been together for about 5 months. We shared selected moments together, but I started noticing I was carefully excluded from many more others. One night in October, after a few beers with friends on a rooftop, embracing the nostalgia that the ending of the warm season brings with it, we called a cab together to head home. I was living in Brooklyn that year. My room was a square space with no windows, with a large black and white carpet to cover the uneven tiles on the floor. The house was missing a living room, and the restroom and tiny kitchen were shared with 4 other guys. L, instead, lived in a beautiful apartment in Queens, a place that felt more like home to me, than any other place in NYC by then. I had brought few things of mine to L's place, not as an imposition of my role in his life, but for the convenience of us both. That night in the cab, it was 3am, my head laying on his strong shoulder, when L whispered: "Isn't it better for you to go home? Don't you have school in the morning?". He was pushing me away, but he made it sound as if it was for my own sake. Failed. I convinced him to let me stay. I remember walking the stairs of his building in silence. As if my presence there, that night, was far from welcomed. He said no words to me until we got into his room, when he confessed his big secret. "I want to do some coke and I know you don't like it. I told you it was better for you to go home". He already had a bag in his hands while

talking to me, as if he couldn't wait a longer second.

I wished that L was cheating on me with another woman, because that would have been a far more familiar field. With cocaine, I had no previous experience, so I thought I could make things better, or even worse, I could be the reason for him to stop using substances. That night I connected all the dots. And after that night, I kept connecting all the following ones. Cocaine was far more serious than an affair. I had no way to win the competition, I would have always been one step behind, and I was being reminded of that, all the way down the lane. For the length of our relationship, I heard the same line "I will never stop using it, I have done it since I was a kid and things won't change". To make himself and me feel better, he always added: "I have a job and a house. I am a responsible guy, let me do what I want".

So, there were days when he would completely disappear, when I wouldn't have news of him until late in the night. I remember showing up at his place worried, ringing his doorbell until he would eventually open. I remember his room at 6pm, the closed air, the closed curtains, his half-closed eyes. I remember entering that room and feeling the heaviest. Those days, he had no strength to do much, and he would barely talk to me. His blue mood would drag me down too. I learned that those were the days after cocaine. I remember our trip in Miami at his friend's house. The first night, I was left in the room alone reading a book, while they consumed coke in the living room and played poker for hours. I remember the laughs and noises coming from their room through the thin wall of the bedroom I was in, and finally his body sneaking in bed at 4 in the morning. The day after, I was criticized for not knowing how to socialize, for not being funny. I never went dancing with L, and the few times we went out with his friends, we ended up having bad arguments. After every fight, no matter the nature of the argument, he would get his phone, digit some numbers and scream at my face "you see, now I'm going to get some". I knew that meant he was going to text his dealer to get his beloved coke, as if it was his medicine against our arguments, and consequently I was the one to blame for his addiction. I knew it wasn't true, but as emotions took over, things got blurred.

Over time, I could feel how cocaine was entering my system as well. Not physically, but by osmosis, it was destroying my life too. I became a toxic partner. I couldn't see my boyfriend's face anymore; all I could see was his addiction. I was embarrassed whenever he would make use of it,

but I seemed incapable to cut the string that bound us. I was oversuspicious, and even though most of the times I had reasons to be, that was time taken away from my passions. I became aggressive and jealous, as I had never been before in my life. I tried to force my presence at all times, because I thought I could show him how beautiful life could have been and how much he was missing. So, for years, I kept entering his dark room, hoping to find some light, to move forever those curtains and leave the house together. Because it seemed unjust to let go, after all I had done for him, all the energy I invested.

It would be unfair, to say it was all dark, or to only remember his addiction. There had been nice moments and love, but only as I knew love then. When L broke up with me in the spring of 2021, I felt a void: I had not only lost L, but also the familiar comfort he provided me on the good days and the case I long vainly tried to solve and fix. Few months after the breakup, I moved out of my room in Brooklyn. I found a beautiful two bedroom apartment in Astoria and shared it with a friend. My room had now not one, but two windows. If it was true that I failed in finding light in L's room and life, I was finally aware I was allowed to search for light anywhere else around me.

One night, around August, I left my phone in the pocket of my jacket for few hours. Me and my roommate were having a beer two blocks away from home. It had been 4 months since L and I had spoken for the last time. As I took out my phone, I found 10 missed calls from one of L's friends. I ran out of the club, hastily put my leather jacket on my shoulders and called him back; L didn't show up at work and ignored all phone calls. His friend was worried. For 2 whole years I had been the one to worry, the one to run outside of his apartment, the one to enter that dark room to find him once again in terrible conditions. It was a pattern I got so much used to, and yet it always scared me and made me feel terribly heavy. That night, as I was on the phone, I realized that it wasn't my responsibility anymore, that I was free from that bulky weight. I smiled at my roommate, and we ran back inside the bar, to finish our beers and another game at the pool table. I loved L and I wished for him to exit that pathway, but it just wasn't my role anymore, to show him new roads and to save him.

The void I felt was real, but also extremely pleasant. It was the void left by the worries that no longer concerned me, the emptiness I perceived as I was letting go, as I was finally cutting that string that bound me, not only to him, but to his addiction as well. When L broke up with me, I thought I was alone, and forever lost but instead I learned once again and hopefully forever, that I should always choose, for my own sake and mental health, to step outside those dark rooms and let that void be a pleasant relief.

Why Stifle Your Native Tongue?

by **Natasha Wiles**

“YOU CYAAN TALK PATOIS ROUN DESE PEOPLE,” are some of my thoughts on a daily basis. All my life I’ve been told to speak “properly” with “properly” meaning Standard American English. I was never encouraged to express myself in my first tongue which is Jamaican Patois. In school, my teachers often described Patois as “broken English” and it was not to be used in professional environments. I have never questioned this term nor why I should speak Standard American English, as my young mind would immediately conform in order to stay out of trouble’s way. Correspondingly, both Amy Tan and Asao B. Inoue suggest that speaking any other language than the standard reaps difficult consequences in American society. According to Inoue, White middle-class English only becomes problematic when it is considered as “the only way to communicate properly” (Inoue 3). We can see where this poses a problem for non-US natives who speak multiple languages and have issues comprehending standard English grammar. As it relates to Tan, she mentions that Asian students are usually driven into maths and science-oriented career paths instead of English. This is due to the fact that when they are tested on their capability to understand and write standard English on achievement tests, they often underperform. This does not indicate that they are not smart, but that their native language doesn’t conform to the standard. When paired together, Tan and Inoue reveal that language and racism are intertwined topics. They both show in their own distinct ways that the Western, white-dominated society inflicts penalties on people who speak multiple Englishes and why it is important to welcome a diversity of languages in social systems.

As claimed by Inoue, the imperative usage of language standardization emphasizes hierarchy of power. This hierarchy specifically places bilingual groups at the bottom of the ladder, resulting

in racism. For instance, he explains that whites have always held powerful positions in infrastructural areas of life and that they have “dictated” what counts as acceptable English for a long time (Inoue 3). With that said, a nonstandard-English speaker will undeniably feel excluded from such places, especially when they don't possess the commanded language. Along with that, this power that the whites hold has also determined the stipulations to qualify for opportunities for social mobility among these minority groups. Spoken command of Standard American English is usually at the top of the list. This is what Inoue refers to as using White dominant English to “Judge others, to punish and withhold opportunities and privileges” (Inoue 3). By this he means that using the standardisation of English as a reason to discriminate against others or hold back chances to succeed from people who don't speak or write the standard language. In light of self-assertion, Inoue suggests that students in schools should be informed on the history of Standard English and why their own versions of English are usually judged to be “ineffective or unclear” (Inoue 4).

Unlike Inoue, Tan doesn't blatantly mention racism, but she does mention how Asians are affected by this requirement to use Standard American language. In Tan's view, the necessity to speak standard English in a formal setting has enabled her code switching. She mentions that she speaks standard English when giving academic speeches, but a “language of intimacy” when speaking to her mother or husband (Tan 1). This would be a distinctive type of English that she only uses around people she is most comfortable with. In like manner, her mother only speaks this kind of English which breeds setbacks when she communicates in general social spaces. For example, she illustrates using a real-life scenario where her mother was denied the results of her CAT scan due to the language barrier between her mother and the hospital's personnel. She had to step in to communicate with her mother's doctor in “perfect English” in order to receive the results (Tan 3). From this, we can infer that not being able to speak standard English disadvantages a person rather than putting them forward. It affects how a person is treated and it's just sad to see that her mother was not taken seriously because of her inability to speak this “White middle class language.” (Inoue 3) Not to mention that her mother's English was often referred to as “Broken or Fractured English.” She has never liked the term because of its negative connotation so she has always avoided using it (Tan 2). To further demonstrate, she says that her

mother's language almost affected her by "limiting my possibilities in life" (Tan 3). By limiting her possibilities, she means that her perception of her mother's language almost placed a barrier on her achievement. She mentions that English was not her best subject as opposed to Maths or Science. To her, English Achievement Tests were "judgement calls" that tested her ability to apply Standard English grammar on paper (Tan 3). As a result, assimilating her mother's English affected how she applied grammar in standard English. For others who speak a similar type of English also face this dilemma. Luckily, Tan was able to escape this necessity. She states that she uses all the Englishes she grew up with in her writings. Not only does this give her a piece of mind that she is able to express herself any way she wants, but it has also been proven fruitful for her in her career as a writer as she observes her mother's language as a legitimate language despite its form. Utilizing many Englishes might not be so bad. It also has the ability to enrich and diversify the way we think.

These examples of both Tan and Inoue show that the way a person is treated is determined the moment they open their mouth. Spoken language is one of the criteria that places you on the social ladder. This is exactly how racism comes into the picture as Inoue mentions that language is usually "racialized" (Inoue 2). We see where we have "fractured or broken English" (Tan 2) which is usually associated with a particular group of people while "proper or correct English" (Inoue 3) is associated with another. Not only do these Englishes identify a race but they also emphasize power. Historically, Whites have held positions of power. Hence, why the language they speak, "perfect English" (Tan 3) is the "dominant English" (Inoue 4). Even more, this form of racism is present in fundamental social systems such as healthcare and schools. We see where it's used to "Judge" (Inoue 3) in instances where teachers have corrected a student's grammar, "punish" (Inoue 3) where a person speaking non standardized English is not taken seriously and "withhold opportunities and privileges" (Inoue 3) where it dictates writing methods to become a writer (unlike Amy Tan). On the other hand, though this is the reality of white language supremacy in today's society, both authors demonstrate why a diversity of languages in these social systems is important. Understanding why speaking a different form of English is judged as not effectual as the standard does not discredit one's intelligence. It can boost a student's confidence to make good language decisions. Not only that but incorporating these forms of Englishes in writing captures

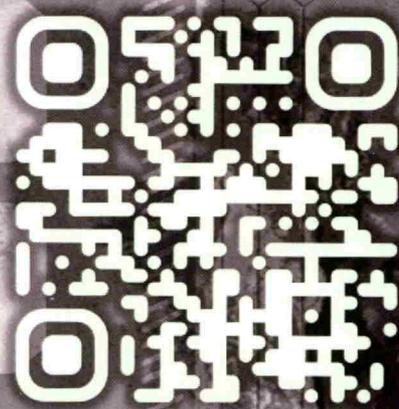
the “passion and imagery” (Tan 4) of the speaker. Subsequently, rewarding a writing career.

In an article by Melissa Dennihy, she speaks about diversity in classrooms and the various Englishes used by students in academia. To tackle the issue, she starts with trying to decipher what is considered “good writing” (Dennihy 1). From there she realizes that language is one of the main categories of deciding if a piece of writing is good. She then acknowledges the many varieties of languages and highlights how a single language (Standard English) is standardized throughout academia. Bear in mind, this is present in schools where the school’s population is heterogeneous. This just means that there is no individual race in these schools with these standards. Henceforth, it should be expected that there will be a variation of languages and dialects. With that said, she states that students being forced to fulfil this “oppressive language” requirement is almost like asking them to change who they are when it comes to their race (Dennihy 8). They also often have to “pay a price” when they don’t meet this standard (Dennihy 2) (usually paying tuition to retake an English course they failed). Consequently, she expresses that “Students who use non-standardized Englishes and languages other than English may understandably feel marginalized in college English classrooms and throughout academia” (Dennihy 3). However, she makes it clear that we should refute this uniformity as proper English is just the way those “who have power communicate out of necessity” (Inoue 3). Though conforming is seen as the key to success for those racially marginalized in a white dominated society, we must recognize that “Language does not speak with one voice” (Dennihy 1). Lastly, she states that teachers in these schools have a very important role in reshaping the narrative on what is good writing. They can do this by breaking the cycle of linguistic prejudice through teaching to question standard English and why it is more reputable than other dialects and to use this standard “in addition to” rather than “instead of” (Dennihy 13).

What I personally have learned from Tan, Inoue and Dennihy is that I should break barriers and incorporate my first language, Jamaican Patois, more in whichever way I choose to communicate. I might face backlash or even not be taken seriously but it is who I am and it efficiently captures my “passion and imagery” as Tan mentioned (Tan 4). I have never questioned the standardization of the English language until reading both articles. Hence, they have taught me that though grammar can be racist to a girl like me who speaks multiple Englishes, it is also my job as a student to help curb this perpetuation of language discrimination by incorporating the many voices that language speaks with, whether in speech or writing.

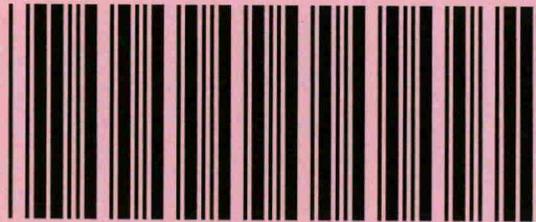
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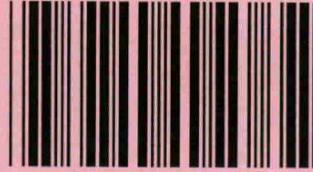




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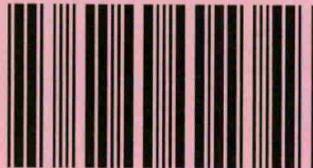
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