

V O L U M E 1
D E F U N K T
M A G A Z I N E
P O E T R Y F I C T I O N





Cover Art

“Houston Art Car Parade”

Michael O’Dwyer

Photograph



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Noah Speaks to Joel Osteen

Joshua Nguyen

You know what you get when you lock up two of every living animal in one ark— a whole lotta animal shit. Joel Joel Joelly Joel, you messed up big this time. Joel, on the first day it rained, God shut me & my family in while screeching scraped along the sides of the ark. We weren't sure if this was thunder or people— I didn't want to know. I wanted it to be thunder. You knew it was people. I told you my tale not for you to mimic me but to learn from my mistakes. You could see through the glass doors of your \$95 million newly-renovated mega-church. God damn, Joel. What did your staff smear against the windows after the storm kept knocking: THAT'S WHAT YOU GET FOR NOT MAKING THE BASKETS HEAVY ENOUGH? Admit it, Joel, you were afraid that if one person fell through, the whole dam would break open. You said *the government is 4 miles away* you said *remember Katrina?* you said and said and said until they wrote about you in the newspaper the next day. And just like that, you pretty much tore the walls down with your open arms. You turned profit into dry foods. You did an interview to clear your name & I swear I saw a giraffe walk out from the back exit of your church, a serpent wrapped around its neck, its neck outstretched towards the sky, a purple tongue aching for water.

Honduras al regreso Shaunteal Cooley

Necesito escribir. Purgar. Recordar y Olvidar.

Honduras. Tierra de hedor y calentura y moja y luz y amor.

Estos niños no saben nada diferente. Toman señales de sus adultos. El lodo. La carne cruda. La basura.

Es un normal nuevo para mí.

Veo que el reloj no mueve aquí.

Veo la lucha.

Veo tanto lucha para un par de zapatos nuevos.

Veo un mundo verdeante y toxico, rebosante de vida y ahogando en plástico.

Las islas han prohibido el plástico. ¿Cuándo vamos a unirles los continentes? ¿Cuánta mierda podemos aguantar?

La muerte es un parte de la vida diaria. Damos y tomamos. Damos y recibimos. Damos y robamos.

No he lavado mi cabello por días. El mejor que podría hacer es salpica agua fría en mi culo. Yo sé porque llora la nena salpicada en la pila.

El olor del Old Spice de mi Darith en mi cabello me mata. Quiero vomitar. Si no muevo mi cabeza siento mejor.

Hablé con Byron y Dunia hasta la madrugada. Tengo una familia nueva. ¿Como no sabía yo que este iba pasar? Yo se ser abierta. Yo se ser lista. Pero cada vez me pega como una pared de ladrillo...este conexión con otros ser humanos. Ser humanos vivos, quienes respiran como yo, quienes aman como yo. ¿De qué coños se tratan los muros?

Por favor. Rezo. Pido y espero curación y amor. Y la ternura. Para Lilian. Y la misericordia para la joven Shauny quien andaba tan estúpida por Santa Lucia y Valle de Ángeles mirando boquiabierto en los arboles de la selva y en el cielo. Tan despistada que quebraba su propio cuerpo y su propio Corazón. Ahora ella es conectada a tierra. Mas segura. Ella es un poco más guardada, pero más abierta a posibilidades. No más en deuda con una memoria inventada por lujuria y un deseo de escapar.

Al entender que Escot no es todo lo que imaginaba, me rescato de mi propia tierra de fantasía. Yo enterré a esos niños, Escot, Chonita, y Dale aquí al pie de la iglesia en San Pedro Sula. Enfrente del Hotel Maya donde pretendamos ser huéspedes para nadar en su piscina. La Buena Dunia abrazándome por el funeral. Adiós amigos. Te quiero y agradezco mucho sus lecciones.

Todos quieren bondad para sus hijos. No todos quieren salir de aquí. Yo quiero entrar. Yo quiero esta exuberancia.

Camino hacia adelante para entrar en esta luz y amor. Acepto todo. Acepto la Amistad y cariño de Escot sin colgar nada en él. Podemos ser viento. Levantándonos. Podemos ser esta alegría cuando estamos juntos, y la memoria de esta alegría cuando separados. No es necesaria, es una

pista extra.

Soy más ligera. Aliviada de una carga.

Incinerated Chapbooks

Marc Brüseke and Karina Bush

Burn the Candle at Both Ends Until the Wick Falls to the
Rug and Sets the House on Fire
A Penis is Not a Therapy Pet
Speeding Down Darkened Roads With The Headlights Switched
Off Hoping For The Best
At Bingo with my Granny on Speed
Photographs of William Burroughs using a flamethrower on a
wooden door
Stigmata from Handjobs in Church: Irish Teenage Folklore
Ulysses Book 2: Or, The Savage Odyssey Of A Yorkshire
Gentlemen
Fantasies about pushing Stephen Hawking down the stairs
Firing a .357 Magnum with Reckless Abandon
Fantasies don't make Babies
Gravel Donkey Fuck Party
Headbutting pensioners for walking slow
Exploding Frog Cigars
Puking Hairballs because he doesn't love me
What's my purpose Rodrigo Alves?
Dickpop Meatball
I cried at a Peter Andre concert and other tales from pre

pubescence

Oven baked French fry fist fucks

Exposé: The Harvey Weinstein of the Small Press

Lusty in the vegetable aisle... and as he climbed into bed
he realised he'd forgotten to fetch the children after
school

Theory of Sexually-Transmitted-Spasmosis

The Giant Purple People Eater

The Song of Sperming: God Hung Suspended His Cum Abounding

Core Data Manipulation Engine

Julian Assange Fever in an Airport Lounge

Lapdancing Upwards into Space

Warper

Michael Hollander

Alcubierre
Motherfucker
Where have you sent me
Where have you hid me
I pray for your children
Pray that they suffer
Your head on a spike
Your heart on an altar

Here there is no light
Here there are no stars
Alcubierre
I am the last one

I am past lonely
I am past madness
Daughter of empty Child of stillness
But here there's no kinship
No touch to affirm me
I am the last one
Alcubierre

Here there is no light
Here there are no stars
Alcubierre
I am the last one

I pray for your bloodline

Pray that it sours
Your blood in an engine
As they engine takes water
Creaking and groaning
Like the drive of this monster
Here I am Tyrant Here i am Pauper

I am the Taxman
I am the Jailer
I am the Saviour
Away in a manger

Here I am Clergy
Black and white collar
I pray for your children
That they're dragged through the water

Here there is no light
Here there are no stars
Alcubierre
Alcubierre

This ship is my keeper
This ship is my altar
It will not allow me
To self harm or injure
Your head is from madness
Your heart in an engine
Here I am dragging
The rack to the pinion

Here there is no light
Here there are no stars
I am the last one
I am the last one

I pray in the water

No answer returning
No path to my ruin
No touch to affirm me
No spike to endure
No light from the window
No hidden boundary
Alcubierre



“The Parcel of Murder, Quiscalus Mexicanus”

Jimena Vilchis

Painting

The Perfect Filter

Christopher Allen

I can't put a face to the named
Stars over my shoulder
I sneak into the middle of selfies
Strangers snap @HollywoodBLVD
Spreading my fame anonymously passive aggressively

Turn on location
search for new friends
@HollywoodImpersonators @CelebrityLookAlikes @OldTimeDiner
#myself #awkward #luckytomeet #fanseverywhere

I meet Marilyn
#hollywoodroyalty
#paiofqueens #yasqueen
#adulterer #jfk

I meet Elvis
#fucktheking #got #nerd
#thedog #sandorclegane
#peanutbutterbananaman
#overdosedonthetoilet

I tag myself in photos I
never pretend to look at
They repeat my name
The faster I scroll the longer I trend

My inbox is full of party invites

I spell my name for the bouncer
So they can add me on Instagram

I pay to get in the party
@VIPTour @ClubElite
#bottleservice #selfpromotion #exposure
#followers #fans

Shots from the balcony of velvet ropes below
#watchmynumbergrow
#hashtaghashtag

Trying on clothes in Malibu
@TrendyBoutique @CustomDesigner
#dressingroomdiva #wardrobemalfunction
Before they can see me
I wave to my fans

English as a Second Language

María Guerra

I went to my mother's homeland to find
the layers scraped away by ESL classes
that promised a future if I forgot
how to say *mamá* and *papá*.

I searched for those parts that knew how
to exchange a *buenas* with strangers
and kiss unknown family on both cheeks
without hesitating under their gaze.

I Give You What My Hands are Capable of Matt Flores

Believing eternity is in this
firm chair. Imagine you
actually care for the ripples
beside a drifting raft.

Throw me down and I am seen
rug raw to a similar system.
Enough from witness to the
oracular movements, your
apartment staircase, I left a
marking
close to the closed door.

Every single daydream undone
bursts down steps gray
dwelled shadows billowing
over the pavement, so how
could I ever stop still to
see
silver corral

blooming from the corners of
libraries. A sweetness that
warps and sways. Were we to
give offerings meekly in
derelict sotto voce fatigue
acquiesced space

between the faceless
commuters. Soft pressure of
concern with the turn,
watching the blood bring the
color back choke on the
transience. Blue and red
 reaching,
 yearning—

philosophy of moon shear,
penumbra of glow,
pointing to say

we have always been here.

Ode to Ikea

Nicholas DiTusa Daily

Out of the box it's
different than I expected.
For all the
labored sanding and
dusting off of those
irregularities
the elm is coarse
blemished.
Parts laid out across the floor
their function impenetrable.
Blood drains from my cheeks and arms,
leaving only frigid tundras
rough and untouched.
but I begin with haste.
The bedposts
shaped with the manufactured brilliance
of some Swedish god of craft
mighty hammer in one hand
throbbing finger on the other
declares it
"good enough,"
slip into their joints too
loosely.
For an ecstatic moment they
slip
into the catch,
only to
slip

out the next.

The bedframe
shudders and groans in my hands
like ancient rails
under a stubborn train.

Sweatily fumbling the mattress
grasping at its saggy folds
lurching desperately.

I yearn for nothing more than
to rest my head upon those
lumpy pillows.

A few too many screws and we're
strung out across the floor and sore
parts

jutting out at odd angles.

We lie there looking away from each other
and our incomplete task.

Hungry

Eliza Swan

Everyone around me was falling away
I no longer saw anything only the plate
of food in front of me bowl of sober broth
leafy greens wilting I did not see the sun
setting the neighborhood growing quieter
until I had lassoed every noodle chewed
swallowed every glucose globule.
I look up, see a picture on the wall
it had not been there before I
recall what happened in the morning on the stairs
you did not know how much I thought of you
how much it would hurt me
to see you sitting there
passed out while you
slept off your high
I thought you had
enough respect
for me not to
get that
close to
death



“Can you see me?”

K.B. Solomon

Photograph

Adrift

Rosalind Williamson

Standing on the rocks just past the seafoam,
I see the shadowed clouds on ocean waves
and know this is where the gateway between
life and death is eroded, dust to dust.

My dead stand on the water, watching me.
Salted wind whips their hair, their shells, their scales.
I wonder if they will summon lightning
and inch away from the encroaching tide.

But ocean air is in my DNA,
the legacy of ungrateful monsters
who crawled out to lay their eggs. Later us.
Billions long-forgotten and fossilized.

I wonder if we melt glaciers so we
will once again be eaten by the sea.

A Scaffold is Only So Safe in the Nighttime - After Luther Hughes

Aris Kian Brown

You make steel of yourself so no one else can.
A footstep's a heavy & metal-toed act, have you

stepped out from yourself today? You miss a stop & imagine
a street filled with men their eyes wet & clawing. You
try being

chaste modest whatever else you're told to do so
you remain untouched. Best case: their hands are tied

to their pockets walking by; even then, you pace a quick
prayer to
bar their tongues behind their teeth. Funny how
blackness

calls more attention than a street sign, that
brown skin shines brightest in stations dim-lit, even

when you've bested yourself matching shadows. Your
arms fold at your hips like copper-plated wings,

blazing & serrated stone-cut & razor-lined; no, you cannot
smile you'll swallow the bus in the flames. You help

the night wane in a hot, dripping silence. You
retreat from your bones like a fire escape.

Plaza Independencia

Gus Sanchez

the first time I saw _____,
there were soldiers on every street
corner, olive-skinned conscripts
clutching their automatics and their
emotions close to the vest
the avenues teemed with the
damp expectancy of ill-suited
fireworks displays, and the powder-
keg knee-jerk reactions that would rain
down like the peloton through the
mountains after Stage 24;
there was fear in our steps, and the very
crystalline facade of normalcy was
challenged at every turn by faceless
sides, but tonight, there were lines to be
queued against, and bellies to be filled,
the fervor of a revolution no one
understood would have to wait another day

JASON KOO, ASS. PROF.

Jason Koo

I'm in the middle of my second round
of conferences with my English 102 students
on their Kafka papers, which, at 10 minutes
per student x 20 students = 200 minutes,
or 400 minutes over two days, or 300 more
minutes than my two regular 50-minute classes,
or five hours of extra time I'm putting in to help
my students with their intros and arguments
and first body paragraphs, which I discovered
a couple of years ago made a major impact
on the quality of their papers, as they no longer
built whole papers on shoddy foundations,
time I will put in three times this semester
for three major essay assignments, or 15 hrs
of extra time put in on my own, not mandated
by the department or the College of Arts & Sciences
or the university, and this for just one class,
when I get an email from my Chair explaining
that I was not approved for promotion.

At first I don't process what she is saying,
 as she starts by saying there is good news
 and bad news, that I've been approved for 4th-year
 review but not for promotion, and I thought
 promotion was such a lock that I don't get it.

Don't get that I didn't get it. Read closely:
 while there was "potential for teaching excellence"
 the department felt there was a "need for mentoring,"
 as there were some "issues" that "gave them pause."

These issues, I'm guessing, were related
 to the awful evals I got in a couple of classes
 that brought down my overall average scores,
 which were generally pretty good to very good.

There was really no other basis, as far as I can tell,
 for them to judge, other than my peer observations,

which were good, and my handouts and syllabi
 and sample student work, etc, which would be difficult

to find much fault with. So the "department,"
 i.e. my colleagues whom I consider my friends

and peers, many of whom were hired about the same
 time as me but who are all, unlike me, tenure track

and white, decided to take a few students' words
 over mine. Actually, I wasn't even allowed

a word, as there was no way for me to defend
 myself against accusations such as one flat-out lie

that I had forced a student to move a chair
from out of the middle of our circle of chairs

to another part of the room, written in a brief
“essay” in the comments section of an eval

by a student who went out of her way to claim
I was the “worst teacher ever” for doing things

like this that she considered rude, such as
marking a student late if they were late

and enforcing a policy that made every two late’s
equal an absence. I am not a perfect teacher

or human being by any means, but I know
I am not the worst teacher ever, and I did nothing

in that class to deserve that kind of vitriol
other than giving that student a bad grade.

Anyone who has had a truly terrible teacher
knows the difference between one who is

professionally inept and one who cares
whether his students learn. I know I am

not a bad teacher. I have been teaching
for over 16 years, I can see my impact

on my students, in their faces in the classroom
when I am reaching them, in the improvement

in their writing, in their admission to graduate
programs, in my generally good student evals

and peer observations over all these years. I don't think I'm a *great* teacher. When I was young I thought I was, but after a while I learned that being a great teacher took more than exciting your students and going easy on their grades. I am trying really hard this semester to get better, and it is going well so far, not just in my three college classes but in my workshop for Brooklyn Poets—which is at max capacity, *maybe* indicating that I'm a good teacher—and my workshop for Cave Canem, also at max capacity.

The Cave Canem workshop in particular is going so well that I have begun telling my students it has a chance to be historically great, something I've never said before, simply because of how well the students are writing and how engaged they are—a lot of this has to do with my going over our rules of engagement on the first day of class, which they were so excited about, I'm guessing because as writers of color they'd probably never gotten that kind of respect or care or attention from a teacher before, as I have not. Or shall we say from an institution.

I'm sitting here on a sunny Friday afternoon

in my office putting in extra hours with students
when I could be driving home to Brooklyn

already for the weekend, hours which formed
no part of my teaching portfolio for review,

because how could you quantify them or make
mention of them, except in the very ways

I have done, and I get this email and everything
inside me goes limp, I slump a little in my chair,

as Kafka describes Josef K. slumping when
the painter explains that there are only

three options for a man like him: actual
acquittal, apparent acquittal and protraction,

and as actual acquittal never happens
there are really only two: apparent acquittal,

where it seems you are acquitted but can
be arrested again at any time, even right after

your acquittal, and protraction, where you
don't ever get acquitted but just extend

your trial indefinitely, keeping it in its initial
stages so you never get convicted and are

more or less "free." My life in academia
has been one of protraction, my services

are constantly kept at the lowest stages,
all of my colleagues who came in with me

and are publishing less than me and not
running a literary nonprofit in the meantime

have been promoted for tenure, when I came in
on this weird, renewable non-tenure-track line

that was called an “assistant” professorship
but has since been dubbed an “assistant teaching”

professorship to denote its difference from
tenure-track lines, I was told I was the “same”

as everyone else, I’d be treated the exact same,
thought of the same, but obviously I was not

the same, and that difference only becomes clear
when your colleagues do the same work

you’re doing or less and get promoted
while you do not. It’s a fancy, nondramatic,

insidious way of getting screwed, academia
keeps coming up with new ways to screw me

while keeping me more or less “free,” as I am
still employed, just not promoted and not

really valued for my work. In this case I came
in with one set of expectations, that I was

to teach and publish like everyone else but not
do much service, as I was not tenure-track

and for that reason was not allowed to advise
students or vote on tenure reviews. So I taught

and published and put in about what I thought
the university could expect of me, as it hadn't
invested in my future; and then last year
the university approved a proposal to give more
security and incentive to non-tenure-track
full-time profs by doing away with the "guillotine,"
the supposed seven-year limit on term faculty
that was never explained to me until after I
accepted the job, by doing away with the term
"term faculty" and replacing it with "teaching
faculty," as if all I did was teach, and building in
the possibility of promotion—but with this
catch, that promotion would be based on teaching
and service, but not on one's research at all.
So I'd been working under one set of expectations
for three years and then, in my fourth year,
when suddenly I was eligible for promotion,
I was scrutinized under another set of expectations.
So never mind all the things I was doing
with my writing that would've shined for me
under tenure review, none of that mattered
as now I was only being judged for what
I did as a teacher and servant of the department.
And of course that looks in no way remarkable
if you haven't been investing all of your energy

in that because you haven't been given incentive to do so; now, after submitting my application for promotion and looking closely at my evals and seeing how much they matter to this process, I have much more incentive to invest more of my energy into teaching than I already do, or into caring what my students think of me, making them like me, which I did not consider an essential part of teaching after I moved out of my graduate teaching phase of wanting everyone to like me and giving out easy grades, boy were my evals fantastic then. It is completely unfair for teachers who've worked under the incentive of getting tenure to judge a teacher who has not worked under that incentive. Had I been tenure-track from the start, or even had I been "teaching faculty" from the start, I would've invested more of my time into teaching, I may even never have founded Brooklyn Poets, which I did because I thought of it as an alternative to academia, a safety net should I ever get screwed again, which I have, something I could build and possibly work for should I never get that tenure-track job. When I first started at my school I thought,

as I have in the past working for other schools
in temporary full-time positions, that there

was a possibility I would get converted
to a tenure line, and my Chair would mention

this as a possibility, sure, my one colleague
in creative writing started in the same position

as me but was converted after a couple of years.
But that didn't happen for me, of course,

after I came in the President lost a shit ton
of money and started laying off some term

faculty. Luckily I was spared but there was no
more mention of me getting converted.

We had one more tenure line made available
to us (and by "us" I mistakenly group myself

with the department, which shows how idiotic
I am) and instead of using that line to make

me-half the creative writing faculty and the only
poet and POC-tenure track, the department

used it to hire a straight white male to teach
Contemporary British fiction. Not once did we talk

about what could be wrong with this. If I had been
tenure track, you can be sure I would have

said something, but because I was not, I shut
my mouth, fearing repercussions that I got

anyway, so I might as well have said something.
This is what happens when you invite a POC

to the table but do not give them the same power
of speech. Not once was the subject of diversity

brought up, not one single POC candidate
was seriously considered. There was one Hispanic

woman I pushed for in the early stages,
but her application was dismissed without

any discussion. Think it might have made
a difference to my review if another POC

had been in the room? Or *several* POC?
I'm sure not once was the subject of diversity

brought up in that room during the review,
I'm sure not one single person thought of how

it might feel to the one full-time POC prof
to have his application for *non-tenure-track*

promotion denied by an all-white tribunal.
Did they even think of how that might *look*

let alone how I might *feel*? No, because no one
is looking, no one looks at what happens

to a person already without power, I would
have to be tenure track for this kind of decision

to matter. I just wish the email from my Chair
had been more blunt and said to me simply,

Your peers whom you have laughed with

and drank with and praised as the best colleagues
you've ever worked with, who seemed
sympathetic to your not being tenure track,
saying it wasn't right, we should do something
about that, have decided they can't even throw
you a bone by voting for your promotion
as a "teaching" professor; your peers, who
you know have gotten bad student evals before,
as every teacher has at some point in their careers,
have decided you "need some mentoring," as if
you were a TA or rookie teacher and not almost 40
years old with 16 years of teaching experience
under your belt, teaching not just for colleges
and universities but nonprofits, teaching all
grade levels from second grade to masters programs,
developing curricula for graduate programs
and a nonprofit workshop program, currently
teaching five classes—two outside the university—
instead of their three, daily maintaining a website
you created and raised over \$25,000 to launch
to enable student poets to connect with mentors
outside of academia. *All I do* is teaching
and mentoring and thinking about teaching
and mentoring, but I am told I have a "need
for mentoring." And I am sitting in the middle

of my fourth extra hour of conference time with students who very well could ruin me by rating me low on things like “sensitive to students’ needs” and “makes himself available to students” which are always, despite all this extra time I’ve been putting in, my lowest eval scores besides “grades work in an unbiased way” (which a smart set of professors might see a connection between), and I’m thinking, *Why should I do this?* Why should I give one fuck about this department or this student who’s asking me basically to tell him what to write about because he hasn’t thought about what *The Trial* means, hasn’t listened in class when we went over possible interpretations or intro structure or critical essay structure, hasn’t read any of my handouts on that stuff. I can see in his eyes he doesn’t give a damn about me or this class and just wants somehow to get a decent grade, in fact when I gave the class a hypothetical scenario about a class in which every day the teacher showed up and said they could leave without doing any work, how maybe they’d like this at first but after a while

wouldn't they hate it because they'd expect
to be held to some standard, wasn't that
what they or their parents were paying for,
this student said, No, I'd love it, I'd just stop
coming to class. Why was I putting in extra time
to conference with this guy, taking extra care
to be nice to him when saying he had to rewrite
his intro, not just add things, which he hadn't
revised *at all* since the first conference, which
was the whole point of the second conference,
to revise the intro/argument after the first—
because now I'd gotten this email and knew
how much this one student could fuck me,
he had an absurd amount of power over
my future compared to my power over his,
which came down to a grade, which we all know
future employers don't give a shit about,
especially if your line of work doesn't involve
the ability to write well, and even if it does,
hell, that grade you got you received years ago,
when you were a freshman. I am absurdly
being paid to teach and evaluate this student
by giving him a grade according to standards
I have set for him in accordance with my own
professional judgment and the department's,

college's and university's, but he is the one
evaluating me in the end, one vicious eval
from him will mean no promotion for me—
and I can, yes, apply again in a year. Yay.
I am forgetting myself, the major character,
I think, as I slump through a woefully
Kafkaesque narrative of me teaching Kafka,
wanting not to fight but to give up, not
to apply for promotion again because I can't
bear the shame of having my colleagues judge
me based on my evals, not to respond
to my Chair, not to meet with her to listen
to her explanations, not to apply for the job
at Long Island University I found out about
that pays twice what my current job does
though it too is not tenure track and is
way out of my reach, as it's an endowed
professorship and I only found out about it
because a Brooklyn Poets intern emailed me
and encouraged me to send the job listing
to women and POC because, of the 24 apps
they'd gotten so far, 23 were by white men
and the two permanent creative writing faculty
are also white men, so, you know, HELP,
but they will probably hire a white person

or an über-famous POC. I don't want to do
anything but crawl into a corner of my bed

in my big brown robe like a bug and not
die, just lie there staring at the white ceiling.

CONTRIBUTORS

Christopher Allen is a 2019 graduate of the University of Houston's English-Creative Writing program. He served as an associate editor on Glass Mountain for two semesters. All of the pieces submitted were created while in the Undergrad program at UH, or at Boldface 2019. He is currently in the MFA program for poetry at Oklahoma State University with plans to be a Creative Writing Professor and published author. He was born in Tomball and somehow always finds his way back despite his best efforts at moving all around the world. A Veteran of the U.S. Army, much of his work is colored by, or alludes directly to, P.T.S.D. Most the rest is inspiration taken from his amazing wife, two inconceivably adorable children, and History books which possess far too much contemporary relevance.

Marc Brüseke is a writer and small press publisher from Cape Town, South Africa. As an author he has published nine chapbooks of poetry and prose, the book length poem *The Arrival of Dr. K: A Poem and Manifesto in Five Parts*, and is currently working on several new novels and a book of selected poems. As a publisher he has helped edit into existence over 100 publications by some of the most recognizable and exciting writers from the contemporary literary underground. He currently resides in the city of York, England.

Karina Bush is an Irish writer and video poet, born in Belfast and now living in Rome. She is the author of three books, 'Brain Lace' (BareBackPress, 2018), '50 Euro' (BareBackPress, 2017), and 'Maiden' (48th Street Press, 2016). For more information visit her website karinabush.com and Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/karinabushxx/>.

Shauntel Cooley is a mom, teacher, and student of life. You will find her dancing, strumming a guitar and organizing music circles in her backyard or traveling with/hosting couchsurfers around the globe. She believes in love. @shaunydaun

Nicholas DiTusa Daily studied philosophy and English; creative writing at the University of Houston. He was awarded the Bryan Lawrence Prize in Poetry in 2018 for a selection of five poems including "Ode

to Ikea.” Nicholas will begin attending Northwestern’s JD program in fall of 2019 in pursuit of a career in space law. He brings with him a fascination with postmodern and absurdist literature.

Matthew Flores lives in Houston, Texas. He is a delivery driver and undergraduate at the University of Houston. He has been published in Glass Mountain.

Maria Guerra enjoys buying books she never reads and notebooks she never writes in.

Michael Hollander arranges words, music, and paper in various configurations. His daughter Luna is his smallest fan. He currently does not have much of an online presence. The best way to reach him is by email at mphollan@gmail.com.

Aris Kian has a BA in English from the University of Houston. She is an inaugural member of CoogSlam, the 4th in the nation collegiate slam team. She has work published in Underground Journal. She was a blogger for AfroVibes Media and co-hosted poetry workshops for WITS. She has been a featured reader for Write About Now Poetry (w/ CoogSlam), The Vibe Experience, and Glass Mountain.

Named one of the “100 Most Influential People in Brooklyn Culture” by Brooklyn Magazine, **Jason Koo** was born in New York City and grew up in Cleveland, Ohio. He is the author of three full-length collections of poetry: *More Than Mere Light*, *America’s Favorite Poem* and *Man on Extremely Small Island*, winner of the De Novo Poetry Prize and the Asian American Writers’ Workshop Members’ Choice Award for the best Asian American book of 2009. He is also the author of the chapbook *Sunset Park* and coeditor of the *Brooklyn Poets Anthology*. He has published his poetry and prose in the *American Scholar*, *Missouri Review*, *Village Voice* and *Yale Review*, among other places, and won fellowships for his work from the National Endowment for the Arts, Vermont Studio Center and New York State Writers Institute. He earned his BA in English from Yale, his MFA in creative writing from the University of Houston and his PhD in English and creative writing from the University of Missouri–Columbia. An associate teaching professor of English at Quinnipiac University, Koo has also taught writing at NYU and Lehman College–CUNY, where he served as the director of the graduate program in English, and as a senior writer-in-residence for Writers in the Schools. He is the founder and executive director of Brooklyn Poets and creator of the Bridge. He

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Joshua Nguyen is a Kundiman Fellow, collegiate national poetry champion (CUPSI), and a native Houstonian. He has been published in *The Offing*, *The Acentos Review*, *Rambutan Literary*, *Button Poetry*, *The Texas Review*, *Auburn Avenue*, *Crab Orchard*, *Gulf Coast*, and *Hot Metal Bridge*. He is currently an MFA candidate at The University of Mississippi. He is a bubble tea connoisseur and works in a kitchen.

Gus Sanchez has been writing poetry, short stories, and experimental non-fiction for the better part of two decades. His poems have been published in various literary magazines and journals, including *Tilde*, *Thirty West Publishing*, *Indie Affair*, *Last Chapter Journal*, and *Uno Kudo Press*. Born in New York City, he currently resides in Charlotte, NC, with his wife, daughter, and one stoic beagle.

Eliza Swan is an author and teaching musician in Houston, TX. Her poems are live on *High Shelf Press* and *The Local Train Magazine*. She has performed her work with *Words and Art*, Houston at the *James Turrell Skyspace*, *Menil Collection* and *Contemporary Arts Museum Houston*. Her words have also sounded at *Gentle Hour*, *Houston VIP Slam* and *Coast2Soul* in Galveston. She loves maps and harpsichords and is active on Instagram. Ms. Swan was editor and publisher for three seasons at *Houston Grand Opera*, which produced her translation of *Baudelaire's* essay "Vastness Unadorned," on the music of Wagner. Born in Berkeley, and raised in Oakland, California, she has studied with *Houston Poet Laureate Deborah Deep Mouton*, *Lupe Mendez* of *Tintero Projects* and U of H PhD candidate *Niki Herd*. She loves maps and harpsichords and is active on Instagram.

Rosalind Williamson studies poetry at the University of Houston, serves as Co-Art Editor for *Glass Mountain Magazine*, and is a scribe and co-founder of *Houlipo Collective*.

Art

Michael O'Dwyer is a photographer/film maker currently based out of Houston Texas. While living in South Korea he fell in love with the underground music scene and began to compulsively document it with photographs and video. The "Bleeding Kimchi: Director's Reel" video and related podcast and photobook: "Bleeding Kimchi: Soju, Metal, Korea" is a collection of portraits of Korean musicians and people related to the scene. To give an insight of the extreme rebels that thrive in a very conservative and traditional society. Whether it's

street photography in Texas or portraits of marginalized musicians the goal is to capture people as they express themselves, without reference to outside opinions or ideologies. He has been described as a child dude that is dedicated to both his work and serving his muse, The Void.

K.B. Solomon, the world of art captured her mind and soul when she was a child. She was born in the sixties – the decade of free love, a tumultuous time of revolution within politics, the civil rights movement and the race to space. She was raised surrounded with love by her mother and grandmother within the Houston city limits and spent many summers in the rural areas of East Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi with family members. She enjoyed all of nature's raw splendor in the countryside and Gulf Coast and thrived in the diversity of going to school in the city. Her passion blossomed when she received her first camera. She finally had a way of showing (telling) a story that is written with a picture. Her work has focused on people, life events, nature, and street art. She is fascinated by our ever-changing culture and our rich past which is seen through architecture, negligence, and gentrification. She thoroughly enjoys capturing the quirkiness, beauty and innocence, and sometimes simple raw emotion of a moment in order to bring joy, laughter and awareness to people.

Jimena Vilchis is an artist from the great Mexico who has ventured to live where the grass is greenest. She misses the other side, but found a perfect home in Katy. Her cookiecut house is bordered by a white picket fence, with the flowers kept always in blossom. The birds sing at night to her, and the skies always seem to be clear (unless they aren't at all). She is inspired by her environment and pictures the flora and fauna from inside and outside.





FICTION

VOLUME 1

DEFUNKT MAGAZINE



Fiction Cover Art
“One Rainy Night”
Aleksandra Korinnaja
Painting

And Let Live Matthew Lovitt

Thomas stood before the sinkhole that opened toward the rear of his property—shelf acreage of baked earth and tangled mesquite. The depression half swallowed the injection wellhead tapped into the shale a mile below, for its light sweet. Jagged fragments of cement casings and iodized pipe broke the sunken earth's surface like a fracture punctures skin, a No Trespassing sign riddled with buckshot still posted to a length of mangled chain-link. He plucked his Reds from his breast pocket, pulled the smoke into lungs, and cussed himself for the promises made by slick men, lies that life would improve, if only with dollars in the bank.

#

Through the open kitchen window, came the sound of a truck rolling up the two-track that ran along the perimeter of his land. Caliche crackled and dried twigs snapped. Thomas planted his hands on the table, rose, and kissed the crucifix that hung from his neck. He whispered, Please give me strength, Ann. I'm sorry for what I've done to your family's land. And the sickness that took you from me, the chemicals that poisoned your body, in the name of greed. If I could do it all again...

#

The company man said, Mr. McFadden?
Thomas nodded.

My name's Dustin Swift. On behalf of Yates Energy, I wanted to let you know that we'll get to the bottom of this. We think that there was some sort of tectonic shift. We're in Texas.

The man glanced at the subs walking the perimeter of the pit, looking confused, perhaps uncertain of how fast to run, and in which direction. Thomas had warned them that the substrata was too porous, the salt layers too thin, and pumping thousands of gallons of water and chemicals into the spent well would cause the earth to lift, disperse, then collapse. And yet...

Dustin said, Needless to say we're going to find out what happened. We'd be happy to put you up in a motel until we can fully assess. But should you choose to stay, we don't believe that you're at any undue risk.

He pulled a fold of papers from his back pocket, then continued, In the meantime, if you could sign this non-disclosure statement. Behind that we have a site survey consent. We aim to discover what went wrong and...you understand.

Thomas said, That I do.

Perfect.

And what will you tell them?

Thomas pointed to the heavy equipment on the next tract, leveling off a new pad.

Dustin said, I'll have to run that one by my boss.

You best and quick.

#

Thomas sat upon the stoop, watched Sheriff Diaz turn into his drive, and rose when the cruiser stopped behind his pickup truck, at the packed-earth path that led to his doorstep.

Tommy, Diaz said.

Afternoon, Sheriff.

Found her on the roof of the laundromat, trying to drop in.

Thomas looked past Diaz.

In the back of the sheriff's cruiser, his daughter rocked, cursed, and spat.

Diaz continued, The other man fell through the vent, landed crosswise, and broke his leg. They had a bag of tools—crowbars, hammers, and ratchets. We suppose they were trying to get into the change machine, and the lockbox kept in the office.

What kind of trouble?

Breaking and Entering; Criminal Mischief.

And you brought her home.

Can't have that in my jail, Diaz said. We're already at max, and in such a state Mary Sue would flip the whole place on its head. Thought maybe you could talk some sense into her before she went someplace where there isn't any coming back.

Thomas nodded. I'll do my best.

It would be a shame for her to land in the pen.

I understand, Sheriff. You're a good man.

#

Mary Sue paced the living room, a cigarette resting between her lips, muttering her doped-up nonsense, that The State neglected its most vulnerable citizens, catered to the donors upon whom it depended, and passed laws that further widened the gap between the means and the end. And the police were but henchmen for society men. The only solution was to rise up and take the power back, and there was this great album by Rage, if Thomas could handle that. She slipped a compact disc into the stereo, turned up the volume to max, and stomped around the living room, smashing fallen cigarette ash into the doublewide's stained and matted shag.

Thomas shook his head. Held his breath. Victimhood kept those who felt less-than reaching for the tokens dangled over their head. Or in change machines and lockboxes,

guarded with charges more like life sentences. But maybe jail was the only way for her to meet the Four Horsemen, the same way as it was for him. Then again maybe Thomas could save her with the sure settlement that would come from Yates destroying their land. They might finally escape the basin, and start again.

#

Thomas lay on the couch, his fingers woven behind his head. The lazy twang of Waylon Jennings dribbled out of the stereo system. On the stoop, Mary Sue smoked cigarettes. And the calm of that moment was almost perfect, a lull in their life of shared discontent. She was drugged psychotic and he paralyzed with regret. But that was okay for he still had some version of her, and she some version of him. Maybe it would be nice for them to take a walk, then settle in for a helping of potatoes and SPAM. He rested his feet on the floor, rocked forward to a stand, and turned for the front door, calling her name in the slow drawl of real men.

#

The sunset painted the sky above Red Dirt RV Park purple, pink, and red. Across the highway sat an abandoned adobe home, shedding white paint like sunburned skin. Thomas took a swig of whiskey, licked the taste from his lips, then slid off his tailgate, strode across the highway, and stole himself against the chaos waiting within. The closer he got the more pronounced the stench of meth-burnt hair and cat piss. He reached the front door uncertain of what to do, and so barged in. Mary Sue was draped over the arm of a tattered, collapsed couch, half-dressed. Four shirtless men hunched over a flame, sticking needles between their toes, into their necks. He moved to heft his daughter over his shoulder. She snapped awake, gripped the couch, and kicked him in the chest. One man caught him, dragged

him outside, and dumped him at the highway's edge. The taste of blood filled his mouth; his ribs seemed to creak with every breath. And yet he lay there staring into the sky, deepening into a bottomless black. Or was it his insides turned out, on display for any soul that might pass?

#

Diaz parked at the end of the McFadden drive, turned to Thomas in the passenger seat, and said, I like you, Tommy. You're a good man. Which is why I'm not going to say it two ways—it's time for you to grow a sack. All this poor-me nonsense is no way to get your life back. So, do something, dammit. If not for me, then Ann.

Thomas wiped the snot from his nose with the back of his hand.

Sheriff continued, That or you're going to lose more—your daughter, home, and what's left of your self-respect. And once those're gone, the taste of a gun comes next. I've seen too many good men go the route of the wicked. So, help me if you don't bootstrap to a stand.

Or what? Thomas said.

Or don't. You're a grown man.

#

Thomas stood before the sinkhole, took a final puff of his Red, then flicked the cigarette into the pit. A fireball broke open the darkness, and in him grew a feeling like warmth and revenge. No longer would he be trod upon, paid alms by maniacs twice risen. Or life was but one mistake after the next—power and love don't mix.

#

Mary Sue stumbled into the house around seven a.m. Thomas found her in the kitchen, holding a bag of frozen

mustard greens to the kaleidoscope of bruises that covered one whole side of her head. He pulled her in for a hug. She wept.

What do you need? he said.

A gun.

He hugged her tighter.

Ten thousand dollars then.

How about we leave instead? I know the perfect place, tucked into the Guadalupe Mountains out west.

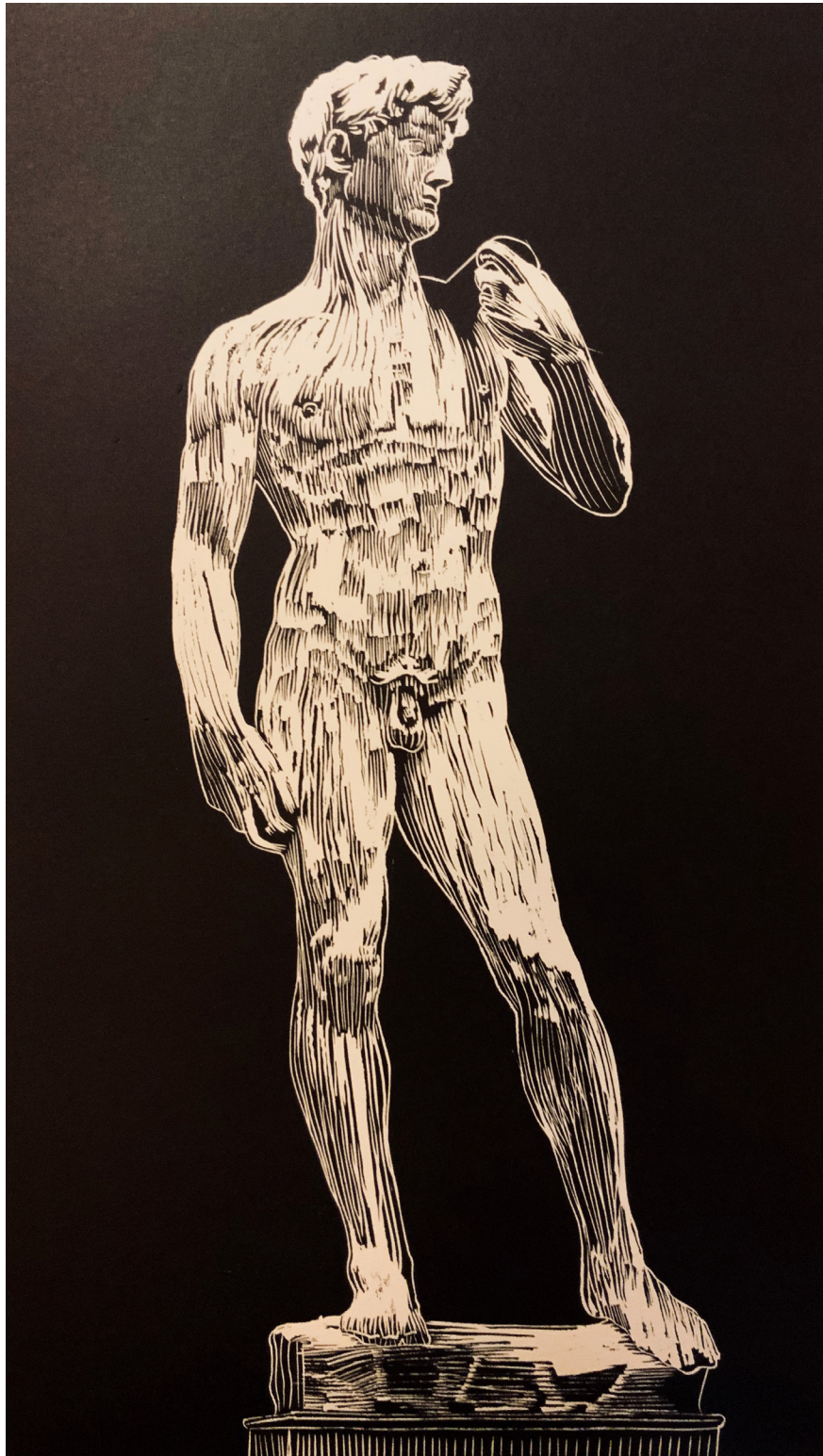
But mom's land?

It's killing us, he said. Hell, we may already be dead.

I can't.

We can.

Mary Sue buried her face in the crook of Thomas' neck. Tears and snot dampened the collar of his faded pearl snap. He didn't know what would happen if they left, but for the first time since his wife died, the thought of anything didn't fill him with a certain dread. That maybe there was a life beyond love and loss and Texas.



“David”

Marc Nicholas Bolivar
Linography

La Rosa

Tony Valverde

La últimas noches del mes de marzo han sido una tortura, como caminar miles de kilómetros por un campo lleno de pasto seco y suelo infértil. O quizá sentarse a cenar como invitado enemigo de Vlad Tepes.

Desde que Omar quien fue mi compañero de cuarto se lo llevo un policía quien según él había sido amigo de Juárez, las noches pesaban en oro su soledad.

Había intentando leer algunos libros que había sacado de la biblioteca pero fue en vano, la palabras se hacían líquidas y luego se evaporaban.

Es más sencillo contar los días cuando esperas algo o alguien. La ansiedad produce una cierta adrenalina que al tiempo se convierte tan adictiva que es imposible apartarse de ella.

Recordé aquella charla que había tenido con Omar la mañana antes de que lo sacaran de la celda para no volverlo a ver.

-Te lo digo, el nuevo dice que conocía a Juárez.

-Quizá te lo dijo solo para asustarte.

-No se, no se, la verdad tenía algo en sus ojos que me dicen que no me engaña.

-Tranquilo, nada va a pasar.

-Eso espero, eso espero.

Incluso me dejo su libro favorito de Poemas de Robert Grave encima de mi colchón, antes de marcharse.

Entonces vinieron los sueños que trasmutaban en pesadillas, cargados de reminiscencias, me acechaban como asesinos

feroces de venganza por haberlos puesto en el olvido.

Una claustrofobia se fue apoderando de mí, como nunca antes había experimentado en aquella celda.

Volví a ver a mi madre tendida en el suelo de aquel departamento barato, con los brazos pinchados como si fueran un colador. A los numerosos amantes que ella encontraba en la carretera, que me tocaban y me obligaban a chuparles el pene.

Luego cuando entre al colegio, dejar que un tipo eyaculara en mi boca fue sinónimo de ganarme un dinero para poder pagar la renta. Al final los litros de semen que trague, sirvieron para los gastos del funeral de mi madre.

Luego de abandonar el instituto, en esa época incluso pensé que me gustaban los hombres. Nunca me había enamorado de una mujer hasta que conocí a Ámbar, fue en la taberna en la que me escondía a beber luego de vender un poco de cocaína por las calles.

Estaba un poco gorda y ella tenía unos cincuenta años, yo apenas diecisiete pero parecía como de treinta, el mal tiempo te calcina.

Ámbar me cocinaba, me escuchaba, cuidaba de mí como mi madre nunca lo hizo. Siempre bebíamos toda la noche y luego cuando fuimos a vivir juntos a una pocilga que alquilamos en la capital, bebíamos prácticamente todo el día.

Cuando se reía, hacía lucir el hueco donde le faltaban dos dientes. Siempre que le que contaba que ahora mis nuevos clientes eran abogados y doctores, se reía a carcajadas mientras decía - El mundo está demente.

Pero la felicidad nunca duro, el destino es como un tallo muy débil que se quiebra con el mínimo roce de la brisa. Y una tarde en un reten policial acabo la poca libertad que me quedaba.

Estoy cumpliendo treinta años en esta muralla de lamentos, y evidentemente no volví a saber nada de Ámbar, a veces me gustaría ver de nuevo esa sonrisa incompleta.

Justo a las pocas días de estar en esta habitación, me hice amigo de Omar. No entendía por que estaba encerra-

do, era un joven sumamente erudito, fue por quien comencé a devorar los viejos libros de la biblioteca.

Hasta que una tarde me atreví a preguntarle por que estaba ahí (yo no soy de los tíos que andan averiguando el pasado de los demás)

- Te lo digo resumidamente, una noche mi hermana menor salió a una fiesta y no regreso, a eso de las tres de la madrugada, mi padre y yo la encontramos inconsciente en una granja abandonada del pueblo, le chorreaba sangre de todo lado especialmente de entre las piernas. Ella no quería hablar con nadie al principio, pero luego de unos días nos dimos cuenta que había sido el maldito de Juárez, un ex compañero suyo de la escuela, y que ahora era policía. Como es obvio no lo iban a juzgar por que era policía, así que tome la escopeta que colgaba de la sala, y salí hacer justicia por mi propia cuenta - Y me sonrió con cierto dolor y placer.

- Lo lamento - Fueron las únicas palabras que alcancé a decir y pensé que todos tenemos una sonrisa incompleta que mostramos siempre.

La única manera de acceder a las mujeres era pagarle a uno de los guardias corruptos para que te consiguiera una prostituta. Así me acosté con varias mujeres, hasta que conocí a Jazmín.

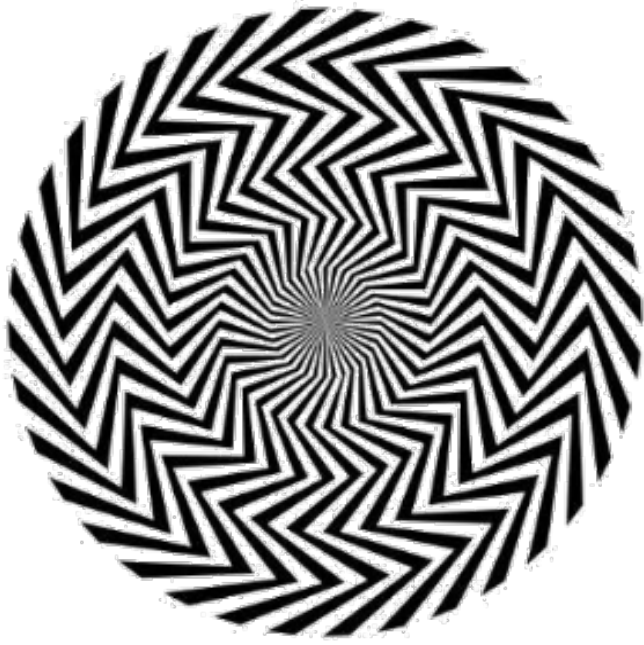
Comenzamos a hablar sobre nosotros y de nuestras vidas. Ella decía que su sueño era ir a vivir a España, yo le prometí que la llevaría apenas saliera de la cárcel.

Le dedique el poema de "Diario de un seductor" de Panero. Y deje de dejarme follar por tipos aquí dentro a cambio de cigarrillos, y comencé a conseguir chocolates para entregárselos cuando la veía.

Omar siempre me aconsejaba de lo que debía de decirle o tratarla. Por que para mi todo se reducía a una manera de practicar el sexo soezmente. Además hablábamos de los li

bros que leíamos recientemente.

Luego de la segunda semana de marzo Jazmín no volvió aparecer. La última vez que la vi le recite un poema de Grave del libro que me había dejado Omar, especialmente hice énfasis en los versos “Tráeme una rosa de tu rosa / para bendecir esta noche y concederme sueño honesto: / sueño no olvido”

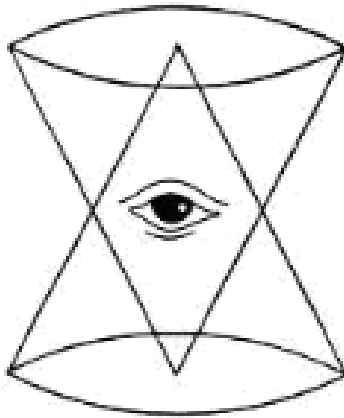


**APPARENTLY OR PURPORTEDLY,
BUT PERHAPS NOT ACTUALLY**

Matthew Fries

“I said then, and I say now, that while there is a lower class, I am in it, and while there is a criminal element I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free.”

-Eugene V. Debs,
addressing the court upon being convicted of violating the
Sedition Act
Sept. 18, 1918



It's funny—you know—that in their trajectories and compositions, everybody seems unable to not get in each other's way.

Misael is thinking this as he stands at the corner of Smith and Walker in downtown Houston, catty-corner to City Hall—traffic being the most acute manifestation of this phenomenon, he figured. Misael was high. He was on the spice or, as the signs posted at gas stations prohibiting its sale referred to it: “synthetic cannabinoids.” He was always more hip to the skinny on the spice. More in tune with the way things tended to be, at both the end and beginning of strings—or so he liked to believe. None of us really got to know him too well because he didn't talk much, but I see right through him.

He watched the people as they drove by or parked, yelled or talked. There is something very telling of the way someone exits their car concerning what they just parked to go do, he thinks. Misael's hands are in his pockets and his headphones are in his ears and everything he owns is in his backpack.

He slouches against the crossing sign at the intersection.

His mother had always told him that he stood too heavy on his feet. But he also thought that maybe he did because she always told him that he did.

While standing at the intersection, contemplating the repercussions of actions and their self-imbued significance, Misael took a step forward and was struck, hard, by a white Ford F-150—the driver never had a chance to do otherwise. Misael's fibula and tibia snapped in half followed by his ribs caving in from the impact of the truck's grille. The skin on the right side of his body scraped against the pavement—his right side, of course, being that Smith is a one-way southbound road and he was facing east—the skin came off like a banana peel right up to his chin, followed by the cranial fracture against the pavement that did him in.

But this time:

While standing at the intersection, contemplating the repercussions of actions and their self-imbued significance, Misael tapped the pedestrian crossing sign and waited for the oncoming traffic to pass before crossing the street ahead of the signal's turning. He only pushed the button so that the light would turn green faster for the cars heading in his direction. He knew that Smith was the busier road, and for whatever failing of infrastructural planning, the light seemed more often green for Walker, so, like he did before anytime he crossed, not bound by traffic signals, he pushed the button to advance the movements of those behind him.

The F-150 carried on, unimpeded.



Meandering through the park, up and down and around

the winding sidewalk, stopping at every post stuck in the ground to yank on it, Osmo eventually came upon the group, his deep brown palms turned up with the spice in their cups.

Downtown loomed just over the brim of a small power plant from where we stood, leaning against the concrete on the side of the freeway on-ramp overhead—the freeway leaned on everything else around us, all around the city, against it, holding it up.

We all stopped what we were doing—mid conversation or otherwise; waiting for time to pass with nothing but the thought of it—how could we not? Here it was. Our way out.

Out, however, isn't quite right. *Through*.

Misael had known that today would be a good day—we all knew that Wednesdays were good days—Wonderful Wednesdays—Misael liked to say to himself. Wednesdays were the days when there was the farmer's market in front of City Hall, across the street from Tranquility Park our old agora—and when the people in slacks and sweaty dress shirts with loose ties—loose because it was lunch time, and because it felt good, and because they were in the city, and because they made money—would come down from the office buildings, down so many elevators, and seep into the newly renovated promenade and fountain the city was trying to show off. It all happened in the shadows of the skyscrapers which would suck them back up like sponges at 1:30PM—the end of lunch.

But it wasn't the office workers that mattered—it was the vendors. The vendors with their dollies and their tents and their need to set them up that afforded an economic opportunity for those of us with eyes to see it. At first we had all tried. Each of us went down to the curbsides. The

“You need help with that?” and the “Here, let me get that”—but we soon learned that didn’t work. It only worked when Mike and Road did it, because they were white. And none of us really liked that that’s how it was, but that’s how it was, and every Wednesday, Mike and Road went down and said the need-any-help’s and carried chafing dishes full of chicken tikka masala and rice and cartons of cold pressed juice. Road even had a regular thing with the egg sellers from Brenham. They would bring back the cash that the unspoken contract allotted them, hand it over to Osmo who knew a guy who worked as a stocker at a headshop in the Heights, and then Osmo brought it to us here, at the park under the overpass, just northeast of downtown, licked by the bayou, ignored by the city, on Wednesday nights, wonderful Wednesday nights.

Misael had spent last night—Tuesday night—at that park just northeast of town. The park ran along and spilled into and down the neglected part of the bicycle path on the bayou, underneath the overpasses, with all the people coming and going overhead. The bayou always smelled, but not enough to put any of us off—I mean, not much could, given our situation—and the trees slumped as if they were shoulders shrugged too many times.

Old Mitzi had her power inverter and car battery out and was charging a buck per minute to plug into it. She sat on a bench towards the edge of the park closest to the bayou, the battery next to her and her left leg swinging back and forth, expectantly. She always kept her head in a wrap, and her eyes on everything else.

Mitzi was old, very old. None of us really knew how she did it, you know, stay alive for so long—she wasn’t really one of us, wasn’t interested in getting high, said she was already in tune with whatever there was to be in tune with. I think the way she did it—you know, stay alive—is because

she's an entrepreneurial son-of-a-gun and if there was a way to flip a profit she was on it. She said she was a devout Buddhist. And I know, we all did, that her spirit animal is a fly rubbing its hands together but she'd tell you that it's a chameleon.

Misael spent two dollars and two minutes using his blow dryer to heat up his pairs of socks to dry the sweat so he could keep wearing them without getting cold feet.

Misael always carried a blow dryer in his backpack, it was a surprisingly useful tool. He thought about charging the tablet that he used for everything in his life, it was his books, his articles, Wikipedia, music, and all the podcasts that he would download in wifi hotspots but figured he could wait until tomorrow and try to nab a little charge from a power outlet downtown—he had enough left to listen to music for at least an hour and a half or so tonight. Misael couldn't sleep without music. It helped him transition.

Misael had a hard time sleeping (a hard time with anything, really) because he was itchin'—itchin' for one more inch of perception. In the whole damned universe, he just wanted one more inch outside of himself. He could only feel so much, see so much, touch so much, taste so much, smell so much—at any given moment—of only one blip of the whole thing. The way he smoked that smoke, anything at all that would change it, really, you could just tell he wanted to see a slip in the cracks, to crawl through it, and hope to make more sense of the place he had squeezed out of—the streets of grey and carefully planned green and fences and steel and cars and bricks and the people inside of them, each different from him, each filling and feeling their own blip and you know what I think is the worst part about him? That he thinks he's the only one trying to push past his blip, the only one trying to expand. And maybe he's right,

about most of them, but that doesn't mean he's the only island where a boat is being built.

I think he found it strange where and what his reality was, where and what and how it happened to be—where and what and how it happened to be for anyone, really. But I do think that there is one chief wisdom that kid got a hold of: he knew better than to ask why it happened to be.



Right before Os delivered the spice today he had overheard *some shit* in the stairwell of the parking garage underneath Tranquility Park.

You see, there's a parking garage underneath Tranquility Park. It serves not only the park but also has entrances to city hall and The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts. No one parked there to go to the park, no one ever used to go there but us. But plenty did park there to get to city hall, including the mayor and his aide who were just returning from a school district financing meeting in Spring Branch when Os overheard them chatting:

“—and, by the way, go ahead and say I sign off on changing the street signs in that neighborhood from ‘Dead End’ to ‘No Outlet’, that councilwoman is right, the average household income is high enough now,” Osmo heard the mayor say and he and his aide started up the staircase, unaware of Osmo standing at its top.

“Mayor Turner, while I realize that the meeting we just attended holds its own merit, we have a much more important item to attend to: self-driving cars are becoming a real phenomenon and we are going to have to address that as a municipality and governing power. Uber is already testing self-driving cars in several cities and it will surely

have—”

“You know I trust you, Ryan, but honestly, what do we care about something that hasn’t happened yet?” said the Mayor, wiping the grease off of his chin from the french fries they had just picked up at the drive-thru, at that one McDonald’s downtown that all the people who held the sticks at the top of the systemic parameters which created the homeless people that they always complained about when they went but they always went, because it was convenient and they could always roll up their windows and turn up their A/C. The Mayor was tall with a bald head and enough wrinkles to seem as if he knew a thing or two about this world but not enough wrinkles to know about the way things are. He was also sweaty—sweat being inescapable in Houston, Texas—it stained his shirt under his jacket which currently hung draped over his arm. Osmo never knew if he felt glad or betrayed that this man was the same color as him.

“But Mayor Tuner, don’t you see? Without the revenue accrued from traffic violations, the city budget would require massive redirection. Just think of all the money we’ll lose from the missed search and seizures. These self-driving cars are designed not to violate the traffic laws, we simply can’t—” But then they were getting to the top of the stairs so Os carried on out the stairwell and into the park.

What he didn’t get to hear was the Mayor say, “Ryan, wipe that ketchup off your pants, you look ridiculous.”



“Self-driving cars, mothafuckers. I said self-driving cars,” Osmo told us exhaling the first hit from the Holy Trinity—Os always got the first hit because he had the connect. The Holy Trinity was the brainchild of Road: a spliff

twisted up of spice, tobacco, and weed. “Who would’ve thought of that shit. Self-driving cars.” The overpass above let out a honk. It was getting dark and the traffic had it all clogged up.

“Shut the fuck up, Os. Stop talking about bullshit that ain’t a concern of ours. You’re just on some shit,” Road said, spitting on the grass.

“What if I am? Don’t mean I didn’t hear what I heard.”

Misael had thought of self-driving cars and he knew that tons of people had—he’d read about them online—but he kept his mouth shut and waited for the spliff to come around. He wasn’t concerned with what any of us had to say—he never was. Always coming and finding out what he owed Mike and Road for the spice, smoking it up, twisting up his little portion, and walking off, down the slope along the green of the bayou.

The deal is this: Mike and Road get the money. Os gets the stuff. Everyone who smokes it had to pay up at the end of the month, scrounging together whatever we could get our hands on. It’s not like they killed us or anything if we couldn’t pay—they just stopped hooking us up—and that was enough incentive to be timely for the lot of us. And now, ever since last month, we *have* to go over to this park just northeast of downtown to get high. Before, we could just smoke it and hang at Tranquility Park, right across from City Hall—sometimes the fountains would be on, sometimes they wouldn’t be—but now there’s always construction being done on the park, on the fountain.

Os says that he thinks that the city has shifted its umbrella of care to include the park across from City Hall because of the recent redevelopment of downtown—and the thing about Osmo and what he thinks is that he’s usual

ly the closest to reality of any of us and the scary part about what he says he thinks is that once the city cares about downtown again, that “this shit—all this shit—all this shit we’ve got goin’ on here: it’s finna be over. Just like that,” and right about now he’s usually turning one hand over the other in front of himself and saying, “and time will go on, just like that,” and he’ll spin his hands, one over the other, “just like that. Nothing but remains.”

As all the ones who didn’t crash at the park started to peeter out, Mike approached Misael, leather jacket crunching as he reached his arms behind his head. “Hey Mis, I was thinkin’ the other day, and you seem like you like to know a lot about shit, always keepin’ your mouth shut. So I figured I’d ask you: Why is the world so cruel? Like, I mean, man, I have seen and still see a lot of shit. Like fucked *up shit*. And it’s got me thinkin’, like, why?”

“Because everyone is tryin’ to survive,” said Misael.

“But if everyone is trying to survive, why is it so hard?”

“Because everyone decided to make it hard for everyone else.”



Mike looked real sideways, he didn’t seem to like that answer, but it set in motion something within him.

We were never hungry until we were asked. Our bellies existing in a state of indeterminacy, fluctuating until observed and thusly endowed with a state—a name. We knew better than to do that, but always, someone would ask. The old magicians knew something about naming that the physicists would have to wait to find out.

so much shit instead of hustlin' and it doesn't matter how much he knows as long as he's hungry. "It's all about puttin' food on the table. Capitalism, man. That's why people get greedy, that's why they want to be rich. And because somebody has to be rich, that's why we've got to be poor." Misael just looked at him and didn't respond and put in his headphones and started walking.

Road spit on the ground and flicked him off.

As far as the lore goes: one time, when Road was presented with a glass filled halfway with water at a halfway house and asked if he saw it as half full or half empty, he picked up the glass and drank it.

Misael did not exactly dislike Road but did not exactly consider him a friend either, more of a necessary implement. Misael was headed towards Notsuoh, where he charged his tablet. That bar never had a problem with him being there—he always bought a beer and sat by an outlet, sometimes playing chess with the owner, Jim—which, unfortunately, is not true of all the bars that in recent years had sprung up around it. Notsuoh has been around through the rises and falls and booms and busts of the developments of downtown, each boom flavored as *the time it's going to really stick*—it has long provided a home for the weirdos, the dejected, and the late night flaneurs regardless of the periodically contrived guises of doing so, all just a marketing trend up and down the sidewalk and the Metro Rail Line.

It was at Notsuoh that Misael would sometimes run into Old Mitzi. That enigma didn't smoke but often drank, usually carrying ketamine in her purse which she would sometimes share if you were lucky. None of us know how she always had it, but she always did. "Dissociatives are the rye-whiskey of psychedelic drugs," she would say.

Whenever their trajectories overlapped at this downtown shore, Misael would sit by her and she would tell him that whenever we finally learn how to download our consciousnesses, the cyberworld will already be full of yogis and monks who have achieved the same state; they used the organic technology, we just happened to have used the digital technology.

And he would imagine himself saying “You ever think about how interesting it is that we, as a species, constantly watch or read either fabricated examples of other members of our species or recountings of their actions, contemporaneous or historical-like, all the time? Think about it—the world already happened—nah, think about it, man—it’s a great story, and we’re now, we’re just watching it—think about it—like, did you know Frank Sinatra’s son was kidnapped? Fuckin’... the first international effort to chart the transit of Venus—the Haitian revolution—the U.S. selling weapons to the Mujahideen to catalyze a built-to-spill war on the Russians while simultaneously funding the fuckin’ Contra war—those are great stories. How are we gonna come up with better material than that? Answer is we can’t—so we just watch it, man.” And, in his mind, Mitzi would say, “You have a point, child—by the way, has anyone ever told you that you stand too heavy on your feet? It’s bad for the soul.”

But really he wouldn’t say anything. Just nod and sip his drink, knowing he would soon run out of anything to sip.



Now, right now, it’s Tuesday again, and it has just started raining, and someone is asking Misael if he’s hungry, if he needed anything. And Misael, half unconscious on the bench, just beginning to feel the drops of rain, and

already not one to speak unless comfortable, just turned away and the altruistic son-of-a-gun said, "Fine, I get it. You like this bullshit. Forget it." But Misael never forgot what people said to him and it hurt him to know that he had negatively impacted someone as they went about their day, their life.

After the man continued walking, his face in his phone, texting away, Misael pulled out a cigarette with its top ripped off and smoked it down to its filter. He put it out under his boot and stuck the butt in his pocket, so as not to litter.

Misael had only ever been alive since the potential for the extermination of the human race had been as well. His was a childhood of canned baked beans, Barnes & Noble floors, a fear of strangers, a fear of God, of waiting for mornings, of drives between estranged parents' apartments on either ends of the beltway, a fear of loneliness, a fear of fear. He used to sleep with his baseball bat under his bed and his mind on his window in case the apartment were to catch fire in his sleep—but only at his mom's, it never crossed his mind at his dad's. He had seen a public service film in his gym class and it stuck with him.

And Misael always remembered, one time, his mother, she said to him, "Now Misito, when someone tells you that this life is hard, you better listen to them, because they know the truth and they know something that can help you know more than they know and then you can know more than anybody else knows, so long as you keep listening to the viejos who tell you that this life is hard.

Another quick word concerning Misael: unbeknownst to him, or any of us, really, his earlier pushing of the walk sign and influencing of the flow of traffic caused the subsequent positioning, in space and time, of a particular

Honda Odyssey, just a few blocks down, to be in the same position in space and time as a particular Toyota Camry that rolled past its red light because of a SnapChat—a collision. It can be argued, had that particular Odyssey (one lane over from our ol' F-150) been subject to the full term of its red light at Smith and Walker (or even, too, if Misael had walked into traffic this time around, to be honest), it would not have come into contact with the Camry at that phenomenal vertex of space and time.

The person who drove the Camry is still an asshole, though, either way.



I'll have you know: We, as a people, invented the parachute before we learned how to fly.

Osmo showed up at the park one day and told us all that. He had been two blocks over at the library, a place he liked to go whenever he got, as he called it, "high as the earth is round," and he liked to pick up a book at random until he learned something new. Misael always looked up whenever Os talked about this practice of his, and I swear these were one of the few times we saw that boy look up, whether from the ground or a book or a screen or a joint.

Road said he didn't care, but he never did, so none of us cared that he didn't.

"This year at Burning Man, I want to build a giant parachute, a parachute big enough to drag you down the playa, like a big ass kite," Osmo said, grinning.

Misael liked the sound of that and the accompanying image in his mind's eye, but doubted its actual execution.

Osmo went to Burning Man every year. He had a guy he

sold spice to—he worked downtown, oil and gas—liked to feel a certain type of way and Os had that way. That guy went to Burning Man every year and thought Osmo was the coolest so he bought him a ticket and flew him down every damn year-- so long as he brought the spice. And he always did.

And Osmo would always say, “It’s all Burning Man, man. All the neighborhoods, all the houses, lined up next to each other—they’re just tents in a theme camp on the playa. It’s all Burning Man, man,” he would say. But the thing is, we rarely saw houses.

Road didn’t believe that Osmo actually went to Burning Man every year, more like he just went once, or maybe, like a couple of times—but Road always carried within him the possibility that, whether it was or was not, absolutely everything regarded as true could not be. He never expected rain from a cloud until he found out if it was smoke.



I’m sure you want to know so I’ll tell you: We call him Road because that’s what he told us to call him because he says that’s where he’s from and where’s going. He’s been here for five years.

All we really knew about Mike was that he wore a leather jacket and road a bicycle. It’s not that we didn’t know much about him because he never talked, rather, he never talked about himself. He never smoked the spice but always went down to the market with Road to earn us the money for it. Os respected him for that. Road thought it was dumb but was glad to have the help.

We’d heard that Mike used to have an alright job—a kid and shit. And that one day he got a DUI in front of his own house—the fucking cop pulled him over as he was park

ing and took him to jail. He lost his job as a teacher and his wife left with the kid but then she got pancreatic cancer and died and the kid lives with his ex-wife's sister and Mike had just pulled an exit ticket. He couldn't kill himself so he decided to stop playing the game. He was just living until he died. Os says that's the kind of thing that has to happen to get a white person on these streets. That, us, we're just born with it. Misael always put on his headphones when Os said shit like that.

But then again we'd also heard that Mike had been a contractor and his wife had been shot over a parking spot dispute, so who knows what's really true? Well, I guess we also know that he has a dead wife.

Months after all of this, though, Mike did actually kill himself. We were on the roof of an elevated parking lot. We were laying on our backs, on the spice, looking at the stars. Osmo was telling us all about how he wants to be a lobbyist. "Them's what make shit happen," he said. And Mike was looking real sideways and none of us really thought much of it and besides, the night was clear and the stars were above us, and the spice felt good. But then Mike stood up and he started yelling:

"I have to eat! I have to have shelter and I have to have help when I am sick! But we have all decided that these things cost money, so they have to be earned!" He wiped his hand over his mouth and shook his head, exhaling. He smacked himself in the temple. "We all just decided to make it harder for each other! What the fuck is that shit?"

Misael gulped. Recognizing his words.

Road leaned up real quick and looked Mike right in the eyes, they had a special bond, probably just because they were white together but maybe because they worked together. He knew. "Come on, now, Mike. Cool down a little bit."

“No!” Mike yelled and he took off his leather jacket and tossed it to the concrete. “ I’m mad. My fucking wife is fucking dead and it doesn’t fucking matter. There is no weight to be levied—I’m just fucking mad. I am mad that no matter what I do, I have to keep myself alive and to keep myself alive I have to play a stupid fucking game that I don’t dig. So go fuck yourself with that shit. I’m not cooling down.”

“C’mon, man,” Osmo started. “Come off with that shit. Look I’ll roll up a fat trinity for you, you never smoke with us, maybe it’ll help get you straight. Maybe that’s your problem in the first place.”

“Fuck off with that, fool. No. You don’t get it. Why did we make it so that the rules are that you have to earn the right to survive? That you’ve got to get skills, to get money, to exchange for food and a place to live. That’s how we say it’s always been. So that’s how it is.”

“Alright now, I feel you, my brother,” Osmo interrupted again, he had read about something like this at the library once, enough to lift what he was putting down. “It is true that this is the first time in our history that it has been possible for us to exist into perpetuity outside of competition with ourselves—”

“—but we won’t do it!” Mike exclaimed. “We won’t do it because it has never been that way and so we all say it never can be that way because we all base the present and the future on the fucking past and the past fucking sucks, so I guess that’s how we’ve all decided the future is going to be too.”

And he did it.

He actually did. He jumped.

And everyone stood and did nothing because they did not know what to do. Except for Os, who just looked back up to the sky and said, "Truly, this life is hard."



But anyway, now it's Tuesday again, almost Wednesday, again, Wonderful Wednesday, again—but not quite. It's nighttime now and it's still raining. Misael is walking down Fannin Street with his hands in his pockets and his headphones in his ears and his raincoat on when the dreaded flash of lights of blue and red and blue and red and blue and red and blue and red and the heart pounding that never didn't happen no matter how many times this did.

The police cruiser sped up until it pulled in front of him and a short Vietnamese cop got out and beckoned with his arm, "Come on, I'm fucking with you, Mis. I confiscated some pot from some kids this morning. Got any spice? I'll match you on one of those spliffs if you've got any spice." He opened up the back door and got back in the front seat, turning off the lights. "Come on, get in. I've had a shitty day."

Officer Tran got a kick out of Misael—the shit Misael would say. Officer Tran was one of the only people Misael would talk to—none of us knew why. Hell, none of us even knew Officer Tran, he was Misael's thing.

"I only have a little bit, man," Misael said. "You know we re-up on Wednesdays, but I'll throw it in."

Officer Tran didn't really like his domestic situation. For that matter, Officer Tran had recently realized that he didn't really like anything about his reality. He found himself at the end of the wax, where the myths fail and the scaffolding underneath begins to poke through the seams and

he could see that the scaffolding was not very sturdy, indeed, and he had begun to think about alternative foundations.

But it was the health insurance—the need to have it, really—that kept him at his job. Officer Tran reached over the computer in the center console of his patrol car and fished out a pack of Zig-Zags and tossed them back to Misael. “Whatever, it’ll work. We’ll just use mostly weed. I’ve got a CD case if you need something to roll on.”

Misael looked up, into the rearview and made eye contact before starting to break up the weed and spice in his lap.

“What’s wrong, man? Come now, I need some of that clever shit you always say. I’ve had a weird day.” The buildings on the streets of midtown—just on the edge of the skyscrapers—whizzed by the car, the lights in the windows catching in the rain drops catching on the windows of the cop car. “Had to break up a fight at a Chili’s,” Tran continued. “Some guy started going at a waitress about how his potatoes were fried not mashed and when he started with the misogynistic shit—why they always got to do the misogynistic shit, Mis?—the bus boy dropped his tub and punched the guy in the throat. Right in it. And I wasn’t mad about it, and nobody really was—except for the guy’s girlfriend. But she threw a fit so I had to arrest the busboy. But get this, as I’m taking the guy out back—in the fucking *rain*, god I hate the fucking rain—I’m sure you do too Mis, always outside and shit—but anyway, so get this: so I’m walking the guy out back and there’s a car in the parking lot with a bunch of teenagers smoking a blunt so I let the busboy go—didn’t have to arrest him after all—and I walk over to their car and I tap on their window and I scare ‘em real good and now we have their weed. Guess it wasn’t such a shitty day after all,” he finished, turn signal blinking as

he made the turn towards the first ward where they had a side street off the bayou they would often park on.

Misael watched the skyline pass through the metal grates he sat behind as a free man, unlike so many before him. "You ever think about the effects of actions? Like inherent repercussions. I'm talkin' 'bout things besides what you perceive them to be, like, like objective—"

The radio flared up but Officer Tran turned it down. "That's great Mis—now you know, Mis, you know, you know I love doin this shit with you, man. I mean, man. Nothing else gets me goin' like this does. But I gotta ask you, man: Do you ever feel that you're like, or, like, getting, like addicted? My wife's been on my case lately but I don't feel like I can stop, it's not like I can't, it's more like I don't—"

"Nah, my friend. I'm no addict, but I'm not quitting anytime soon either. It's a hobby. You, you got it too, you can see that there's something else. That there is something else going on, and you want to see it, know it, taste it. Before drugs I was lost and my vision was small. How you think a jogger would act if told she can't run no more. Wouldn't take it so good, man. Nah, my friend, we are not addicts."

"Damn, Mis. You always got it more pinned down than me." Officer Tran parked along the bayou and lit a cigarette, handing one to Misael who broke off the tip and emptied out some of the tobacco into a little plastic bag.

They smoked another spliff and then Officer Tran pulled out a roxy he picked up in Sugar Land and they smoked it off some foil.

"Hey I got an idea, Mis. How about we go give someone a

scare, huh? Give ‘em something to flip their wig about. Kinda like I did you, but to some motherfucker driving a car.” “I don’t know man,” Misael says.

“Alright, alright Mis, we’ll leave it to fate, or serendipity, that shit you like so much. If some unlucky son of a gun drives by us right now, we’re grabbin ‘em.”

And so they sat, until, by chance, a car drove by, not exactly speeding but over the speed limit enough.

“Oh shit, look there’s one!” Tran yelled, excitedly, “Let’s grab him!”. He pulled out of the ditch, and turned on the lights and siren.

The car didn’t stop, even as they turned a corner. Officer Tran turned on the intercom and told the car to pull-over.

“See that, Mis, you see that! He’s resisting arrest. This is some kind of serious motherfucker right here. I bet you this guy just did some shit or is currently doing some shit What if it’s sex trafficking. I bet you it’s fucking sex trafficking. Here, here. Take my gun. Shoot out his fucking tire. Let’s get this motherfucker.”

Tran tossed Misael his gun and said, “Shoot it, Mis. Fucking shoot the tire!”

Misael stared, wide eyed at the gun in his lap. “Are you fucking insane? I can’t do it! Are you fuckin’ crazy, man? You’re too fucking high!”

“I’m a cop, it’s ok, we’ll get away with it!” Tran said and Misael said he couldn’t fucking do it so Office Tran reached over and grabbed Misael’s hand and put it on the wheel and he grabbed the gun and he leaned out the win-

Misael and Tran both jumped out of the car as soon as they parked it and rushed over to the crashed car. Misael crouched down on his knees and put his hands on the ground, eyes real wide. Officer Tran grabbed the gun back from Misael and pointed it at the driver's side door of the car and yelled, "Alright, dumbass. That's the end of it. Come out with your hands up."

But no one got out of the car.

"Fuck, man, maybe he's hurt! Or dead!" Misael cried out, still crouched on the ground. "Fuck, man."

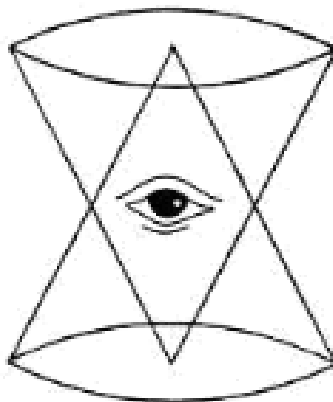
Wide eyed.

Officer Tran leaned his chin up and called out, "I am now assuming you are injured or otherwise incapacitated. I am approaching the car, do not make any sudden movements or I swear to every God that I will shoot you dead!"

Officer Tran lunged over to the driver's side door, gun drawn and yelled out, "This is it, pal!"

It was a self-driving car.

Ain't that some shit?



Tu cuerpo mío

Mauricio Patrón Rivera

No soy más joven que ayer y desde entonces tengo dos cuerpos, el que quiero que sea y el que soy. Vivimos juntos desde pequeños. Nos vestían igual, vemos los mismos programas y siempre hemos ido juntos a la escuela.

Pero hubo una ocasión en que salimos a dar la vuelta, por la calle de Durango, un jueves por la tarde. Íbamos a la casa de nuestro mejor amigo, Luis, pero a la altura de la calle Sonora se soltó un enorme pastor alemán de la mano de su dueña, corrió directo hacia nosotros y cada uno escapó para un lado distinto. El perro alcanzó al que soy y me marcó los dientes en la nalga derecha. El que quiero ser resultó ileso, pero desde entonces se fue distanciando de mí.

Aunque en cada comida seguimos metiendo la cuchara a la boca exactamente al mismo tiempo, yo lo admiro por su escape y él me desprecia por haber sobrevivido.

Desde entonces, me miro al espejo cada día. Los pelos creciendo desordenados por todas partes, la panza indomable, las uñas mordidas y las cicatrices son todas mías. Las bromas frente al espejo, tuyas. El parkour imaginario mientras nos vemos esa parte torneada del brazo es tuyo; la pose con los lentes nuevos, tuyos. Las sonrisas también.

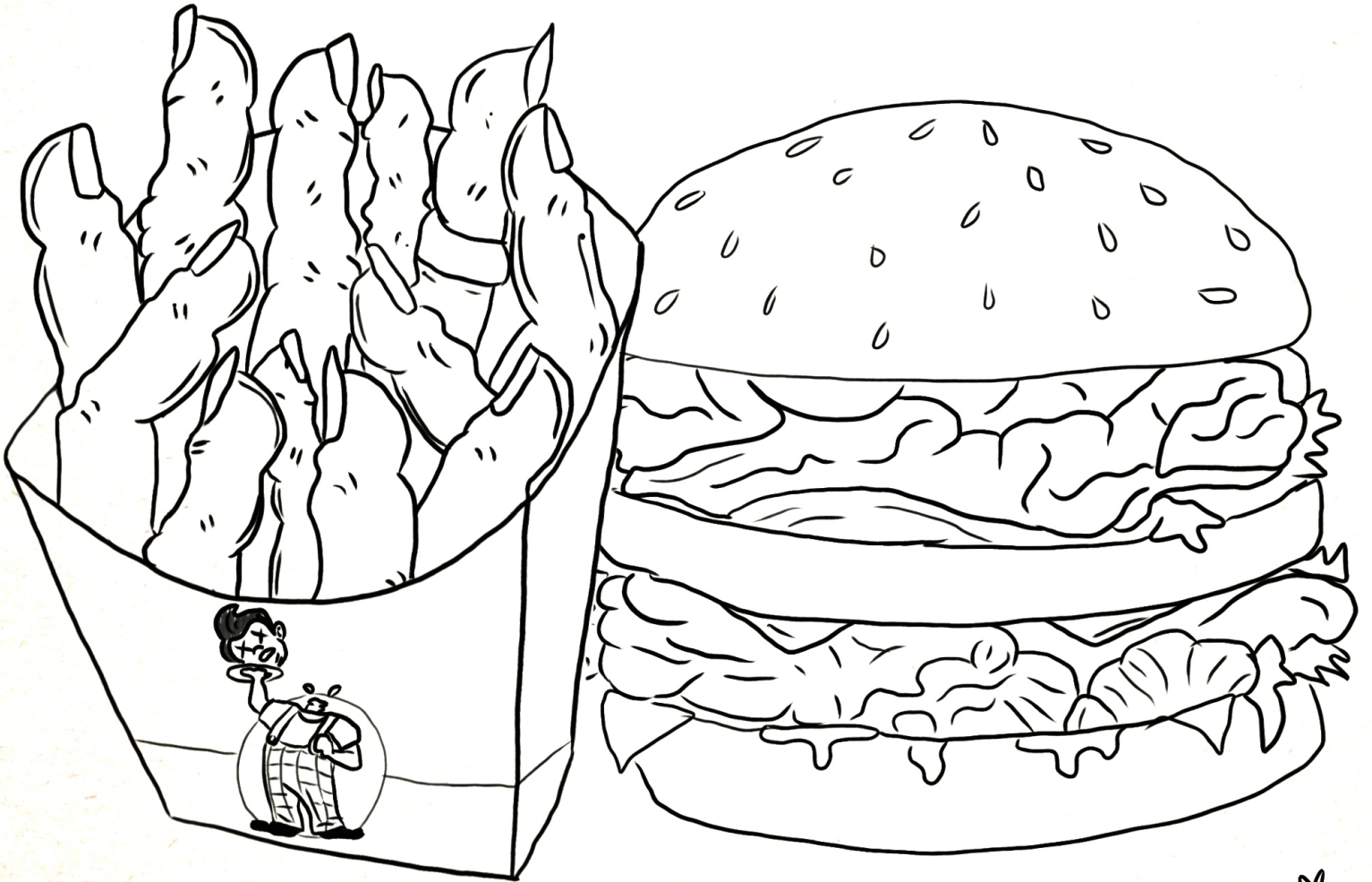
Las mejores caminatas y los hombros alineados en postura de Dandi del Apocalipsis; sí, son tuyas. Cuando nos arrojamos a bailar, la pista y la barra le pertenecen, yo me quedé con la camisa sudada, la cuenta y las filas en el baño.

En la geografía de mi cuerpo me pertenece la dev

astación, y esa protuberancia negra que me preocupa, pero nunca atiendo; tal vez un día estalle y será mi venganza contra el que quiero que sea. Y es que mi admiración por él se había terminado por completo. Pasé toda mi juventud dándole mis mejores recuerdos y teniendo que vivir lo peor del presente con los peores recuerdos. Ese cuerpo traidor que estaba atrapado en mi futuro me empezó a dar ansiedad, hasta que me di cuenta de que él también se estaba haciendo viejo.

Mi venganza no tenía que ser un estallido de sangre, ni una lesión escandalosa, solo la paciencia. El que quiero ser estaba tan ocupado viviendo en el futuro, intentando ser perfecto, que empecé a meter recuerdos de contrabando en su territorio. Le colé la vez que nos dieron una paliza en la escuela, en especial cuando nos sacaron el aire del estómago. La vez que no aguanté y me cagué en los pantalones, la vez que me gritaron “pinche putito” porque solo tenía un amigo y estábamos juntos cada recreo. La vez que nos masturbamos y me metí un dedo en el culo para ver que sentía. La vez que me emborraché y sus labios besaron los de su mejor amigo. El cuerpo que quiero que sea no pareció inmutarse, creo que estaba muy ocupado estudiando y ganando dinero.

Lo empecé a sabotear llenándole el cuerpo de todas mis perversiones y exploraciones, incluso los recuerdos que más cariño les tenía, como la vez que me puse una tanga por primera vez o cuando robé mi primer vestido, porque supe que cuando él los descubriera le estallarían en la cara con la inminencia del no retorno. Así fue como me hice su pasado y él se hizo mi presente. Sé que aún me recuerda cuando se queda largo rato en el espejo y cuando al subir la media por su pierna derecha sus dedos rosan mi cicatriz de perro.



“Zombie Burger Joint”

Rachel McWhirter

Drawing

Lure of Freedom

Tibor Bagocsi

Stripped down to his underwear, Corporal Szabo was scrubbing blood from his hands under running water in the barracks' bathroom. Dark jelled blood was smeared in his hair, around his neck, and on his forehead. Corporal Kovacs was fully dressed in the pickle green military uniform of the People's Republic of Hungary. He was leaning against the faded white-tiled wall and looked on as Szabo tried to cleanse himself. As the blood dissolved, it stained the water with pinkish swirls.

"You can scrub all night, but his blood will be under your nails for days. Doesn't that bother you?" Kovacs asked.

Szabo turned the faucet off. He shook his head and watched the bloody water spiral around the sink before draining into the sewer system. He raised his head and looked into the mirror. "His eyes bother me. I will never forget them."

"His eyes?"

Szabo maintained his gaze at his own reflection. "They were wide open, staring at the sky. They were deep blue, just like my dad's." Szabo sighed. "His face was intact, but it was white like chalk. His body was drained of blood, lying in a gooey dark puddle. His right leg was twisted into an impossible position. When I picked up his body, I realized his leg was detached. I threw him on my shoulder and carried his leg in my hand."

Private Guti came in and took the next sink. He squeezed some toothpaste onto his toothbrush and looked at

Szabo. "Man, I can't believe you did that. Was it worth risking your life for a three-day pass?"

"I didn't do it for the pass," Szabo said.

"Why, then?"

Szabo shrugged. "Somebody had to do it."

"The nightshift guys said they heard him cry and sob in the dark for fifteen minutes before the minefield went quiet. He didn't call for help. He just wailed," Kovacs said.

"I saw dead birds hanging in vineyards on poles to keep the live ones out," Guti said. "They should have left him there. His skeleton could have warned others for decades to stay away from the border."

Szabo looked at Guti. "He was somebody's husband and somebody's son."

"Husband? How would you know that? He was long dead when you got to him," Guti said.

"He had a wedding ring," Szabo replied.

Kovacs nodded. "His wife would have been allowed to leave if he made it. She could have joined him in the West. It's called 'family reunification.' It takes about a year."

"Nobody is going anywhere now," Guti said.

Szabo looked at Guti with disdain.

"What? You think he cared about how many years you'd spend in a labor camp if he got through your sector?" Guti huffed.

Kovacs laughed and tapped Szabo's arm as he said, "Hey, at least you know more about the minefield now. There has to be a pattern. Did you figure it out? You know, like on the chessboard. Did you pay attention when the mine-detecting scout took you out there? He had a minesweeper, didn't he?" Kovacs thought for a moment. "That's what that fool needed to get through there at night. Did he think he could just plug his ears with his fingers and tiptoe through the minefield?"

Guti was gargling and gagged from laughing. He spat the water into the sink. "That's hilarious," Guti said. He plugged his ears and tiptoed out of the bathroom.

Szabo waited until Guti cleared the bathroom and then stared at Kovacs.

"What?" Kovacs grinned.

Szabo placed his right forearm horizontally on Kovacs' throat and pressed him against the wall. He leaned forward and whispered in Kovacs' ear, "You are the brother I never had, but if you mention my name one more time in your stupid theories about how to get out, I'll beat you until you beg me to let you run out into the minefield."

Kovacs wiggled out of Szabo's hold, rubbed his throat and coughed. "Guti knows what I mean. He is all right. He doesn't think you are trying to escape."

"Nobody is all right, you idiot," Szabo hissed. "If someone doesn't report you to save his own ass from labor camp, he will do it to save his family."

"Corporal Szabo!" someone yelled out in the hallway. Szabo stepped out into the hallway and replied, "Yes, Sergeant!" to the night duty sergeant who was standing in the open door of the barracks room that Szabo shared with 12 other roommates.

The sergeant turned toward Szabo and said, "The commander wants to see you tomorrow morning at nine."

The commander of Sector Four of the Hungarian border with Austria was sitting at his desk, reviewing a document. There was a loud knock on his office door. "Enter!" he yelled.

Corporal Szabo entered the office, stopped in front of the commander's desk, and clicked his heels. "Corporal Szabo reporting as directed, Comrade Commander!" he said, holding his salute.

The commander returned the salute and told Szabo to stand at ease. He ran his eyes down on Szabo from head to toe and turned his attention back to the document. He signed it and dated it June 10, 1969. He looked it over and

said, "Less than 13 seconds, Corporal Szabo. Very impressive."

Szabo exhaled a heavy breath, and his shoulders dropped. "Thank you, Comrade Commander."

The commander nodded. "You improved the old company record by more than a second. Here is your reward," he said, extending the document toward Szabo.

Szabo stepped forward and took the document from the commander. He looked at it and smiled. The carbine was the border guards' primary weapon. Breaking it down and reassembling its firing mechanism rapidly was highly valued by the command. Corporal Szabo could now do it in 12.3 seconds.

"Thank you, Comrade Commander," Szabo replied.

"Our socialist homeland needs soldiers like you. Correcting a malfunction might save your life in combat someday and enable you to accomplish your mission," the commander said.

In Hungary, just like in the rest of Communist Eastern Europe, all males had to serve two years in the military. Conscripts were drafted within a year after their 18th birthday and were allowed to go home only a few times per year. Weekend passes were among the most coveted rewards. Soldiers who served as guards on the Austrian border were under constant scrutiny. Protecting the "iron curtain" from western attack was only their secondary duty; their primary focus was to prevent people from escaping "workers' paradise." The temptation of freedom among the guards was a constant threat to the careers of commanders. Guards strictly followed protocols to avoid harsh punishment that was handed to them if one's negligence enabled a peer to escape.

"That's one three-day pass, Corporal Szabo, and here is another one for retrieving from the minefield what was left of that traitor," the commander said, extending his arm again.

"I did it to serve my socialist motherland," Szabo said

as he accepted the document.

“I know you do your duty in any situation. Now,” said the commander and leaned forward, lowering his voice. “Talk to me about your partner. Has Corporal Kovacs made any remarks to you that would make you think he might want to defect to the West?”

“No, Comrade Commander. He did not,” Szabo replied without hesitation.

The commander stared at Corporal Szabo silently. He pursed his lips and said, “I know you form a friendship with your partner out there. It’s only natural when you spend so much time with someone. Don’t worry about him, though. Some people get themselves into trouble. You can’t help that. You must look out for yourself, or he will drag you down too. Do you understand what I mean, Corporal Szabo?”

“I do, Comrade Commander,” Szabo replied.

The commander pulled a cigarette from a dark wooden box on his desk, placed it in his mouth, and lit it. He took a deep drag and slowly exhaled the smoke as he leaned back in his vinyl coated black office chair. He silently observed Szabo. The cigarette was in his right hand, and he slowly tapped his left index finger on the armrest. He could tell Szabo wasn’t a smoker from the way the smoke bothered his eyes. “What does he talk about when you are on guard?” he asked squinting.

Szabo broke eye contact with the commander. He inhaled deeply and held the air. He slowly let out the air. The commander’s continued silence forced him to start again, “Kovacs likes to ponder out loud where the weak and the strong sections of the border are,” Szabo said.

The commander nodded and said, “Talk to me a bit more about that.”

Szabo looked down and gazed at the worn black and white checker-tiled floor. He gulped and looked at the commander. “Go on,” the commander said, raising his eyebrows.

Szabo lowered his eyes to the commander’s gray metal

desk and said, "Yesterday, when that civilian was killed on the minefield, Corporal Kovacs said that man was crazy to try to defect through there. He said that if he himself wanted to get across, he would put a thin L-shaped pipe in his mouth, strap a lead belt around his waist and crawl very slowly across a shallow part of Lake Neusiedl into Austria." Szabo's face was deep red. He stared at his boots and remained silent. His face slowly faded into a pale shade of yellow.

The commander leaned forward again, placing some weight on his elbows over the desk. "You know, Corporal Szabo, there was an incident on this post a few years ago. One of the guards from this station escaped to Austria. The commander was relieved of his command because of that. But you know who ended up worse than that commander did?"

Szabo thought for a moment and then said, "The traitor, of course, because he had to live with himself after having betrayed the socialist cause."

"Right. Of course," The commander said, raising his eyebrows and tipping his head to the right at the same time. "But how about the guard who failed to follow protocol and shoot when his partner set foot in no man's land? That guard spent two years in a labor camp for allowing that traitor to escape without firing his weapon."

"I wouldn't hesitate, Comrade Commander. I would shoot, and I wouldn't miss," said Corporal Szabo with a tone of military discipline.

"I know you wouldn't miss, Comrade Szabo. I appreciate a good soldier when I have one. I have a feeling you'll have more three-day passes coming your way. I give reward when a reward is due." The commander slowly nodded with a patronizing smirk of confidence as he said, "You are dismissed, Comrade Szabo."

Szabo clicked his heels, saluted, and left the commander's office.

Kovacs' brown leather combat boots squeaked as he and Szabo patrolled their sector, walking the well-trodden gray gravel trail. Kovacs was distracted by some workers way down in the valley, hitching a log-laden trailer to a Soviet-made brown tractor. The workers were too far for any sound to reach the guards, but that scene reminded Kovacs of harvest time when tractors like that hauled wheat through his village from government-owned collective farms. He could see his village vividly with white houses, dusty streets, and he could hear those tractors' loud ticking sound. In the white, slowly drifting cumulus cloud above that forest patch, Kovacs saw the face of his girlfriend, Juliska, the beautiful brunette with hazel eyes who was yearning for the end of his military service as much as he was.

Szabo was looking the other way, gazing at the coils of concertina wire and the skull-over-crossbones signs posted every fifty feet, warning of the minefield. He watched swallows silently swoop down and gracefully glide over the deadly ground and wondered where those birds go before the weather gets cold and harsh in Hungary. Was it Italy, Greece, or somewhere else?

"What's the matter? What are you thinking about?" Kovacs asked.

"Your boots. They will rub your feet raw," Szabo said.

"Nah. They are not as bad as they sound. I have to break them in sometime. Tomorrow I'll wear my old ones," Kovacs replied and raised his head toward Austria. "The Austrian guards, I bet they get comfortable boots. I heard they have to serve only nine months, and they get paid too. They can also go home on the weekends. Every weekend. If they have duty on the weekend, they get compensated during the week."

Szabo looked toward Austria and said, "You shouldn't believe every rumor you hear. I haven't met anyone who talked to an Austrian guard."

Kovacs shrugged. "Maybe it's not all true, but I know

somebody whose uncle defected though. He lives in Canada now. He works in a factory and drives a Mercedes. He says farmers there have their own farms and drive tractors that belong to them.”

Szabo nodded and turned toward the minefield. “You know, the guy whose corpse I retrieved from the minefield the other day, believed those things. I don’t know how he ended up on the minefield. Maybe he was lost, or someone gave him false information. What I’m trying to tell you is that he decided what he wanted and quietly went after it. It cost him his life. I understand that. You, I don’t get. You keep talking about it, but you stay.”

“I don’t want to defect,” Kovacs said, turning red.

“Stop talking about it then, Kovacs. Somebody will report you, and you’ll be punished for something you haven’t done. Keep those thoughts to yourself. Talk about something else.”

A light fog lingered over the border. Looking down from the high ground on the Hungarian side, no man’s land looked like a frozen, snow-covered river. The morning sun was rising and gaining strength, beating down on the fog and showering the lush, green Austrian hillside with its golden rays. The Hungarian side was darker, still in the shade. The ridgeline looked bleak and barren. It was cleared of all vegetation that could have served as concealment for traitors who might approach the border with the capitalist West.

“I’ve got a problem,” Kovacs said, stopping in front of the outhouse. He slung his weapon from his shoulder and held it out toward Szabo.

“Hot cocoa,” Szabo smirked.

Kovacs was lactose intolerant, and the outhouse was a routine stop on days when he had hot cocoa for breakfast. “How could I resist a breakfast like that? Hot cocoa with

freshly baked crusty croissants. That's the best treat out here." Kovacs was rocking his body on his crossed legs.

"Take my weapon before I shit myself!"

"Let me use the outhouse first. You'll stink it up," Szabo said, refusing the weapon.

"Don't mess with me!" Kovacs yelled.

"Hurry up," Szabo smiled, taking the weapon from his partner because protocol didn't allow weapons in the outhouse.

"Sector clear?" Kovacs called out from the outhouse.

"Sector clear," Szabo replied as he raised his binoculars to his eyes and checked on the guard in the tower to the right and then did the same with the tower to the left. The towers were three hundred yards apart. They were in enclaves halfway into the minefield. The towers gave an enhanced view to the guards staffing them, but more importantly, their elevation and position set in the minefield extended the "kill zone" as the guards weren't allowed to fire into Austria.

"Sector clear?" Kovacs called out from the outhouse.

"Sector clear," Szabo replied. He lowered his binoculars and walked down the slope toward the concertina wire that separated Hungary from no man's land. He raised the binoculars to his eyes again and looked at the Austrian guards. He swept his gaze over the golden rolling wheat fields in Austria and then brought his view back over the grassy field that separated the two countries. That area still had a few small patches of white fog lingering in a few places. He raised his binoculars and watched an eagle soar in the azure blue Austrian sky.

"Sector clear?" Kovacs yelled from the outhouse. There was silence. "Goddamn, Szabo! Sector clear?" he repeated much louder. There was no reply. "Sector clear?" He screamed in panic and flung the door open with a signal flare in his hand.

Szabo calmly turned around and said, "What's wrong?"

"Goddamn it, Szabo! I kept screaming for you!" Kovacs

yelled.

Szabo looked at the red flare in Kovacs' hand, grinned and said, "Was the outhouse out of paper?"

"Don't fuck around with me, Szabo! You broke protocol!"

"I thought there was some movement in the sector," Szabo calmly shrugged and handed Kovacs his weapon back.

Kovacs put the red flare back into his belt pouch. "I almost set this off," he sighed, regaining his composure.

"Follow protocol, and you can't go wrong," Szabo replied.

"Damn right, I'm following protocol," Kovacs said as he started a function check on his weapon. He dropped the magazine and inspected the ammunition. Then he pulled the charging handle back, rode the bolt forward, rotated the lever from "fire" to "safe," and slammed the magazine back into the weapon well. "Function check complete. Weapon functional," Kovacs said.

"Always follow protocol," Szabo nodded. "And you won't get in trouble."

"Says the guy who just broke protocol," Kovacs sulked.

"You would still be sitting in there if I didn't," Szabo laughed, tipping his head toward the outhouse.

"Keep it up, and you'll find yourself in labor camp,"

Kovacs said as he slung his weapon over his shoulder.

He finished tucking in his shirt deep in thought and asked, "Shooting a stranger is not hard, but would you shoot a friend without thinking of the good times you had?"

Szabo looked Kovacs in the eye and calmly replied, "Yes. I would aim center mass. In your case, I would aim for your head to spare you from labor camp."

"Very comforting. You are a true friend."

"You might as well try the minefield if I'm here. In that case, I might watch you for a while before I shoot." Szabo laughed. "How about you? Would you hesitate to shoot a friend?"

Kovacs turned his head toward Austria and said, "Ev-

erybody I care about is a trustworthy citizen. Besides, even if they wanted to get out, they would be smart enough not to try this border. This is suicide. No civilian could reach this point without being detected. Even if someone made it here and could get past us, he would have to know where the breaks in the minefield are. He would be blown to pieces otherwise.”

“Well, you made it this far. You can push past that roll of concertina wire and then it’s an eighty-yard dash to the red marker. Six yards to the left from the gray markers is your mine-free path. When you pass the red marker, no one is allowed to shoot. Stefan and Hans on the Austrian side will be your welcoming committee from there.

“Six yards?” Kovacs said, looking back at the gray marker over his shoulder. “You did learn something retrieving that corpse.”

“I figured that out a long time ago. I only verified it when I retrieved that dead man. Go! You are wasting time,” Szabo said.

“Me? What are you talking about?” Kovacs laughed.

“We are standing on the perfect spot. The border slightly curves here and the guard towers are at such an angle that the guards would have to turn in their seat to look back here. They won’t look until the flare goes up,” said Szabo with a serious face. “You need 17 seconds to reach the marker in combat boots. With the adrenalin pumping, you’ll be there in 15.

“I was born in this land, and I will die in this land,” Kovacs replied.

“You have been blabbing about ways to make it across the border so much that nobody believes you when you say that.”

“Just because I talk about ways to get across, it doesn’t mean I want to defect. It’s my job to look for weaknesses in the border, and...and...and it helps me to pass the time.”

“You talk too much. You should have kept those thoughts

inside your head.”

“I can’t help it. I was born in the year of the rat. I talk a lot, and I think out loud,” Kovacs said. He was pale, and his lips quivered as he asked, “Did somebody report me?”

“Somebody? We live in a depraved, destitute land. Those birds on the wire over there have ears. You keep chirping, and they’ll do you in for a handful of seeds.” Szabo turned toward Austria. “Look! It’s so close. That’s freedom over there. One moment you are here, and the next you are free. It takes fifteen seconds, and you can say whatever you want for the rest of your life. Nobody will put you in prison for thinking out loud. Thinking is not a crime over there.”

“Am I in trouble? Just tell me,” Kovacs stammered.

“Not if you start running. I’m giving you an offer few people would refuse in this land. Do it now. This is your last chance. Horvath is in the south tower. He is reading a book, just like he always does in the barracks. Guti is in the north tower. He is daydreaming about his girlfriend. That’s all he ever does. They are out of this world until the shrill of the flare brings them back. Do it. Do it now. I’ll be right behind you.”

“Stop your nonsense, or I’ll have to file a report,” Kovacs said.

Szabo shook his head and pulled a pair of pliers from his pocket. He calmly turned around. There were three metallic snapping sounds. The stretched out, four-foot high concertina wire suddenly bounced to the left and then coiled on the ground in a limp pile like a broken accordion.

“Are you out of your mind?” Kovacs gasped, looking around in disbelief.

“That green grass is your welcome mat,” Szabo gestured toward no man’s land.

“You are crazy. I ‘m not going. My brother would lose his position at the coal mine. I would never see Julis-

ka again. It would break her heart,” Kovacs murmured with bulging eyes.

“You are a great guy, Kovacs, but there are times when you have to think of yourself before anybody else. Go. Run. Run as if you were Cinderella and the clock was about to strike midnight. Run, you fool! That gap to a better future is about to close, and it will never open again.”

“No. I’m not going, and I won’t let you go either. You did this to yourself, you idiot.”

The two soldiers stared at each other. Neither one moved. They both held their weapon slings with their right hands by their right shoulders. Szabo was calm. He was stronger, more agile, and much better with weapons than Kovacs. Kovacs was aware of that. His knuckles were white over the weapon’s sling. Beads of sweat were forming on his brow, and his knees were trembling.

Szabo smiled at his partner and turned around. He squatted down and placed the pliers on the concrete base of the steel console that used to hold the now cut concertina wire in place. As he stood up, Szabo heard the metallic scraping sound of the bolt traveling back as Kovacs charged his weapon. There was a loud snap as the bolt traveled forward, feeding a bullet into the chamber. Szabo stopped moving. He was facing away from Kovacs.

“Slowly take your weapon off your shoulder and drop it on the ground,” Kovacs said.

Szabo casually took his weapon from his shoulder and tossed it into no man’s land. “Throw away yours. You’ll run faster without your weapon. We’ll run together,” Szabo said.

“I’m sorry, Szabo. There is no chance for that, and there is no going back. You should have asked me before you cut that wire. There is nothing I can do now. You’re my friend, but I will shoot if you take one step.”

“I’m counting on that. Just aim for my head.” Szabo sighed. He nodded and said, “I will miss you, partner. Do you know the protocol for this situation?”

“I will shoot until you are immobilized, dead, or my weapon is out of ammunition. Then, I will fire the signal flare,” Kovacs replied.

“That sounds right,” Szabo replied, still facing away, “but your weapon is still on safe.”

There was a click as Kovacs flicked the lever from safe to fire.

“Not anymore. I will shoot if your foot touches no man’s land. I’m not going to labor camp.”

“We both will remember this moment for the rest of our lives,” Szabo said and took a step forward into no man’s land.

There was a thud as Kovacs’ weapon misfired. He quickly pulled the bolt back and released it again. Szabo stopped, turned his head back, and looked at the ejected bullet intact on the ground by Kovacs’ feet where the spent shell should have been. He glanced at the south tower and then at the north one. “Keep firing!” he reminded Kovacs and then took off running toward Austria to the rhythm of thuds alternating with the sound of ejecting duds. He ran with the breath of freedom on his skin, with just a shirt on his back and nothing in his pockets, except Kovacs’ weapon’s firing pin.

THE CLOUD

Pat Morgan

He tied his boat off and started to climb the cliffs. He knew that no one had lived to tell what was behind the cloud, but still he climbed. From his small boat the cliffs had looked smooth and slick but as he rose he realized that, in fact, the surface was rugged and rutted providing perfect foot holds almost like rock climbing.

Although, he only wore cut-offs, hiking boots, and an old tee-shirt with "Ladies Man" on the front he felt hot and sticky with sweat but as he was enfolded in the first mist of the cloud he felt the coolness drifting over him and was soon comfortable and at the top.

He stumbled around the rim for a moment or two then plunged into the colorless mist breaking through and finding himself in a radiant garden. The trees were of a green he had never seen before and the flowers, set off in between blue stone paths, were full and blooming brilliantly. Wafts of jasmine, gardenia, and roses assaulted his sense of smell and when he turned, that's when he saw it.

It was a bird. Not quite a parrot, not quite a nightingale or flamingo but had a bill like a duck and fluffy yellow feathers lying flat and smooth and except for the color, similar to a swan.

"Hello," it said. "My name is Marvin. Enjoy your climb, John?"

There was no way he could speak.

“Never you mind,” Marvin went on. “Follow me and I’ll introduce you to the others.”

He followed and saw at the other end of the garden there was a huge party in progress. A great hulk of a man with a dark chin beard was grilling hot dogs, another spewing beer into iced mugs. A tall, thin, man at a piano was playing and singing, “What A Swell Party This Is.” Women were setting folding tables with flowered bowls of salads and fruit. There were garish iced cakes and nut-filled breads. I could see a young boy filling waffle cones from an ice-cream machine and there were people everywhere, milling, talking, and laughing.

“Marvin, what the hell is this?” he asked.

“Oh, just the regular gang. Writers, painters, poets, sculptors, a few graffiti artists, a playwright or two, all doing their thing. You see, there are no artistic restrictions here. No critics, galleries, or producers. No publishers, or censorship, and best of all no competition.”

“That’s incredible. How is this possible?” he asked.

“Oh, everyone just works together. Critiquing, suggesting, or just making themselves available to help each other. Somehow it all works.”

“But, what about ego, Marvin? My God, they should be killing each other.”

“Oh, heavens, everyone here let go of that a long time ago.”

They had reached the party area.

“Is this some sort of artist’s colony?” he asked.

“Could be,” Marvin answered. “Never thought about it much.”

Marvin’s attention was suddenly diverted.

“Oh, I see Truman and Tennessee over there by the fountain. Come along, I’ll introduce you and then we’ll get a hot dog. I didn’t catch your last name, John?”

“Steinbeck, John Steinbeck.”

“Well” said Marvin. “Welcome John, we’ve been expecting you.”

And then he knew why no one had ever returned to tell what was behind the cloud. They simply didn’t want to and he was home.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Matthew Fries is a multimedia artist primarily working with electronics to make interactive light and sound sculptures with his collaborative partner Julian Luna under the collective moniker "Moon Papas". Matt Fries graduated from the University of Houston in 2017 with a degree in Creative Writing with a concentration in fiction after many years of leaving and returning to teach himself electronics, engineering, and to operate an unlicensed music venue from his home. His impetus, both for his artwork and writing, is to encourage the viewer/reader to reconsider the parameters which they have determined to determine their reality, whether under their own accord or under the surreptitious inculcation by the powers that be, because, he believes, everything is reprogrammable and perception, being perpetually malleable, is best sculpted by its own wielder.

Matthew Lovitt is a drug addict recovering in Austin, Texas. His work can be found at Soft Cartel and ExPat Press. Writing keeps him in the flesh.

Pat Morgan came out of the glossies and started writing plays in 1986. After over thirty productions nationwide she's still at it. Pat has won the Texas Women's Repertory Project Award, was a finalist in the Texas Playwright's Festival, is a HAA grant recipient, won "best play" at the Camino Real Theatre's Show-Off Competition in California and was presented at First Stage. Her full-length CAPOTE TONIGHT opened in Houston at Express Theatre in May, 2007, THE LAST POSSE opened at the Lodestar Theater, NYC, in April, 2007, and her 10 minute play, SEX GAMES, won the Scriptwriters/Houston 2007 first prize. She is a seven time 10x10 winner. Pat's first novel, ANGEL TRACKS, was published in 2012. She is produced and published in both adult and children's plays, is a proud member of the Dramatist Guild

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Mauricio Patrón Rivera (México City, 1984) is an artist of the text and its relationship with the community. His work travels through decolonial feminism, necropolitics, human rights, and journalism. The outputs of his work are short stories, essays, curatorial projects, academic research, and collaborative processes. He is currently studying a Ph.D. in Creative Writing in Spanish at the University of Houston. His writing explores the outsiders' corporalities. You can read him (in Spanish) at poluxre.tumblr.com

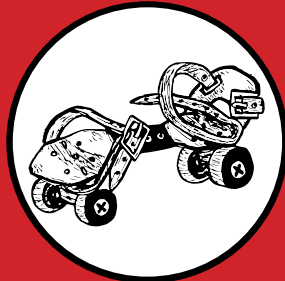
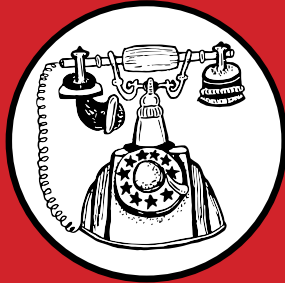
Antony Valverde is a 27 years old aspiring writer. He is a student of philosophy and literature in Universidad Nacional of Costa Rica. A big fan of movies, the beat generation, Roberto Bolaño and grunge music. Has published poems for the Costa Rican publishing house Fruit Salad Shaker ED. He is a faithful believer that David Foster Wallace is our closest messiah and that Felipe Granados is more cursed than Rimbaud.

Art

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Aleksandra Korinnaja is a Sydney based digital artist. Her body of work is comprised of concept art pieces of supernatural and esoteric themes and imagery. Through the application of fine art techniques, Korinnaja seeks to marry the organic look of traditional art with the decorative nature of digital illustration. "One Rainy Night" is an environment piece inspired by Japanese folklore and Serge Lutens' photography. The composition entails a night on which spirits roam freely among the empty streets, with some travelling from far and wide to meet at a shrine and others looking for an opportunity to cause havoc.

Rachel McWhirter graduated from SCAD with a BA in Digital Media. She is a queer artist that enjoys local food & coffee, volunteering, street art, urban hiking, and general adventuring. She currently resides and creates in Montrose, HTX. You can reach her through Insta: [rachel_mcwhirter](https://www.instagram.com/rachel_mcwhirter)



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