



Vaughan Street Doubles

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A Curious Kind of Scent
Drew Nicks

Infinite blackness crashes over me in waves. Each wave comes so quickly. I struggle to catch my breath. I'm dying. My eyes can see nothing through the thrashing obsidian sea. But, I can hear her voice calling out to me. She sounds so weak and frightened. I try to move forward but my feet seem anchored. I scream and feel the putrid blackness slither down my throat. I can still hear her voice, though my senses begin to fail. She always calls the same thing.

"Clifford! Come to me!"

The sound of the mail slot opening startled Clifford Reid from the thoroughly worn sofa. His leg hit the coffee table on his descent. He winced with pain, but only for a moment. Then he lay motionless on the floor. The pain meant nothing to him. Nothing truly mattered anymore.

After wallowing in self-pity for some time, he stood and wiped his brow. He glanced over to the newly accumulated mail. The pile was growing to massive proportions. He sighed, walked to the pile, and stooped.

Bills, past due. Letters from the University. Garbage all.

He angrily wondered why the world couldn't leave him be. Leave him alone with his misery and guilt. Few would understand.

Stomping off to the kitchen, Clifford was determined to brew a pot of coffee. Upon entering the kitchen he did not notice the fetid odor filling the tiled room. Dishes were piled shoulder high in the sink. Maggots writhed along greasy plates, and flies buzzed overhead. He paid no mind as he reached for the badly stained pot. While holding it under the faucet, a maggot fell from its perch and into the swirling water. It was soon joined by the caked on remnants of previous rounds of coffee. He continued filling without batting an eye.

As he set the pot in the filth layered maker, a thought crossed his mind. The plants. Leaving the kitchen, he approached the warped brown door to the basement. Humidity was thick in the air. He could almost taste it. The scent, which so tenderly licked at the nostrils, was of an earthy variety. He smiled and placed his hand on the knob. It rattled as he twisted it, dislodging two screws that tumbled to the hardwood. Their melodious tinkle went unnoticed by Clifford, whose mind was dead set on the children growing in the basement.

While Clifford descended, the scent of lush greenery filled the air. The basement was much larger than the house's floor plan would indicate. The soft hum of ultra-violet lights and the slow drip of water were the only sounds that could be heard. He stepped close to the hydroponic set-up and was dismayed. The long and arduous work proved to be all for naught. The withered, brown leaves of *Atropa belladonna* brought a look of devastation to his face.

Moving further along, he saw the malignancy of death had not limited itself to the deadly nightshade. The *Rafflesia arnoldii* that he had been carefully monitoring, lay limp. Its powerful, colorful petals had wilted. They now resembled brown gelatin. Clifford smashed his fist down on its pulpy remains. The foul smelling jelly spurted on the surrounding plants and lamps. It dripped in putrid dollops down his fingers.

Dejected, he turned back to the stairs and ascended, shutting all the lights off upon reaching the top. Fuck it, they can all die.

Returning to the kitchen, he took the coffee pot from the maker. He looked about the stacks of greasy dishes searching for a mug. The "World's Best Teacher" mug caught his eye. He grabbed it and filled its blackened interior. Even as he took the first mouthful he remained blissfully ignorant of the wriggling maggot that slithered down his esophagus. He smiled as a surge of energy coursed through his body.

The caffeine made his perception sharper if only to realize the sheltered existence he'd been living. He looked to the gray drapes covering all the windows within sight. They had not always been gray. When Celia was there, the drapes were always of a bright color. Purple in the living room. Green in the foyer. Yellow in the kitchen. A cornucopia of colors. Those had been happy days. Days which allowed Clifford to smile. Those days were but frayed memories. When Celia died, Clifford had torn down all the colors in their home. Now, the once black drapes had faded to their present gray.

A knock at the front door roused Clifford from his reminiscences. He glanced around the room, thinking it may have come from the basement or, worse, the ceiling. The knock came again and he knew that it did not originate in the house. The clink of the mail slot opening piqued his interest.

"Clifford?" called the male voice at the slot.

Cautiously, Clifford crept to the door. He slinked along the wall almost as though he were preparing for the worst. In short order, it became apparent that it was the worst.

"Clifford, will you come here?" the now too familiar tone called. "We've been worried about you in the department."

Yes, I know that voice. The man that called to him was that of Dr. Nigel Kelly, head of the Botany Department of the University. A well respected and cultured professional that Clifford had never liked. Ha, he thought, worried now? After all these years?

"Clifford!" called Nigel's grating voice again. "I must speak with you."

Feeling especially malicious, Clifford knelt down to the mail slot, pushing aside the mountains of letters.

"Yes, Nigel. What is it?"

Though he could only see Dr. Kelly's knees he noticed a certain swoon in his step. The doctor backed away from the door.

"My god Clifford, I'm glad you answered!" said Nigel. "We were beginning to worry about your well being! Haven't you received the letters? Your preliminary work has given us a grant."

Silence.

"Isn't that exciting?" he continued. "Your marvelous work will lead our University to national recognition! Aren't you enthusiastic in the slightest?"

Clifford forced a smile on his face that was quick to diminish. These people want me to be thrilled about them piggybacking off my work? He leaned close to the slot and exhaled. He hoped Nigel could smell his foul coffee breath.

"That's exciting, Nigel, but what does that have to do with me?"

Though he could not see his face, Clifford knew the doctor was glancing about with wide eyes and quivering in his shoes. He wouldn't be here without me. That's why he thinks a service call is necessary. Just like the gasman.

"What does it have to do with you? Well everything, my good man! Without you, we'd still be in our stagnant period. The students we get, while bright, are sorely lacking without your guidance."

Clifford laughed. Laughed directly into the mail slot.

"So that's why you're here. You want me back to guide these failures to a competent life?"

Nigel floundered.

"Not at all, my good man. We were simply worried about you and thought you may be interested to know what your research has created."

Clifford could smell his sweat and awkward motions. An unfortunate gift the plants had bestowed upon him.

"That's marvelous, Nigel. Now there are two things I want you to do for me..."

Dr. Kelly knelt and placed his ear close to the mail slot. A certain greediness crossed his face.

"Yes? And that is?"

Clifford moved close, to be sure the doctor would hear it.

“Fuck off and go away!”

With that, Clifford slammed the mail slot shut and returned to his inner sanctum. Though the Nigel called to him, he did not hear a word of it. His mind had turned back to his own dark thoughts. He had important work to do.

It washes over me. In this brightness, I try to weave between the purples and the greens. The sky is awash in a sheen of yellow. Not the yellow of a bright summer day, more the yellow of the sickened stain of a urinal. It appears diseased. Something about its shade makes me think of pus. Of gangrene. Of bruises. I push forward to the glass house. It grows nearer but it feels like I'll never reach it. She swims overhead. Her sea of blackness, her kingdom. My sea of silence, my future. I reach above my head to touch her. She skitters away from my grasp. Will things ever be the same?

Standing before the greenhouse, Clifford maintained hope. Here, his personal kingdom must bear fruit. He hesitated before twisting the knob. If this has failed, what have I to live for? He pushed the door open and the smell of death overtook him. He closed his aching eyes as he entered. Not now, not right now. The smell of decaying plant matter became much stronger in the tightly packed greenhouse. Clifford refused to open his eyes. He knew his *Conium maculatum* and *Euphorbia pulcherrima* had perished. There was no getting around it. The sickly sweet mix of deadly hemlock interweaved with the smell of Christmas. Oh how he'd once loved Christmas! Christmas with Celia. Christmas long faded...

He strode to the back of the greenhouse where his prize possession lay. There he opened his eyes. Celia grew strong. She had grown to almost eight feet. Her leathery membranous leaves stretched forth, as if to say, lover, come close to me...

Clifford felt the erection in his pants, gazing upon the beauty that was Celia. Has it been that long? The Titan arum had grown to unprecedented proportions. Its long armed leaves stretched out over the lesser plants. It's learning to take. He stepped close to her and lightly touched her leaves. Celia quivered beneath his touch. He smiled. Good. He stepped back and inhaled deeply. The smell of her was so precious. It brought back nothing but fond memories. Memories of strolling through the streets. Memories of intimacy. Memories of a love that would never die.

Clifford began to weep. He brought his hands close to his face. It did nothing to halt his thoughts. The smell of carrion should have been predominant but instead Clifford could smell Celia again. That perfume had always driven him wild. When she wore it, he could barely contain his lust. He would run his hands over her body whenever she wore that perfume. She would playfully push his hands away and he, in turn, would always bring them back.

Clifford could hold back his emotions no longer. His knees became weak. His eyes poured tears. He could not stand being in her presence. It only brought anger and sorrow to his already weakened mind. Turning away, he headed towards the door, laying his eyes on the decaying poinsettias and hemlock. Streams of mucus and tears coalesced midway down his face. When he began to walk he heard a sound from behind. To his ears, it sounded like peas being separated from a pod. He turned, hesitantly, back to Celia. The top of the pod had begun to peel away. The brown hair, Clifford recognized. He turned back to the door and ran out of the greenhouse.

In time, she'll be ready. In time...

A floating sabot cloud
Dian Parrotta

a weighty sabot like a clunky inside that cloud a floating block of wood or a crusty ciabatta like a wooden shoe, a clog a wind driven sky-cloud rests spirits and charms the mind while watching it roll in then collapsing on the glide like folklore klompendansen in the Netherlands in the streets with the klompen dancers with high kicks in wooden clogs dance in soles made from ash wood, tapping toes with moving ankles and heels on wood in the streets at Tulip Time Festival but now in the sky outside my window that moving sky festival thinking of quaint villages, windmills flowers, fish and cheese, runaway rosters and brooding hens with men in boats fishing those carp water lakes

A Perfect Stranger
Linda Crate

"hey, queer girl"
you said;
but as soon as you
launched those words of war
my helpfulness toward you
and my willingness to help faded away
like dying stars—
queer girl has become
my anthem
i am a queen and i won't be reduced
to tears or anger because of someone
who refuses to understand,
you may think yourself funny;
but i am laughing at you not with you
you've made yourself a joke—
if you cannot play nicely
you will never know the magic of
a rainbow heart nor all the joy they can bring;
& quite honestly i don't think you deserve it
considering you decided to be condescending and rude
to a perfect stranger.

Arrest Warrant
R. Gerry Fabian

You lock the bars
somewhere deep inside
and refuse any visitors.
You ignore the bail bond
of immediate family
and deny
any sympathy parole.
Several attempts
to reopen the case
lie crumpled
in your psyche cell.
No one is sure
of the exact charge.

But whatever
the secret crime -
this slow death
is cruel and unusual.

Camilla
Robert Beveridge

Goodbye
she whispered
in a hundred
different dreams

it seemed inevitable
that she'd switch
to thick red wine
before the first time
she took me to bed

with my hands bound
to her wrists
and my eyes
downcast

Charity
Gale Acuff

I don't want to die and go to Hell, I
go to church and Sunday School and never
miss and I'm ten years old and pray
at least once a day and read or try to
my Bible and try like the Devil not
to sin and I keep the Ten Commandments,
I've never committed adultery,
I've never coveted my neighbor's wife,
and I have no other gods before me,
before God that is, including Santa

and Batman and the Mighty Thor and I
think I've gotten saved enough times to count
against my trespasses but sometimes I
think that being a good boy's not enough,
I need to sacrifice more, I want to
be crucified you might say, I want to
snatch a baby out of traffic and give
my life even if I have to take it
over to the sidewalk and then run back
into the street again. It's how you give.

Cold Turkey
Anna Sanderson

When Jess was coming down, her body shivered with imaginary cold. She felt queasy, threw up, felt sick again. She told me there were tiny drummers playing in her head. My withdrawal's different, but the longing and the desperation are there, hands too often trembling above the call button on my phone, the same way hers did when faced with those small plastic packages of white powder she found so hard to resist. I remember Jess once told me I'd never understand what it was like going cold turkey. Now, learning to live without her, I only wish she'd been right.

Heaven Knows
Ada Pelonia

"How long have you been here?" Beck asked the girl who sat beside him out of impulse and widened his eyes when he saw the girl raise her eyebrow at him.

"Sorry," he said and looked at the floor. The girl chuckled. She took out her phone – probably looked at the date he thought – and said, "Three weeks and counting." Beck nodded as he pursed his lips, restraining himself from asking any more question.

"How 'bout you?" the girl asked. Beck excitedly took both his hands outside the pockets of his hospital gown and frowned, stopping.

"I don't really count."

Beck looked at the window where stars twinkled brightly in the sky. The bench had always been his favorite since it was placed in a corridor not many know of and what he could see from the window adjacent to it was picturesque – far from the gloom the hospital had always brought him.

"I'm guessing you've been here longer than me."

He was cut off from thinking when the girl talked again. This was the longest conversation he had with a stranger, he thought.

"Probably, yeah."

The girl tapped the cast on her arm, creating beats as if she were making rhythmic sound that had a beautiful harmony before stopping to take a deep breath.

"What happened?" Beck tilted his head, looking at the cast.

"Got out of the concert hall after a short audition, enjoyed some booze with the band, drove drunk, and hit a trunk of a tree."

"Shit."

The girl looked at him and laughed.

"Yeah, shit. It was the worst. I thought I was going to die." She held her cast again and looked at the ceiling. Beck saw her eyelids flicker.

"You're afraid of dying?"

She scooted away from him and held her chest, her eyes questioning.

"Are you kidding me? Of course! Who knows what'll happen after you die."

It was Beck's turn to sigh. He stared at the stars in the sky from where he sat.

"They say heaven knows."

"Oh, and you believe that?"

Beck looked at his hands, "Yeah, I guess I still do."

The girl shrugged. "Your choice."

"Right."

She tilted her head slightly as she looked at him, smiling.

"But hey, I hope heaven really does know."

The girl's phone buzzed – a notification popping out. She told him she was being beckoned by her mom. She stood and bade him good bye. He only smiled back.

"I hope so too," Beck told himself as he stood – his feet not touching the ground.

How I Came to Value Intersectionality in Feminism as a DisAbleD Woman

When I was first diagnosed with depression and anxiety I didn't see myself as someone with a disAbility. When I was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder, I still didn't. As I was getting accommodations in university for it, I still resisted. Why did I feel so defiant against this label?

Mental illness can be incapacitating. Although the definitions of disAbility are vast and complex, I think we can mostly agree that disorders that alter how you think, like mental illness, can be categorized within the spectrum of the definition.

As someone who identifies as a woman, I recognize the pressures that have historically been placed amongst people with the same gender identity as me. No matter what our experience, it seems that we struggle with underestimating ourselves. I see this happen with other identities as well.

Am I disAbleD "enough" to identify as such?

Because my disAbilities are invisible, does it really count?

We see this picture play out in wretched situations involving gender – like sexual assault.

It wasn't rape – does it really matter?

I was drunk – surely I'm to blame.

This culture of not internally validating our lived experiences is incredibly detrimental on a personal and societal level. It also keeps us from having a chance at understanding those who may identify differently than us.

Now I'm sure you're wondering – where am I going with this? The point is to demonstrate that intersectionality is vital to everyone's feminism. As a straight, cis-gender, white, middle-class person – there are some things that I will never understand by virtue of privilege. However, the limitations that are imposed on me because of being a woman with a disAbility help me conceptualize the idea of oppression because of identity.

We are, thankfully, progressing to a place where the variation of identities is seen as beautiful. I refuse to be shackled to the notion that difference is negative. You may never get what it's like to "walk a mile in my shoes" – and I'm not necessarily asking you do. What I'm asking for is that you give a shit that my life may be different than yours and take that into consideration when making decisions for yourself.

To ask to have your existence recognized is not a selfish act! In fact, it's one of survival. Sometimes, others need a bit of a nudge to recognize that the so-called "dominant" discourse isn't reflective of the world that we live in.

The struggle of simply being acknowledged is frustrating as all hell. However, we must persevere and demand to be seen. Moreso, we need to challenge the institutions that have forever ignored us. And yes, we need more than just a seat at the table. The table needs to be ours. The table IS ours.

My experience with disAbility has led to my feminism to be more inclusive. For that I am thankful. If you take anything away from this rant, let it be the value of intersectionality. I leave you with the questions: Are you validating others' realities? Do you consider other lived experiences when taking into consideration your personal choices? If the answers are no, I would gently suggest that you take these queries and reflect.

No one is perfect at this. I fail at it all the time. I have so much to learn, and likely, so do you. So let's do it together, shall we? My hand is extended out to yours. Will you reach back?

In Solidarity,
Paige Kezima

Footnote: I speak only from my own experience and don't claim to represent anyone else. I also recognize my privilege in being able to write these words and have you read them.

Just a Minor Threat
William Falo

I survived the hectic holiday season with only a few missing packages and minor scrapes and bumps from falls, but now with the warm weather coming more threats appeared. The route I delivered nobody else wanted, it was a development located far away from anything else including police and ambulances, it was a remote suburbia and the people here stayed in their houses and rarely came out for one reason or another, but they ordered lots of packages. Often, they moved without notice and every street had at least one empty house.

The summer dangers came in many forms: porch pirates thrived now, insects swarmed which was really dangerous since I was allergic to bees, spiders set up webs big enough to catch me, dogs barked and growled at me as I approached their houses even though I loved them, and worst of all the bandits with black masks liked to harass me. I hated the raccoons. They stole my food if I left the truck's door opened.

I complained about it, but all I received was a letter saying Erin was out-smarted by raccoons. It was posted on the bulletin board and everyone laughed at me.

I drove down the most remote street on my route and saw a man wave a girl into a car. Drugs were common here just like everywhere else and this sure looked like a drug deal. Sex for drugs was a possibility. What could I do? She looked young and he looked shady, but I was not even a resident here. I couldn't afford it. Since my divorce, I lived in an apartment and needed this job to survive.

The car drove away and I thought I heard a scream. It might have come from the girl in the car or been my imagination. Before I did anything, a raccoon grabbed the package that I just dropped off. I gritted my teeth.

"Drop it, you stupid bandit."

I ran toward it holding out my dog spray out. The raccoon joined two others and ran toward the woods. The package was from a pet supply company. I lost too many packages to porch pirates and already received a letter of warning even though it wasn't my fault. I would like to add some men who lost packages did not receive any warnings. Being new, I was in danger of being fired so, I chased the raccoons.

I turned the corner and one of the horrid creatures threw a chicken bone and hit me in the eye. I turned and it looked like the raccoon was laughing at me. My eye stung and I covered it with my hand.

"You must have rabies?" I yelled out. It hissed when it slumbered away.

The package was gone. Another one lost. I went back with a throbbing eye. I made a partial eye patch out of some paper and rubber bands. I finished the deliveries with my one good eye looking out for the raccoons. The last delivery was for a house on a dead-end street. I didn't even know anyone lived there, but the car in the driveway was the one I saw the girl get in earlier.

I walked up to the house looking like a pirate. Near the front door, I glanced into the window with my one good eye. A girl was laying on an air mattress with a syringe beside her. It looked like she wasn't breathing.

I called 911. When you lived in the suburbs at the edge of the woods, emergency services are too far away. It would take too long if she was overdosing. The window was open and I pushed in the screen and climbed into the empty room. The girl looked like a lifeless doll, I tried CPR and glanced at an ID next to her. Her name was Emma. She looked like a teenager, despite the scars on her arms from drug use.

"Emma," I said over and over, but she remained still. My tears fell down my face, even from my bad eye and I kept doing chest compressions as sirens came closer, then someone opened the back door. I looked up as the man from the car ran out the door with another girl. They headed for the woods.

The ambulance crew burst in and took over trying to save Emma. I ran out the back door in pursuit of the man. He got a head start, but the girl slowed him down and I gained on him. After a few more minutes, the man dropped the girl, turned around and pointed a gun at me. I froze and saw my sad life fading away. Even though I was lonely and depressed I didn't want to die. Not yet anyway.

The man laughed when he looked at me. "Are you a pirate?" The gun gave him confidence.

"Let the girl and me go. I won't tell the cops anything."

"It's too late. Emma is dead."

"Maybe not." More sirens came closer.

His hand shook. If I ran away; he probably would miss, but the girl moaned and that idea faded away.

"What's her name?" I pointed at the girl.

"Hayley."

"Let her go." I stepped forward.

"No. I'm not afraid of you. You're just a minor threat. Do you know how many girls I got on drugs and sold to traffickers?"

He steadied his hand and his finger twitched. He was going to kill me. I closed my good eye then heard a rustling sound. When I opened it, a blur jumped on the man as sparks flew out of the gun. I dove to the ground and everything became fuzzy, but I crawled forward and grab Hayley then we stumbled away from the scene while the man wrestled with raccoons. I heard another shot and a searing pain in my leg knocked me to the ground. I looked back and saw a raccoon holding a gun. It sounds crazy, but I swear the raccoon was holding the gun. They saved me, and yet one of them took the opportunity to shoot me. Raccoons are insane.

I led Hayley toward the arriving police cars. When I got closer, some of them pulled guns while others stared in shock. I understood why since I limped toward them with a drugged girl while wearing an eye patch and with blood pouring out of my leg. I collapsed to the ground when they reached me.

###

In the hospital, my eye improved but remained circled with a dark bruise. I looked in the mirror and thought the raccoons somehow made me one of them. I laughed for a minute.

My leg hurt and was wrapped in thick bandages. Nobody believed that a raccoon shot me. They laughed at the thought of it, but I knew it was true.

Sadness overcame me when I found out that Emma died from the drug overdose. I couldn't save her. I cried at random times for the loss of such a young life. I planned to buy Narcan, just in case I ever saw an overdose again, but I hoped that I never would need it. The police arrested the trafficker and explained away the bite wounds on him as from a stray dog despite what we both said about the raccoons. They told me I may have saved lots of future victims of his trafficking scheme. It seemed he lived in foreclosed homes in various suburbs, then got the girls hooked on drugs and sold them to traffickers. He hid in plain sight.

On my third day in the hospital, Hayley came to visit me with her mother. They hugged me so hard I couldn't breathe. Despite, many bruises and cuts she looked good.

"You saved my life," she said. Her mother nodded.

"The raccoons helped." I said.

They looked at each other and shook their heads. "Pain meds," the mother whispered.

I didn't pursue it. I didn't want to end up in the psych ward.

"I'm going to rehab." She told me as I left. "I'll call you when I get out."

She picked up my phone and entered her number and did the same to her phone with my number. They left me with a box of cookies and a big card.

To my surprise the delivery company kept me, even giving me an award. I got a parking spot closest to the building for a month. The risk your life for preferred parking thought made me laugh. On

my first day back on the route, I carried extra supplies. My pockets were filled with cookies, cat treats, and crackers. When I passed the house that Emma died in, I paused beside the crime scene tape that still surrounded it. I couldn't stop the tears.

I threw the treats out and before long a group of raccoons came out and gobbled them up. We made a truce that day, but they still stole food from me since raccoons can't help themselves. I believe they are born to be mischievous.

Now, I always look out for anyone in trouble. Maybe I can save someone in the future before it's too late. I could be a monster hunter.

The police never found the gun and I kept expecting to turn a corner and encounter a raccoon pointing it at me. No matter what its intentions are the thought of a raccoon with a gun made me shiver. That would be more than a minor threat.

Like Giovanni's Room
Dan Provost

Buried in
self-exile.

Looking out
a window that
breeds deformity.

Dust streaks profiling
a sickly sun.

The feeble roof...

Counters my attempts
of hope.

Sagging, ready to crush.

My fragile shoulders
unable to repress
the heavy weight.

This is the room I inhabit.

Abandoned, only able
to witness Kerouac stars
as a tempted penance.

I cannot leave.
Do I want to leave?

Trapped?
By my own hand?

This place,

is where dreams
came to die.

Where I come to die.

Seeing the remains...
Books, notepads, clothes
that do not fit anymore...

It...it...it...it...it

is finally here.

Finished...I
have surrendered.

Mark Six
Jim Robb

When Mark Six came online everything was different.

His surroundings were no longer abstract, artificial concepts, owing their existence only to their degree of agreement with the definitions he was programmed to recognize.

Now they were real.

He knew the horizontal area on which he stood was a floor, but now it was more than that. The square beige panels that made up its surface gave it a symmetry he found ... he could not yet define his reaction.

The vertical surfaces that surrounded him were walls, but he found their pale green colour did not evoke the same response as did the beige panels of the floor.

Above him was a complex surface made up of a pattern of rectangular panels bounded by white-painted strips of metal. Clearly this was a ceiling. Though most of the panels were white and textured, others were of a translucent material which partially concealed tubular sources of light arranged in pairs.

Light!

All about him were objects which he identified as cupboards and shelves, themselves holding smaller objects which differed wildly in shape, size, and colour. Some of these lesser objects even incorporated small sources of coloured light. He began the task of identifying the sub-objects but relegated it to the background, for there were further miracles to occupy his newly-discovered conscious attention.

He could hear.

From somewhere he could hear the whisper of moving air, air that he could actually feel as it moved against the surface of his body. He looked upward and found the source of this latest experience, a set of louvered openings high up on the walls.

As he looked he realized he was not alone. Near the point where two walls met the ceiling he could see a small eight-legged creature engaged in some task.

Fascinated, he watched the creature at work, but as he did the moving air brought another concept to reality, that of smell. Some of the smells were subtle, like the cold metallic smell of the air itself -- cold, another sensation, he realized in passing. Other smells, like those coming from some of the objects on the shelves, were so strong he could even taste them.

Taste. Yet another marvel.

Mark Six remained perfectly still, not daring to move for fear he might lose contact with these new and precious sensations before he could fully analyze and catalogue and, more importantly, experience them.

#

"Looks like another system crash," Dr. Miller said as he turned away from the monitor. "Completely unresponsive. Damn it anyway!"

"Maybe we can try a partial reboot?" Dr. Jacobs offered.

"Don't bother," Dr. Miller said, looking at his watch. "If we leave now we can still make the TGIF."

"Shut him down."

END

No Pills For The Pain
Patrick O'Shea

No pills for the pain, as you watch your loved one suffer, no pills for the pain as you hear of the loss of a loved one,

No pills for the pain as you try to understand what is happening to the loved one, as they smile and say it's really not so bad, or it's unbearable,

No pills for the pain as you stand silently with a hole in the heart where your son or daughter used to be, and scream inside at the loss,

No pills for the pain due your impotence in the face of the loved one's body failing, and them trying to spare you full understanding of their pain.

No ease for the brain, as the eyes reflect the terror of the news from a doctor, that their life is going to change forever, and shorten dramatically,

No ease for the brain, as the understanding leads you down a dark and lonely path, a path you never imagined, but now will lead you to your dark road,

No ease for the brain, as you see the society you thought you knew, taking directions that will not allow your comprehension, treatment too expensive,

No ease for the brain, as loved ones begin to vanish in a cloud of memory loss, incontinence, inability to cope, and then forget what you were and who you are.

No pills for the pain, no oxycodone, uppers, downers, pink pills, green pills, blue pills, can do anything but dull the pain, but can never remove it,

No ease for the brain can come from the society so drugged that it no longer seems to be aware of what it is, where it is, or what it is,

No pills for the pain that is a part of our life, that part which is the unwanted friend of the joy and happiness that we seem to have always wanted,

No ease for the brain except in the love we bear, the love we share, and the knowledge that we can still care for those with the pain.

Not Heart Trouble, Heart Malaise
John Grey

Today
my heart is not listening,
just looking for ways out
of this situation.

And it has nothing for you,
not even the ordinary things
like a trestle or a chaise-lounge.

Its walls are pallid,
pigments dwindling,
more puddle
than beating organ.

That's it -
my heart doesn't so much pound
as leak out.

Look,
there it is behind you.
No wait,
it's crept under those blankets.

My disturbed heart
does not wish to be disturbed.

Oxygen
Steve Carr

A thin line of white sunlight shows between the very narrowly parted, dusty, faded, gold and white velour drapes. It's the only source of light in the room and only illuminates a portion of the threadbare, ornately but poorly designed gray rug, like a shining pathway cut through dreamlike images of peacocks, doves and willow trees. A large overstuffed floral patterned chair is in one corner with a pole lamp standing next to it that has a beige lampshade with fringe that was once white but has turned yellow with age. There's a fireplace that has a piece of plywood nailed across the front. The mantle is cluttered with an assortment of tchotchkes, mostly figurines of horses. In a gold painted wood frame, an oil painting done in dark greens and mustard yellow of an Italian villa hangs above the fireplace. A circular glass coffee table covered with old National Geographic Magazines is in the middle of the room. The television sits on a small table against a wall and is turned off. One of the kitchen chairs is beside it.

A light green sofa is pushed against one wall. In a pair of blue flannel pajamas, Uncle Roy is stretched out on it, his head resting on one armrest, his feet propped up on the other one. He doesn't move and in the dim light he could almost be mistaken for a pile of laundry. Intermittently there is a bright red glow that erupts and then quickly fades from the end of his burning cigarette each time he takes a drag. He breaks into a hacking cough after each puff. The smell of the smoke mixes with the odor of pine cleaner and hangs heavily in the air. The whirr from the air humidifier plugged into a baseboard outlet and sitting near the sofa is the only sound in the room.

Uncle Roy's dark green oxygen tank is on the other side of the arm rest where his head is. The excess tubing that leads from the mask to the tank is bunched up on the armrest next to his left ear. The mask rests on his chest next to a crystal ashtray filled with ashes and cigarette butts.

#

Aunt Edna's elbows are on the kitchen table and she's holding her pudgy, wrinkle-lined face in her hands. Her canary, Lulu, is hopping about in its bamboo cage that hangs by the refrigerator, knocking birdseed onto the dingy white tile floor. Drops of water fall from the faucet onto a crumb-crusting tin pie plate in the sink filled with dishes, making a pinging noise that reverberates in the kitchen. On the stove's burners there's an iron skillet with gelled grease from fried pork chops, a sauce pan caked with dried tomato soup, and a Teflon frying pan splattered with pieces of dried scrambled eggs and bits of green peppers.

The window above the sink is up a few inches and a hot breeze blows in, making the ends of the separated purple, plastic curtains flutter. Through the grimy window glass the water tower that stands near the railroad tracks can be seen.

Aunt Edna tilts her head, placing her cheek in the palm of one hand. With her free hand she flips back and forth the two pages of a funeral home pamphlet. Several similar pamphlets are stuck in a clear plastic napkin holder sitting in the middle of the table.

#

Lying naked in a supine position on her bed, Cathy palpates first one breast, then does the same to the other, checking for lumps. The fan is in front of the raised window, blowing hot air over her body. Perspiration has glued her hair to her forehead and neck. The small blonde hairs on her arms are covered in dewdrops of sweat. Other than the movement of her fingers on her breasts she is immobile, as if weighed down by the dull gray ceiling above her. Stirred by the fan-driven breeze, the edges of the paper doilies on her vanity dresser tremble. Her sash from when she was crowned Miss Coal Mines 1998 is draped diagonally across the mirror.

The door to the clothes closet is open and a pile of clothes and shoes are in a mound in the doorway. Many of the black wire hangers have nothing on them. A large stuffed penguin won at the state fair

stands in the back of the closet, peering out with its one remaining button eye. The shelf above the clothes rod is lined with paperback romance novels whose covers are tattered and pages are dog eared.

On the walls beside the door leading out to the hallway there are pinned hundreds of photographs of Russell. In most he is wearing the yellow metal hat and gray field jacket covered in coal soot that he wore in the mines.

#

Light from the dim bulb shines through the lampshade, casting a muddy glow on the room. Uncle Roy's face is gaunt and his eyes are sunken. His face has a pale blue pallor. With every exhaled breath his chest shudders. He's sitting up on the sofa with his legs between the legs of a metal TV tray that holds a plate of food and a bottle of beer and the ash tray. There's a small overly done steak on the plate that he vigorously saws with a dull steak knife. His pale, arthritic, vein-covered hands shakes as he cuts into the meat and makes the tray wobble. He's knocked most of the corn from his plate and the bright yellow kernels lie on the tray like beads from a broken necklace. There's a burning cigarette in the ashtray. Its wisps of smoke curls in the air and disappears. His oxygen tank is on the floor next to a leg of the tray. The tubing and mask are in his lap.

The television is on, but the sound is down so low that its noise is almost imperceptible. After swallowing each piece of steak he takes a swig of beer and then takes a drag on the cigarette. He stares at the television, showing no sign that he cares about or even comprehends what he's seeing.

#

Sitting in the kitchen chair next to the television, Aunt Edna has her tray pulled up to her lap with her plump legs stretched out between the legs of the tray. She's wearing a pair of dirty, blue fuzzy slippers. She pushes the corn around on her plate with her fork until she impales a single kernel with a tine. Unable to see the television screen from where she's seated, she gazes wistfully at the Italian villa while she eats. It's the only piece of art she owns.

#

Wearing a pale green dress and white pumps, Cathy comes down the stairs and stands in the hallway for a moment and adjusts her bra strap before going into the living room.

"He'll be here in a few minutes," she says.

Aunt Edna puts a corn kernel in her mouth, chews and then swallows. "Are you sure he won't want something to eat?" she says.

"We're going out to eat," Cathy says.

She steps back into the hallway and opens the closet door and takes a can of air freshener from the shelf. Beginning in the hallway and going into the living room she sprays the lemon scented freshener. Its scent is quickly lost in the haze of cigarette smoke. She returns the can to the closet, and then goes back into the living room and sits in the overstuffed chair.

"It's been two years since I've been out with a man," she says as she turns her watch with the gold band around on her wrist. Although the hands are moving, she taps impatiently on the watch crystal.

"It's about time," Aunt Edna says. She pushes the tray away from her and brushes biscuit crumbs from her dress. "Russell wouldn't have wanted you spending the rest of your life mourning."

Uncle Roy eats the last piece of steak, then drinks the last of the beer. He takes the cigarette from the ashtray and takes a long drag, drawing the smoke deep into his lungs. As he begins to cough, he turns on the oxygen and puts the mask over his mouth and nose and inhales. His cheeks have turned ashen. He puts the ashtray with the burning cigarette in his lap, pushes the tray aside and leans back against the sofa cushions.

"I'll say it again, you're killing yourself Uncle Roy," Cathy says.

"Black lung is killing him already," Aunt Edna says. "Tell me again, where did you meet this man you're going out with?"

"He worked with Russell at the mine. I met him before the accident, when Russell was alive," Cathy says.

There is the discordant chime of the doorbell.

"He's here," Cathy says and then quickly rises from the chair and rushes to the front door. Breathless with excitement, she opens the door.

A few minutes later she returns to the living room with Sam.

"Sam, this is Russell's aunt, Edna, and his uncle, Roy," Cathy says motioning toward them. "They kinda took me in after Russell's death."

Sam nods first to Aunt Edna and then to Uncle Roy. "Please to meet you," he says.

Aunt Edna stands. "We adopted Russell when he was two after his parents died in a boating accident. They drowned," she says nonchalantly. "Were you in the mine when that part of it collapsed and trapped our Russell and the other men?"

"No ma'am, I wasn't," he says.

"Imagine dying from having no air to breath." She puts her hand to her mouth and feels her warm breath on her fingertips.

Uncle Roy removes his mask and puts the cigarette to his lips.

"It's dangerous to have a lit cigarette around an oxygen tank," Sam says. "You could start a fire."

#

In the dark of the middle of the night, a train passes. There is the tinkle of cups and glasses in the cupboard.

On the cold stove burner sits a frying pan full of grease and bits of steak fat. In the sink, water from the dripping faucet falls on the metal tray used for baking the biscuits that lays atop dirty plates and utensils.

Sitting at the kitchen table in her pale pink cotton nightgown, Aunt Edna takes a pamphlet from the napkin holder and spreads it out in front of her. This is the funeral home they used to bury Russell. Even after two years she hasn't forgiven them for forgetting to put out a book for mourners to sign as they entered the funeral home to see Russell's body. She folds up the pamphlet and shoves it aside and takes out another one. In the birdcage, the canary hops onto the floor of the cage, and takes a kernel of corn into its beak that Aunt Edna had thrown in earlier. It hops back up onto a perch, and a moment later it flings it out of the cage.

#

In her bed and in the darkness, Cathy runs her fingers over the rash on her cheeks and neck caused by Sam's beard rubbing against her skin as he kissed her. She didn't like how he kissed her at all. His mouth was all over her, smothering her with kisses. It was nothing like the tender way Russell used to kiss her. When Sam put his hand up her dress she slapped him and got out of the car and walked home.

As the hot breeze from the blowing fan washes over her body she raises one arm above her head and checks the underarm for lumps, tenderness, or pain.

#

Sitting in complete darkness, Uncle Roy removes the oxygen mask and purposely places it beside the ashtray that has a burning cigarette among the ashes.

The End

Sharing My Canoe
William Doreski

Thanks for sharing my canoe.
Yes, I drift around the pond
all day, reading and trusting
what I read, tasting the onset
of colder weather, aching for
the affection of migrating birds.

I'm glad to have you examine
notes I've taken on the poems
of Wallace Stevens. So many
secrets to set me blinking and wise,
so much texture to smooth me.

You with your decided flesh
offer coffee custom brewed
to seduce me into a lower case
version of myself. Why bother
with the niceties of literature
when the pond exhumes itself
in stink of leaf decay and fish?

Here comes rain to impress
its wax seal on everything sweet.
Refreshing with fragrance of stone,
revising the last unfallen leaves.
You fold my pages into yourself
and look homeward or shoreward
with the slightest tinge of fear.

We should always be this subtle,
leaving only the faintest ripples
as the canoe I refuse to paddle
sketches a simple hieroglyph
only the pond itself can read.

Snowfall in a Streetlamp
Kristian Beatty

Snowfall in a streetlamp.
The night sky's kiss.

Not any streetlamp, mind you.
The ones with the old bulbs.
The ones with a nostalgic glow.

How they flicker and how they dance.
It's really quite the show.

You've seen it all before.
Those soft lights.
That quiet snow.

In countless suburban nights
Spent under nostalgic lights.

You ran and you laughed
And they never seemed to end.
You played and you danced.
In the glowing lights.

Just like the soft fall of snow.

Look up.
Just one of these nights
Take your time

with the snow
and the lights.

S.T.E.M. Guy
Gerard Sarnat

I compose haiku
'cause more mathematical
though less artistic.

Stolen at Four and a Half
Rob McKinnon

He and his mother had become sick
when he was four and a half
and she had taken him to hospital.
They persuaded her to leave him
at a home for babies until she was better
but social welfare said she was unfit to look after him
and they took him from her.

For the next few years he would move between orphanages and foster homes.
He was often reminded of the colour of his skin,
teasing by cruel children
meant he would never feel like he belonged anywhere.
Christian foster parents would severely scald him
at any slight indiscretion he felt the pain of belt leather.

His mother never gave up looking for him,
she would often write letters to the state welfare departments
pleading with them to give her son back.
All her letters were treated with disregard
making the anguish of her separation more intense.
She kept sending birthday and Christmas cards
but none were passed onto him.

When he was eighteen
he was requested to attend a welfare office.
The senior officer gave him a file
that contained the story of his life
told in hundreds of pages of welfare department reports.
He cried when he opened the cards from his mother,
the reminders of the life the state had taken away from him.

Without offering any console
or apology for the treatment he had undergone,
the welfare officer passed him a handwritten note
with his mother's current address.
She was working in a hostel for Aboriginal children
with twenty children under her care.
They only had six more years before she died.

*Based on Confidential evidence 133, Bringing Them Home, The National Inquiry into the
Forced Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, 1997

Sunday Lunch
Shawn Van Horn

You don't want to do this. You dread these Sunday lunches with Mom and her new fiancé. They dated for a week before he bought her a ring and you know that's fucking crazy. What's his deal? But he makes her happy, so you try to accept it. Now every Sunday, the long tradition of lunch with Mom has an unwanted add on. But he has money and always pays, so at least there's that.

You drive up to Bob Evans, its cherry red siding burning under the full noon sun. Owen is in the back seat, playing a loud game on his tablet. He looks up when you come to a stop in a parking space.

"Joe is here, too," you tell him.

"He's here again," he says, and the emphasis on the last word, the honest annoyance of a five-year-old, makes you feel stronger. He's on your side.

You walk across the parking lot, holding your son's hand, wishing you had made an excuse to cancel. You reach the double glass door with the loud wood trim. Mom and Joe are sitting inside on a bench. Mom is dressed in a plain blouse and slacks. You've never seen her wear a dress or skirt in your entire life. Joe wears a tight blue dress shirt, his bowling ball gut straining the buttons. He pushes his square wire glasses up onto the bridge of his flattened pancake nose.

They see you and rise. Mom hugs you. You tense up. That happens a lot now and you feel so guilty. Joe says hello and puts out his hand.

"Hey," you say, no emotion. You hope he feels how much you don't feel for him. You shake his hand with a weak apathetic grip, making sure he sees you wipe your palm on your pants leg after.

He says hi to your son, but Owen hides behind you, peeking out to catch a glimpse.

"He's shy," you say, but it's a lie. Owen's the friendliest kid you know. Right now you're so proud of him.

A blonde waitress half your age leads you to your table. You look around at the after church crowd. You're the youngest adult here by a good twenty years. You sit at the end of the long table by the window. Joe sits across from you. You hate that. He picks up his laminated menu and tells you to order whatever you want. Oh, you will. You skipped breakfast just so you'd be hungry enough to order the most expensive meal they have.

He puts his arm around your mother and caresses the nape of her neck. She smiles. You look away. Mom asks how your week has been.

"Okay," you say, and no more. More guilt. You've had the argument with her before about this new addition, and you'll have it again, but now is not the time or place to rekindle it.

"Your mom showed me that story you had published," Joe says to you. "It was good. I liked it." His interest catches you off guard. You almost thank him, but stop yourself and reply with a slight nod.

You pull out your phone and hide it under the table. You scroll through Facebook so you won't have to focus on the now. Who cares if it's rude. You look up just long enough to mumble your drink order.

After a few minutes of awkward silence, the waitress is back with four Mason jars. When did they start using those? Joe and you both got a Coke, Mom just a water as always, Owen a chocolate milk. Your son rips off the tip of paper covering the end of his straw. He puts the open end to his mouth, aims it at Joe's chubby face, and blows. The paper arrow strikes him in the cheek and Owen cackles with delight. You laugh, too. You taught him that.

The waitress is still there. "Are you guys ready to order or do you need more time?"

You tell her to skip you and come back at the end. You're not ready. You're going to need a lot more time.

END

Taps
DC Diamondopolous

Peter crouched in front of the attic window and gazed down on old man Mueller's cornfield. The plow, unhitched beyond the stalks, turned north like he meant to continue but got interrupted. Peter looked toward the barn, no sign of Mueller's horse and buggy. The Amish and Mennonite neighbors, with their peculiar ways kept to themselves. Mueller only talked to his pa when he accused Rufus of killing his chickens, or a year ago, the day his brother's mind broke when Gabe went screaming from the veranda twisting his ears as he ran into Muller's cornfield. That day Mueller shot out of the house, the top of his unsnapped overalls flapping as he sprinted after Gabe, Mueller's wife and five children dashed onto the porch, the boys still in their pajamas.

After that day, Gabe was never the same, and neither was Peter.

At fourteen, he felt all grownup. His childhood ended when his brother and best friend came down with a cold inside his brain. Ma said he'd get better. They just had to pray harder. Pa wanted to send him somewhere, to a place where they removed part of the brain or shocked it into normal. Peter listened as they argued back and forth, Ma blaming herself and Pa's eyes wet with tears, as they tried to decide what was best for their eldest son; feelings of helplessness sat like a centerpiece on the dining room table.

"How come I don't hear the voices, Ma?"

"Thank the good Lord you don't, son."

Gabe's trumpet playing now sailed out of his window across the beauty of the corn and wheat fields, the notes drifting as new ones began over the vast cloudless skies of Lancaster County. Gabe played Taps, Taps in the morning, Taps in the afternoon, and Taps at night. Peter thought it must have to do with the sadness inside him, but once in a while Gabe scratched the air with a different kind of song; it would sail smooth, cut off, spiral and dip. In those moments, he thought his brother had talent, enough to make Peter enjoy the fantasies they provoked. He coaxed Gabe to take lessons, maybe play at the church, learn Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing, so people would like him—that part he left out. Gabe had scowled, and Peter fell quiet, afraid he'd make his brother go to that place where a chorus of devils shuffled his mind.

Peter learned to rake words the way he did leaves. Words like sure, and all right calmed him, but others like before, and used to, could bring on a fit.

The kitchen screen door slammed as Gabe came out of the house and stood on the veranda. He brought the trumpet to his lips and began to play. Peter bounded to his feet. Gabe had never taken the trumpet outside or played it in front of others. Peter hoped this meant he'd been healed, that his parents' prayers and his own were finally answered. Excited, he ran down the stairs wanting his parents to see. He passed the room he once shared with his brother until his pa separated them cause of the sickness. He jumped onto the landing and rode the banister sidesaddle down to the living room.

"Ma? Pa?"

Peter ran through the kitchen where his mother's cornbread sat on the stove. He caught a whiff of its warm, sweet smell and realized his brother had stopped playing.

He pushed the screen door open, but Gabe wasn't there.

"Rufus, come here boy!" he shouted from the porch. "Pa?" Where was everyone? His eyes darted from the tether ball, to the lawnmower, to the Troyer's house. The late September day was as still as the sun. It was Saturday. Life always had something going on. It didn't just stop.

Peter found it strange that his father's hammer, pliers, and screwdriver lay on the porch swing. Although his brother wouldn't hurt a gnat, he'd often hurt himself. And, his pa made sure to keep his guns and tools locked up.

Peter leaped off the steps and ran around the brick house they had moved into three years ago. The front yard looked no different from any other time, the '47 Buick station wagon parked in the driveway, nothing out of place, except the absence of his folks and Rufus.

Maybe they went to the Kerr's or the Troyers' cause someone got sick. But Rufus' disappearance downright confused him. That dog always came when called.

He'd better tend to Gabe.

Peter ran to the backyard and saw a swath cut in the cornfield. The Amish and Mennonites were acquainted with Gabe's screams, his running away and hiding in their barns. And the time he sprinted all the way to the feed store and climbed into a grain sack to get away from the voices. Six months ago, Peter and his pa found Gabe in a dumpster. His pa picked him up by his armpits and dragged his crumpled body over the edge and placed him on the ground. Peter felt like something died that day; a corner of his heart just fell off. His pa helped Gabe get to his feet, put an arm around his shoulders and told him: It's gonna be okay. Peter wanted to believe. Later that day his father told him: You're the older one now, son. Tend to him like a pup.

He followed Gabe's tracks, swatting through the rustling stalks, and batting away flies. "Gabe?" He felt trickles of sweat form on his brow as the smothering shoots closed behind him. "Where are you?"

"Go away."

"Where's our folks and Rufus?"

"I don't know. Leave me alone."

Peter took careful steps so not to upset his brother. He wanted to make sure Gabe was all right and not doing weird things like banging his head against the ground, or clawing his ears until they turned purple blue.

Peter brushed his dark bangs out of his eyes and parted the stalks. Gabe sat cradling the trumpet, rocking back and forth.

"You seen Rufus?"

"No."

"Heard you playing outside." Peter parted the shoots to give them more room. He stepped around his brother. "What's that on your shirt?"

"Nothin'."

"Somethin'. Looks like blood." He reached to touch the shirt. Gabe shoved his hand away.

"Leave me be."

"You tell me how you got blood on your shirt and I'll leave you be."

"It's not blood. It's ketchup."

"Hogwash."

Peter took hold of his brother's shoulders and gripped them as he leaned down and smelled the shirt. "It's blood." He ripped it open and saw slash marks on Gabe's chest. "Jesus Gabriel."

"I'm cold."

"Where's the knife?"

"You tore my shirt."

"Here put mine on."

Gabe did and started to blubber as he mismatched the buttons with the holes.

"Gimme the knife."

"Mueller has it."

"You're saying Mueller did this to you?"

Gabe nodded.

He couldn't trust a darn thing that came out of Gabe's mouth.

Peter leaped on top of his brother and tried to roll him over, but Gabe fought back

swinging his fists and grazed the side of his head. "I'm trying to keep you out of trouble," Peter said as he straddled Gabe's legs and ran his hands along his brother's pockets. "Where'd you throw it?" He rolled Gabe's shirt into a ball, stood, and picked up the trumpet.

"Don't have it."

Peter glanced about. It could be anywhere. "Let's go find Rufus."

Gabe grabbed onto the stalks and pulled himself up. "Mueller killed him with the knife."

Peter swung around. He dropped the shirt and trumpet and lunged at his brother knocking him to the ground. "You're lyin'." He looked down at Gabe not feeling a bit sorry for him. "You can talk crazy all you want, but not about my dog." Peter felt a rush of trembles coming on. The kind he had as a kid when he'd wake up in his own piss. Sometimes his brother was just too much responsibility. Peter picked up the shirt and handed the trumpet to Gabe. "I'm goin' home."

Gabe followed.

Old man Mueller would never use a knife. He might shoot Rufus if he killed his chicks, but he'd never use a knife. And, when it came to hurting his brother, well sir, that just didn't make sense. It bugged Peter that Gabe could get to him like that, after all, his mind was sharp. He could grasp a situation and pluck its essence clean out.

When they reached the porch, his father's tools were still lying about. He'd put them away once he cleaned Gabe's wounds and got rid of the shirt, no sense telling his parents. It would upset them, and they would send Gabe away.

The screen door slammed as the brothers went into the kitchen. "Take off my shirt. I'll clean those wounds," Peter said as he took the dishrag from the washbasin and soaked it in warm water. "Put the trumpet down." He reached into the cupboard and pulled out his pa's whiskey. "Come here." He poured a little onto the rag—his pa wouldn't notice—and wiped his brother's chest.

"Ouch! That's for drinkin'."

"It'll clean the wounds. Seen Pa?"

Gabe slowly moved his head to the left and the right, reminding Peter of an elephant he saw at the carnival in HershyPark.

"No."

Peter took the bloody shirt and put it in the sink. He lifted the lid of his nanaw's bronze striker that hung on the wall, took out a wooden match and struck it, lighting the shirt on fire. When the flames licked it to ash, Peter ran the water. "Let's go upstairs. We gotta hide those wounds."

Gabe started to laugh. Peter saw the madness in his brother's eyes as if his mind hooked a corner and kept spinning unable to right itself. No amount of shaking, coaxing, or yelling could bring Gabe around. Peter remembered that same laugh Memorial Day when the Kerr's invited them to a picnic in their backyard. They all sat at the long wooden table eating ham, onions, coleslaw and pudding. Gabe scarfed down a slice of watermelon when he started to laugh. Course everyone wanted to know what was so funny. His laughter grew to hysterics. Let us in on the joke, Lester said. But Gabe kept laughing like it was his own private thing, even as the juice ran out his nose and into his mouth. The look in his eyes when Lester persisted, come on, what's so funny, was dark and ugly.

Peter would never forget the look on Gretchen's face, the girl with hair the color of wheat, and eyes as dark as the Blue Ridge Mountains. He wanted Gretchen for his girl the moment he saw her in the church choir. But on the day that Gabe snapped, and she brought her finger up to the side of her head and made fast circles laughing at his brother's torment, his feelings for her died.

Did he hear Rufus? Peter raced to the screen door and opened it. He stepped onto the veranda. "Rufus!" He took the stairs when he felt something strike the back of his head. The force was so great he toppled forward. He struggled to get away as he pulled himself along the ground. Crawling in his own blood, he was sure he heard his dog.

Rufus sprinted up to his master and barked. "Hey, boy," Peter moaned.

“Oh my God, Gabriel!”

The distant wail of his mother’s voice reminded him of the way Gabe faded the final notes of Taps.

“Put that hammer down. Now Gabriel!” The fear he heard in his pa’s voice scared him. Peter struggled to get up.

He felt a searing explosion and lost consciousness.

The Forever Shit Pants
Marshall Shenner

Jered cursed at his textbook, "the greek gods," he laughed. These long nights were getting to him, he had long forgotten why he chose classical studies as an elective and now regretted it. "Why do I have to learn about a bunch of long forgotten, petty, moody, degenerates, worshiped by people who didn't even wear pants." But Jered would regret those words more than anything. In a flash of lightning, before him appeared a muscle bound figure with the face of an elderly man, dressed in a toga he stood there his skin crackling with electricity. Jered fell back in his chair horrified and unable to speak.

The being broke the Silence "So you little mortal shit bird, you like making fun of the gods do you, now we haven't been too active of late. Hara has been trying to help me curb my impulses and temper, but this I can not let stand!"

His voice cracking Jered finally spoke "Who... what are you!?"

"I am Zues, king of the gods, ya little shitburger," he pointed a fat finger at Jered, lightning dancing at its end, "and boy have you fucked up!" The angry god thought of roasting the pathetic college student right there, but the gods did always have a twisted sense of humour. "You will be punished for your arrogance Jered of Mossbank!" Zues threw his head back and laughed, "You will die Jered!" Jered began to sob as the hopelessness of his situation began to set in, if only he had just done his homework on time, maybe he wouldn't have misdirected his anger at the book. Zues continued, "but not right now, the next time you shit, it will be your last and you will die!"

"WHAT, THAT'S SO UNF-" Jared began to shout, but was cut short as a beam of light shot from the gods accusing finger into Jered's abdomen. He passed out, and awoke later in his dark cramped empty dorm room.

The next few hours would be ones of panic, depression, and deep thought for Jered. He abandoned his schoolwork. He had been subsisting off of instant ramen, cheap wings, and tacos for the past two days. He knew not when his time would come but it would be today and it would not be pleasant. He thought about calling everyone he loved but what would he say, instead he went to his favourite pub and waited, he thought deeply about his life, what he would have done differently.

But there was no use for thought like that, "he would make his peace" he thought. So he enjoyed his last beer, watched the end of the game of his favorite baseball team (they lost), and enjoyed to the fullest his last few moments. When the time came and he felt his stomach begin to rumble in that familiar way, he remained where he was seated at the table no need to die alone in a cold dirty bathroom stall.

"This is where I'll die, content, screw that god, what right does he have!? Oh well it doesn't matter now." He felt the pressure building, with one last magnum opus of a fart, he closed his eyes. Sweet release came quickly as he sat there a smile on his face. At once he noticed the smell, he hadn't thought he would make it this long, the hot sensation was beginning to ruin the moment. The minute dragged on, nothing came no death no darkness, just the waiter with a horrified look on his face. The god had lied, all a cruel joke. Now Jered had been truly humiliated and wished he had actually just died. Instead all he had was a pair of forever pre-shat pants and no dignity. He heard the rolling sound of thunder outside, like chuckling to his ears. "I think I'm going to drop classical studies," he thought to himself.

The Most Rained
Kushal Poddar

The most rained morning,
muted crackling, vapor rising
from the leftover riot of silence,

my siren hand pierces
your stupor of dream.
"South of being burns", I say,
and you ask, "Where

will we find a leeway
for our offsprings?"
I know not. Rain tiptoes,

fails and falls midst
two icebergs melting apart -
the time we perceive and
the time that holds us within.

The Old Man and His Memories
Libby Taylor

Pictures hanging on the wall smile at me
Their tone grey and dark
Yet when I look at them, they light up the room with colour.

I look at myself back then; glossy hair, smooth skin
Surrounded by the people I loved
All gone now.

I catch a glimpse of an old man in the reflection of the pictures
He is now all I can focus on
His aged face covering a time of youth.

See, back then all I dreamt of was the future
And before I knew it I was old and alone
Dreaming of the past.

The Road to Banff
Victoria Bender

Midsummer in the Rockies, I leave
Glacier, heading towards Banff;
early rain reflects off pines as if
last night's stars fell liquid.
I open the car window, inhale
an earthy dank.

One midnight, John and I awoke,
drove through starry dark.
As dawn touched Tahoe, we
made love on dew-cold ground,
pink, orange and muted blue
above.

Now, topping a small rise, I look
across an unexpected valley,
before me in a perfect arc,
a rainbow. Inside its colored dome
the forest hovers,
blending light with time.

A giant bus pulls in beside,
belching noise and people;
cameras click away. Except
one couple midway back
next to an open window. She half
rises, camera ready,

as she turns to him, "What d'ya think?
Ya wanna get out an' see the rainbow?"
He peers through the window which gives
a partial view. "Nah" he snorts,
"it's nothin', I've seen
rainbows before."

I'm heading to the ice fields,
one hundred twenty-five square miles
and depth sometimes 1000 feet;
formed when other life walked here
feeling the sun,
seeing the rainbow.

The Spark
Kim Payne

In the midst of the fall
I opened my eyes just long enough to witness
The sun drop
Its fiery exterior crashing with a glorious spark
It reminded me of the 4th of July
As a child when I held the shining sparkler
In my chubby chocolate -streaked hand
Waving it around like a little patriot
Like a little fool with no worries
No fear of falling
For surely someone would be there to catch me

Thing with Feathers
Frederick Pollack

By now if she could see herself,
dirt-dry, hair greasy-grey, it would be
only a fact, like joints hurting.
Yet she remains (so hastily trained)
effective with the several salvaged
automatics: half the kills
on the upper levels were hers.
(Now in her margins she's grateful
the cold draft from below keeps
their smell from following; imagines
that if we return they'll be gone.)
The fact the lights remain on
is mysterious, like all power.
In the glare we look to her
(we like to think) like children
who are doing something stupid
and have stolen heavy things to do it with.
Descending the slimed stairs, past
their slogans, leapfrogging
halls, clearing rooms, we hear
her mutter. It sounds neither crazy
nor angry: a chant
perhaps concerning peace, food,
"relationships" (that strange old word
from above). When we encounter one
of them, she tries (we think)
to fire before surprise on that face
becomes hate-default.
We lose people. At the bottom,
no lights but a thick door
that wasn't in our briefing.
Exhausted, someone whines, "What now?"
She takes C-4
from the pack of a man
who knew how to use it, says "Hope."

Travelling Music Haiku
Gerard Sarnat

i. Los Angeles Commute Time

Each intersection
bottlenecked -- trailing Teslas
try to shimmy through.

Freeway to LAX so
packed, folks with suitcases run
on Sepulveda.

ii. Air Traffic Control

So much hovering
right now, it's time to strive for
scrappy grounded kids.

iii. Hollywood Pitch

Trying to revive
such an exhausted Star Wars
franchise, I suggest:

cyber's for Evil
Empire forces can't afford
kinetic battles.

We Talk About It
DS Maolalai

in bed sometimes; moving in
together. I've told her we should wait a while
and hold off looking at least
until I get a better job
or one which is
more situated.
(I'm not looking,
really, but it helps sometimes
to delay) and we want

a second bedroom too -
an office for her,
and a place for me to write poems
and fire the evening
lit inside with wine. the dogs
can live there perhaps. we've talked about
getting another dog. I've told her
we should find a place
somewhere in the city - that life
kills slowly in the suburbs, like cigarettes
in a closed room.
and we've talked about it. we talk

about it. living with her
sounds nice - it does - eating dinner together
and sleeping together late. making breakfast.
leaving for work in the morning. we've talked
about it. buying a sofa
in a second-hand shop. organising a kitchen
according to her system.
finding a view
which both of us
will love.







Art by
Cushion



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