

SCAB

ISSUE #9

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EDITOR'S NOTE

It feels so strange – showing you a new issue with pieces already familiar to you.

I've decided to change things up and present each new piece individually this time with one thing in mind: directing all due attention to the work of a single writer or artist at a time. It worked, or at least I'd like to think it did. But I kind of miss the excitement now – the usual, sweet feeling I get just before dropping the much-anticipated, filthy bomb of a new issue among you.

Of course, as the one-man editorial team of SCAB, I'm in a lucky position. I can choose freely and without any compromise what I want to do going forward – whether I want to go back to how it used to be or stick with the new idea. I would love to know, however, what *you* think, too. After all, you're the ones who keep SCAB alive, with your unfailing talent and interest. So. Let me know if you happen to feel like it and now... enjoy the feast all over again, please!

D.

September 2021

Three Studies of *Two Figures*

after Francis Bacon

wrestle/a-laugh-and/bonyfingers
 breath on/the neck (guffawing)/ trapped
 when his hand first/reachedhis/fingers
 peeling/venusfly trapped
 comedy is subjective
 he's reduced/us/ /to a squirm

transit/an intermediate/the-walls-irrelevant
 the grapple blinkers/roly-poly/puddin
 he calls me in/the jumble oflimbs
 we are in the voiding/blackholed there is only
 skintouch ing in great leaps/a basket rolling
 downhill
 ready willing to be dashed

pressure/youreyes staring/holding
 you won't/try/to explain/away this (grease
 the dirt)/your voice stowed/overhead
 the ceiling somethingnot
 yourfucking/eyes/so late/and this
 time cannot /watch/the sheets absorb
 the dirt/my body floating
 I hear your voice/Itry/tospeak/ and you

Mark Ward is the author of the chapbooks *Circumference* (Finishing Line Press, 2018) and *Carcass* (Seven Kitchens Press, 2020) and the forthcoming full-length collection *Nightlight* (Salmon Poetry, 2022). He is the founding editor of Impossible Archetype, a journal of LGBTQ+ poetry, now in its fifth year.



Tea-Bagged (by Amy Bassin)

Tea-Bagged (by Mark Blickley)

That idiotic doctor smiling down at me as if I am a Christmas leg of lamb ready to carve into my chest searching for a purse of gold and municipal bonds safely guarded by Margaret's father cruel old bastard God forgive me bribing me to marry his obnoxious daughter crying in the corridor afraid I might live and interrupt her carnality and bastardly children dear Lord I am sorry do not treat me harshly why did you plant this Covid-19 have I not suffered through years of archaic gospel and fanatic potbellied evangelists kill Margaret's father or my bacchanal son not me or that incompetent surgeon ready to claim my wife's loins along with her insurance oh Jesus remember I am sick I will die today spouting blood making nurses convulse with disgust splattering my fluids onto sterile white aprons disregarded in garbage cans as my flesh is shoved into an incinerator Blessed Mother is it hot in there will my flesh sizzle does the soul scorch damn family tradition I do not want to be cooked like spare ribs on a spring picnic I want to stay alive inhale spring's aromas my God it will be spring in less than a week when my corpse will have entered its first stage of decay and I revert back to the existence I led ten months before my birth oh Holy Father I do not mean I have changed you are the light why do they turn on those lights before I am under turn them off turn them off I will not have you see me like this stop stop I demand no one will see who I am I do not want to die put me back where I was do not put me under Blessed Saints I am drifting help me help me pull that mask off my face so I can tell Margaret's old man to shove it and quit his factory to escape his grandchildren calling me old fart unloving thanks to the shithead shrink he sends them to forgive me Lord they are beginning to slice my flesh who cares I am exhausted by this reminiscence of my life the larger box preceding the smaller one fourteen years overseeing the manufacturing of cardboard boxes Margaret's father will probably display me in number 324D all-purpose industrial container engineering breakthrough designed by contents within the urn be displayed next to my collection of Dickens or Margaret will turn it into a night lamp flicking me on and off teasing the lovers of the loveless sweet Christ hallowed by thy name thy kingdom come shit what is the rest ha my rest eternal rest eternal darkness dear god are they dimming the lights I will not succumb to them or you Holy Virgin forgive me it is too cold I am scared you scare the man just like the boy threatening vengeful flames perpetual blindness oh merciful Lord

forgive my transgressions I loved people before machines consumed my fervor you know people are malicious untrustworthy beasts preying on you devouring gentleness defecating deceit help me everything is black empty listen to me I repent you win just help me do not leave me in the dark please leave me alone it is your fault toying with me playing my fear of darkness laughing at me writhing you sadistic creature of evil forgive me forgive me Father you do understand I see I see yes this is like birth dark frightening yet to be thrust in life light praise God on high a fresh chance to find joy forgiveness ah bullshit no no dear Savior they are hoisting my lungs put them back put them back that madman is murdering me do something I am so cold so alone a thinking piece of butchered meat presold by Prudential premiums why why must I be punished I am a decent man unimportant undistinguished what of murderers rapists enjoying life as I am dissected I hate you give me back my lungs damn it oh Blessed Lady of Mercy grant me guidance save me from death and life's years of suffering only to die wondering running not escaping God forgive me because I will survive this surgery and laugh at my family destroying exotic visions of cruises and cars vomiting my bile in their hypocritical faces stuffing my diseased lungs down their throats I will survive this operation if only to bring joy to Prudential my God help me help me Christ help me help me....

New York interdisciplinary artist Amy Bassin and writer Mark Blickley work together on text-based art collaborations and experimental videos. Their work has appeared in many national and international publications as well as two books, *Weathered Reports: Trump Surrogate Quotes from the Underground* (Moria Books, Chicago) and *Dream Streams* (Clare Songbird Publishing House, New York). Their videos, *Speaking in Bootongue* and *Widow's Peek: The Kiss of Death* represented the United States in the 2020 year-long world tour of *Time Is Love: Universal Feelings: Myths & Conjunctions*, organized by the esteemed African curator, Kisito Assangni.

litany of concentric circles

finished his drink then
shot himself

said he hoped the poem would be better than the
shit i usually wrote but i didn't even
know him, wasn't even there, and he pulled the
trigger and it was november

was sunlit and cold and the blood on the
walls, sound of the girl smiling in the doorway
of the porn shop and my car wasn't running again

was rusting in the sunlight of someone else's
driveway and the sound of the
shot and she was smiling as i walked by, was sharing a
cigarette with the guy who worked there, asked me
how the poem was going, said she wasn't even there but
he had finished the drink then shot himself and
past the high school was the river

sunlit and cold and i found his body floating
near the shore, knew his girlfriend but i couldn't
lift him up and two kids on the bridge above
throwing rocks down at us, tried to explain that i
wasn't there, that i wasn't here, but my
hands had lost all feeling

mouth was bleeding and the hole in the side of his
head where the light poured out, said the girl
had been his sister and i told him he was dead

do you remember?

it was november, bright blue sky and frozen and
he'd written his girlfriend a letter, had told her
he was sorry and then he pulled the trigger

told her to ask me about the poem

showed her some words i'd scribbled across the backs of
some carry-out menus when i found her
standing in the doorway of the mexican restaurant,
explained that i wasn't even there, and these kids
across the street throwing rocks at us

my car down by the river, *tangled up in blue*
on the radio and she said she'd always hated dylan,
said she'd always hated the stones, and then he
finished his drink and pulled the trigger

static poured out of the hole in his heart and
he said the poem was the important thing

said the gun was just a metaphor but
he wouldn't stop bleeding

laughed when i showed him what i'd written
and told me i'd better try again

John Sweet sends greetings from the rural wastelands of upstate NY. He is a firm believer in writing as catharsis and in the continuous search for an unattainable and constantly evolving absolute truth. His latest poetry collections include *A Flag on Fire Is a Song of Hope* (Scars Publications, 2019) and *A Dead Man, Either Way* (Kung Fu Treachery Press, 2020).

Inhaling Party Balloons Alone

I can pave a road out of cocaine bricks
Finding a way to see the intention in my mistakes
I look in the mirror and I see a mirror
Tenuously stressing over trying to stress less
I'm not blessed, this isn't a gift
I'm possessed, I am the sacrifice
To myself, I am the devious deity roaming below
In the catacombs drinking red wine through twizzlers

Combing your cat until she purrs, climbing through the burrs
And baking rye and letting ourselves cry in the dark
In December by the dying embers, never peeling ourselves away
Doing my best to forget how to remember, how to be a new me
Watching an online tutorial on how to conduct heart surgery
While conducting surgery on myself
cutting out the cancerous part; my heart
The feeling and squealing steam engine in my chest that never lets me sleep

I daydream of nightmares, to at least leave this body for a moment
I am having an in-body experience and I fucking hate it

John Maurer is a 26-year-old writer from Pittsburgh that writes fiction, poetry, and everything in-between, but his work always strives to portray that what is true is beautiful. He has been previously published in Claudius Speaks, The Bitchin' Kitsch, Thought Catalog, and more than fifty others. Social media @JohnPMaurer (johnpmaurer.com).



Thesis

Charles J. March III is a neurodivergent Navy hospital corpsman veteran currently living in California. His work has appeared in 3:AM, Sensitive Skin, Evergreen Review, Expat, tragickal, Misery Tourism, Back Patio, Versification, The Recusant, RIC Journal, Datura, Cephalopress, Ink Sweat & Tears, Queen Mob's Teahouse, Fugitives & Futurists, The Writing Disorder, Heroin Love Songs, Bareknuckle Poet, Black Scat Review, etc. More can be found at LinkedIn (@charles-j-march-iii-4114b5b2) and SoundCloud (@charles-john-march-iii).

True Fuck

His blood coagulates in the meth so you pop the needle off the point and drink what's inside, squirting it down your throat. Tastes like shit. Halfway through you think, wait, there's a better way, so you stick the rig up your ass and squirt its contents there instead. Later he fills your colon with piss and you walk all the way to Queens on the rush, zombified. Your ass flap opens up like a valve on the bridge and the piss cascades out, soaking your shorts as you walk, leaving a trail behind you on the pavement like a slug. You fold the wet shorts and place them in a plastic bag with your expired ID card, the one he didn't commandeer. They can possess you once they have your documents, Adac always warned. You place the bag on top of the wardrobe. You put his ID in the orange clutch, then apologize robotically and take it out again. He won't drink any water. Like, ever. Different tweakers come by and do chores for him, clean his apartment in exchange for getting to sit on the bed together and smoke his drugs little by little. It really is a community. He says there's cops there all the time but there's limits to what they can do, what they care about even. All you care about is the blue painting of the dog. How it glows like that in the blacklight. Lena cries and cries. I can't let you go back there, she says, on the second step of the basement, the smoke from her spliff curling into the center of the room and hovering there. I have to, you say, don't you get it? There's a painting of my childhood dog on the wall! And I'm in the painting, too, sitting on the dog's head. I don't care! Lena says. How could she fail to grasp the gravity of this karmic resonance? You haven't seen her since, not once. She stopped by your mother's motel room in Jamaica to drop off your suitcase on her way somewhere else. Or so you heard.

When he's enormous, engorged, you realize he's prehistoric. Pink scales, orange iridescence. The dinosaurs from *Dinosaurs*. In every ER one patient is a DJ. It's important to find the one, he says, and listen, really listen, to the sounds he spins. Not, like, with your ears. You have to listen deeper, on the cellular level and shit. Did he tell you that, or did it come to you in a dream? More importantly, are all paintings haunted like that? Anthony was. He cleaned the place up real good, much better than your pathetic attempts. Very organized. Lots of free meth from the big man. Eight years he's been partying, he says, and he's kept the same steady 9 to 5 gig the whole time consistently. Everything in his life is

fine more or less, he says. Yes, he's got AIDS, but who doesn't? It's not a death sentence. It comes with the territory. A badge of honor. Lots of guys want the virus these days. He's not a slut, though, wants a boyfriend. Doesn't fuck around, really. Partying doesn't make you feel horny? you ask. All it makes me feel now is normal, he says.

Nicky feels mad because you didn't ask before you squirted his blood up your ass. Fucking psycho! He doesn't get we're in a porno, you win points for these kinds of things. The totals in bubbles above everyone's heads. Lena's a big star. Millions of points. You're a big star, too, even bigger than her. Trillions, zillions. Bing bing bing bing! The others? Eh. I don't remember the middle part. The cinematic feeling. Psychosis is just learning to live in the part of your brain that realizes you're in a movie. The goat voice, the pleasure voice piped into your ear. How it curls around the sacrum, twisting up its energy and rolling through the spine. Electric in the blood. Tender, horny, terrifying, grotesque – but sweet, and slimy too. An unholy new breed of satiety. Jesus and the devil and all the little cenobites. The gray thing squirming around inside you. Little slugs are easy enough to remove later on. One popped out of your turkey sandwich the other day and scampered off. They don't like the taste of these good vibrations. I don't care, Lena says. I'll tell your parents. I'll tell your parents your secrets, you say. Like how a possum came into the basement that time, the night your dad had bedbugs. Or how your boyfriend's a small-time, bullshit con artist coke dealer with a perma-frown. He sucks! Stop dating him. It's a really good porno, though. The blue painting is a nice touch. The one of the dog. Your childhood dog, remember? That's what they're filming you through. The dog is protecting you, too, though. Anything that looks like an eye is a possible suspect. He gifted you the painting then took it back. All your gifts he buried in the sand.

It's funny, the glimmers of future shit you get in madness. That's probably why they call it crystal. He covers the dog with a blanket. He's jealous of it. The attention you give it when you could be making the bed or saying I love you or sucking him off, even though you tear his cock with your vampire teeth, craving blood instinctively. He texts the one neighbor who does the good slams in exchange for little shards. He comes over. You slam. He leaves. Your boyfriend thinks you're a vampire. You see him as more of a lizard, which gets less frightening over time. At least he's not a pedophile. Well, I mean, he is, but not the way

some guys are. Like what's the dude's face. Just kidding, I won't say his name. The one guy who you party with for three days and then he's like, welp, got to get back to work driving the retard van to Wal-Mart. What a visual – hear me out. Some method-out psycho pedo guy with a giant fro and hickeys and bite marks and lipstick smears down his neck behind the wheel of a careening van zooming down the 678 to the fucking Wal-Mart in South Jamaica, all the retards in the back choking on their lollipops and screaming bloody murder. Ha. Oh wait, he wasn't the pedophile. No, it was that other guy – the Jewish guy who loved *Peter Pan*. Yeah. That makes more sense. The *Peter Pan* guy was the pedophile.

When Nicky shows you pictures of the burnt houses, that's when you start to lose it. We did that? you say. Yup, he says, his muscley arm encircling you like a boa constrictor. You did such a good job, baby. They'll never catch us. The problem with murder, arson etc is once you're in you're fucking in. The people you do the crime with become like family. I mean, Nicky already was family. Our DNA entwined. You know your soul's been circling around his for lifetimes. Impossible to escape that kind of magnetism. It's the shit they write symphonies about. Whole operas. That Heathcliff and Cathy kind of bullshit. That one image, though. Cenobites slipping out of the closet. The shadowy ones in the windows. You miss them all the time, even to this day. How they brought you two together. They love Grindr, all kinds of dirty pictures. Viruses, bacteria, any type of invaders: Ass invaders. Space invaders. Home invaders. The thought that it might be all in your head never occurred to you. Still, a dirty trick. Telling you he knew whose mansion it was the first time. Telling you we had a right to be there. That it belonged to a friend of his. That the people who showed up were the real intruders. The ones whose house it literally was. Your first victims. But you're trying to forget about all that. The whole consent thing. The victim-perpetrator delusion. That's the gift he's given you.

People don't know what they want. You have to give it to them in spite of that. That's why they call it crystal. 'Cause it's a crystal ball that shows you everyone's motivations and desires. It shows you who wants to live and who wants to die. And it gives you the magic, the confidence you need to carry out the will of the holy destroyer who possesses you when you imbibe it. The first one had to be a trick. Because it taught you the game. It taught you the fuck. The true fuck: the magnificent magic of it. You're scared at first. But he

teaches you well. He shows you how to let its sacred rhythms move you. Overtake you. When you breathe and let it happen there's nothing you can't do. No one you can't destroy. No tower too big to smash. No soul too wild or wily to harvest.

In time the student becomes the teacher. The cat turns into the mouse. The heretic leads his own bloody inquisition. Or so they say. All you ever wanted and needed was love, and to live your life like it was a work of art. You always knew you'd die young, but not in your wildest dreams could you have pictured this outcome. You remember it all like it was yesterday. Or was it actually all yesterday, and that's why you remember it like that? You scratch your balls. Something stinks, like rotten meat. You reach for the torch, reach for the pipe. Skeletal fractal swirls spiral to the ceiling and puff outward, becoming ambient, becoming air. Baby, you want a hit? You call out in the direction of the bathroom. No response. Baby? Nicky? You alive in there? Just a sec, babe, his voice rings out. The toilet flushes. The timing is perfect. Not suspicious at all. You both laugh. All three of you. Be right there, he says. You exhale.

Todd Matthews is a horror author and the CEO of Todd Matthews Enterprises, with previous work in Surfaces, Misery Tourism, and Terror House Magazine. Find Todd on social media @tod_dmatthews.

Anatomy of a Disordered Personality: Bones

skull:

frontal cranial, neat linear fracture above right eye, below hairline; wish you knew what happened but it occurred during a blackout so that story is lost forever (to you, anyway) (God knows who knows, who was there when the fissure came to exist, who witnessed it, caused it, remembers the sound your skull made when it split) and now you have this lump on your forehead that has never receded and you're acutely aware of it, how your face looks different because of it, and you wonder if it's possible to sort of *shave* the bone away so your forehead is smooth and symmetrical again; and whenever you experience a psychiatric crisis your boyfriend will suggest that perhaps your bumped brain is actually a *tumour* or maybe *you're having a stroke* but seriously, what the fuck does he know, he's a painter and decorator from Manchester, hardly a fucking doctor, and anyway it's probably definitely fine. You'll just have this unsightly lump protruding from your forehead until the day you die. Then they'll do an autopsy and see what's inside and your boyfriend will rush to your graveside to say, "See, I TOLD you. I was right! It wasn't *mental illness*, it was a *BRAIN INJURY* that made her so fucking loopy!"

teeth:

you have 5 (!!!) wisdom teeth

they cause you *a lot* of grief

rotten / erupted / impacted / other uncomfortable adjectives

Brother says that you having an extra wisdom tooth

makes you more 'wisdomous' than others

and you fear that if you get them removed you'll lose

what little sense you have left

right hand:

3 out of 5 knuckles broken
 punched a hole in a nightclub wall
 in Guildford when you were told that
 your best friend had slept with your ex-boyfriend
 and the security guard, instead of kicking you
 off the premises, covered up the hole with a poster
 advertising an upcoming student night
 and told you "fair play" he would've
 "had the same reaction if

his mate shagged his missus”

you never had those knuckles reset and
 in a fit of rage at a later date you broke
 the broken bits and had to go to Ascot
 Hospital (the area was so fucking posh
 you laughed at the house prices in the window
 of the estate agents and expected to bump
 into the Queen but instead you had to jump
 the barriers at the train station because you
 couldn't afford the 2 stop ticket) where they
 x-rayed your claws and told you, deadpan, that
 you will lose “the full use of your right hand by
 the time you're 30” and you said, “oh, that's
 fine, I won't live long enough to experience
 that” and the doctor said, “your 2 outer metacarpals
 are shattered, who or what did you batter?” and
 you said you can't remember and/or it doesn't matter
 and there's no treatment to fix your broken bits
 so your hand exists in a state of permanent ache
 but fuck it, it's fine, you're left-handed anyway.

wrists:

skinny and weak: can't bear your body weight
 constant cracking / clicking / creaking carrying things is hard
 could never do a handstand / sometimes you take a brick to your wrists to try
 to smash the achy ivory inside as a punishment for being bad / mad / sad, so that you may
 never write or paint again or fight again but, annoyingly, your wrists are too weak to hold
 the bricks and bring them down with the force required to shatter your scaphoid to smithereens
 (another thing you can't do properly) (useless) (useless useless fucking useless)

torso:

right side: 4 cracked ribs drunk / tripped
 over in the dark landed on an old oil filled
 radiator / all these years later and they hurt
 every time you laugh or cough or sob
 into your open hands the ache radiates
 up your side and into your arms and face
 and touches your brain with sticky
 smoke-stained fingertips and a quick
 Google search informs you that there is
 no word for “fear of radiators” and
 congratulations! There's another thing
 wrong with you that no one can treat or cure
 that only serves to make you madder
 than psychiatry textbooks can account for.

knees:

“aaaagAAAAARRGGhhhhhggghhaaaaagghhh”

family history of dodgy knees

by the age of 23, you hobbled

like a little old lady

your brother, at 25, had to stop playing football and visit

a physio who told him that his knees “belong to a man of 83”

stairs are the worst

if you attempted a squat-thrust you would never get back up

you have accepted that you can no longer run for a bus

yeah, your knees will inevitably be

removed, chiselled, out

and away and replaced

with plastic kneecaps,

just like Dad had

(it's tradition! And your flimsy knees aren't even

the worst thing that you and Brother inherited

from your father's side of the family)

feet:

broken toes too many times to count
fractured metatarsals: celebrating

an England penalty, all 18 stone of
Frank the Tank jumped on your foot

you wore high heels the next day, fuck it
click, click, clickety-click

(that's the sound of your bones, not your heels on the ground)
(you wore platform wedges not stilettos, you're not *that* fucking stupid)

oh, and your pathetic creaky ankles (also weak, not sure how
they don't crumble on standing) crunch alllllllllll the way round
if you circle them:

hang on

listen...

can you hear that?

Grim, i'n't it?

That's the sound of a body
too traumatised to ever stand
surely.

HLR writes poetry and short prose about mental illness, trauma, and grief. Her work has been widely published in print and online, most recently by Misery Tourism and Punk Noir Magazine. She is the winner of The Desmond O'Grady International Poetry Prize 2021. She is the author of the highly regarded prosetry collection *History of Present Complaint* (Close to the Bone) and micro-chap *Portrait of the Poet as a Hot Mess* (Ghost City Press). HLR lives in north London where she was born and raised.

beastly

occasionally i think of that t shirt in snooper's paradise
which depicted bambi
not as you'd ever known him
a rabid gargoye
scarfing meaty chunks of his animal friends
the rabbit drooling
and missing part of his scalp
the skunk with a new-found gap in his guts
watching in horror
as his intestines spilled
out onto the rusty floor
the deer staring down, rapacious
and feral
insurrectionist strength fuelling his spindly legs
devastating hunger coating his bloodied tongue

i bought the shirt
and later returned it
(i didn't quite have the stomach)
but his eyes stay with me
now belonging to lonely men in low-lit bars
that persistent ravenousness
that corroding desperation
i wonder what turned them, too

Alex Jacobs is a poet and writer from Bristol, UK. His poetry evokes powerful flavours of sensation in short bursts and experiments with form as a framing method. His articles and creative writing have been featured by The Sick Love Zine, TransActual, and Trans Pride South West. You can find more of Alex's writing at alexjacobs.substack.com.

Wing Shadows

Once upon a time, I had an idea that we were one soul in two bodies, but I don't know how true that was. I'm pretty sure that some serious mistakes were made, that perhaps something was separated that should never have been touched, that perhaps something was warped and wronged somehow. I still remember clawing my way up from the deep, through gouts of heaving mud and poison, hauling myself through the cracked fault lines where the dark bled through – because even now, after so many years, it still feels like my tainted soul is mocking me, so I hide in this tiny niche that pain has carved behind the world's many judgements.

We loved each other in the way of all monsters – with the gentlest of claws, as if the other was the only piece of beauty that ever mattered. The problem was, that kind of love, it's inexcusable, and it never stops being hungry. No matter how deep we would tear into each other, it would never be enough, not until one of us had crushed himself completely into the space taken up by the other. We didn't know any limits, and that was what made us things to be afraid of. You think loving made us human? Our bodies are what made us human. Loving is what made us sick.

We wash the small pink triangles down with cold beer, the soft fuzz of the cheap motel room closing in around us, the light in the air weighed down to the corners of the room. Suddenly, his hand lands on my arm, and he gasps, and then purrs, before sliding it up to my shoulder. Fingertip touches, rain-tender, blood-hungry.

“Oh, you're so soft,” he murmurs, and now both of his hands are on me. “You're so warm, so alive.”

His body is burning up, and he's making these little gasping noises between kisses, as if this is somehow new to him.

I get distracted briefly because the pills are kicking in, and the carpet has suddenly become the most interesting carpet I have ever seen. It's so soft and velvety that it feels almost wet – but then I'm back in the room, and I'm stroking *his* arms this time, ripping off his t-shirt, dragging him down on top of me, pulling his hair, kissing him again, deeply. The noise he makes into my mouth is obscene, and he's gasping for breath now, rolling against me, and even his voice is higher than usual – breathless to the point of being whiny. I'd be lying if I said I didn't like it.

"Jesus Christ," I moan softly as he takes me into his mouth, teeth scraping over my jutting hip bone.

"Jesus isn't here, stupid," he spits. "He can't help you now."

His voice sounds like the haunting echo of a fake laugh in an empty room, but then I let go, and there's nothing but the slow, slick noise between us.

After a while, he stops, his head turning sideways, humming shakily at all the new sensations – so, to distract him, I flip him over, kissing my way down his chest, watching him jump while I make my way over his stomach. When I take his cock into my mouth, he tries to grab my hair with both hands, which doesn't really work, so he huffs and glares down at me, looking amused and annoyed.

"Your hair is too short," he mutters, and I laugh. The darkness swallows the sound.

Pushing him back down onto the bed, his spine feels like a length of knotted ribbon under my palm, and as he stretches out his thin arms, every blue vein shining through his pale skin, I see the straight razor scars gleaming in the inverted darkness.

It's like nothing I've ever felt before. I know that his nails have cut my shoulder blades because I can feel the blood running down my spine, dripping over my bare ass, but I am more distracted with the sight of his pouty lips and pained, blushing face than the assault on my back. A small wound has opened up by his left collarbone where I must have bitten him or something, and I keep digging my tongue into it, biting down on the skin surrounding it so that I can taste his coppery blood running down the sides of my mouth. I've never felt so fucking predatory.

I know for a fact that nobody else has even come close to taking this perfect boy out of his box, and yet, here I am, taking him out, playing with him – ruining him like a chewed-up plaything, and all the while he's trying to look back at me, eyes wide and shining, mouth hanging open, as if he has been waiting for this his whole life.

I can tell when he gets close because for a second, he's quiet, and then it's this crescendo, this repetition of something miraculous. It hits me like a physical blow, lingering, hot and slow as molten lead. I nearly choke. I think I might be dying for a second because I can't seem to catch my breath, but god, what a fucking beautiful way to die.

I've been around for a while, of course, but this feels different. It's not that this boy is innocent, of course he fucking isn't. But underneath all that shivering, naked eeriness, there's a curiosity, a curiosity that I'm guessing is probably why he Fell – and now, his

blood is wet and red just like any boy's from earth, even though when I look up, I can still see the shadows that his wings cast, stretched out across the entire wall.

Much later that night, something in my throat swells until my chest hurts. He's stroking my hair, whispering to me, but I can't hear a word over my own fucking heartbeat.

"Was it that dream again?" the boy says. I'm not sure which one he means.

"I guess?"

"When I have a bad dream, I sometimes try and make patterns with the stars," he says, quite seriously, waving his hands at the heavens. His fingers smell like cum and weed.

"There are no stars, just the ceiling," I say. But he merely smiles.

Something strange and immortal breathes into the silence. Wing shadows slowly fold themselves closed. Like map contours. Or jigsaw pieces.

M. T. Coombe is a queer multidisciplinary artist living in the UK. He is fascinated by the idea of modern fairy-tales. His writings are based on youth / obsession / loss / memory / dreams / addiction / folklore, and apocalyptic landscapes. He has been published in X-R-A-Y Literary Magazine, Misery Tourism, Expat Press, Bear Creek Gazette, SCAB, and more. He is currently writing his debut novel. Find him at trashprincemusic.com/writing and on Twitter @trashprincemuse.

Road (an excerpt)

Here is the showerhead, and here is Barni, having what those in the biz call a Personal Existential Crisis (PEC, which, when said aloud, is pronounced like “peck” by the initiated speaker). I mean, the water’s not even running and underneath it is this big flunky slice of a man with his watershed eyes and asymmetric balance. And the man thinks he’s just seen God, and he’s got nowhere to go, and it cost him nothing to get into this shower, sure, but then it cost a couple of bucks to get the water going hot, and Barni wasn’t about to take a cold shower, not in winter, okay, so he’s just been sitting out on the street begging for spare change for a while, a scary man, smelly, covered in his own dried excrement, it took hours, you’d be surprised, but anyway, here’s Barni, in the middle of his PEC about to put some dollars in the meter and turn the water on to hot.

When Barni was a kid, his parents had a shower enclosed in its own little vacuum. You’d shut the doors behind you and then it was just you and white walls, glistening with little specks of black mould. Okay, so it wasn’t ideal, but it was somewhere to be alone, and somewhere that Barni came to do his thinking. He’d stood in that shower without water running plenty of times, most notably when Jenny told him age twelve that no, she wouldn’t go out with him, actually, leave me alone, creep, and then threw the drawing he’d done for her in the green rubbish bin at the edge of the tennis court they had both been standing on. Barni hadn’t played tennis too much after that, which had made him a little sad years later when he read the first section or two of *Infinite Jest*, actually, the tennis had been the reason he’d stopped, and he’d spent some time sitting in the shower after quitting that book, too, feeling like a failure once again.

The opening of a small wormhole, then. Barni, age twelve, rejected by Jenny. Barni, age nineteen, rejecting David Foster Wallace for the first time. Barni now, thirty, full-on PEC underway, about to scrub away something that literally came from inside himself.

Time travel is real in memory, and Barni is doing it.

He puts one toe into each hole in the drain grille and turns on the water. When Barni was a kid, it’s hard to remember what age now, he’d read some instruction manual (obviously

a joke) for a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) swimming pool. Plug the grille, water on, let it rise, water off, swim around, unplug grille, water drain, back to an empty shower and nobody knows you broke the rules. Barni never asked why the book didn't just suggest taking a bath. But, whatever, it didn't work anyway, Barni's toes didn't plug enough and there was too much empty space around the sides.

Well, really, it's worth knowing, probably, that if you were to see Barni walking along the street, you'd be much more likely to notice the empty space around him than Barni himself. Sure, you'd know a man was there, but you wouldn't look at him. The world around him would take on a slightly brighter hue. You might notice a misspelled corporate logo that you hadn't before. You might finally appreciate the color hot pink for the first time. Barni has this effect and he has this effect without even realising it.

(Those units that kicked Barni out after the microwave incident have receded into dullness themselves without Barni around).

So: the water's running and Barni's feet are over the grille. Of course, he's not going to succeed at creating a homemade swimming pool, and even if he did, it wouldn't be homemade, it'd be Made In Public (MIP), a DIY MIP swimming pool, but anyway, the DIY MIP dream is exactly that, a dream. Instead, the only effect Barni's feet over the grille have is that his own dried diarrhoea doesn't come off, it just dampens and bits of it start floating around in the bottom of the water. It's probably not good for Barni's foot fungus, but then, what is, and actually, it takes Barni a surprisingly long time to recognize how disgusting the situation is, in fact, by then the water's running cold and Barni's quest for spare change wasn't worth anything after all.

A few dollars spent on a few minutes of hot water.

A worthwhile spending decision, wasted.

The showerhead's spitting cold water angrily at Barni's head and he just has to get on with the cleansing job underway, so, fine, he does it with his bare hands and then rinses his hands off too. There's no real shower soap around, but what do you expect, it's a public

shower, although in the next room over (concrete, of course) there's a public toilet with hand-soap, which will have to do. Barni leaves the shower running and makes a mad dash for the hand-soap, well and truly in the nude, which luckily nobody sees. Spilling half of the soap he's collected on the way back to the shower is a crying shame, but Barni has no desire to extend this ordeal any longer, so he makes do with what he has, gets back under the water, gives himself a quick rinse, this time with a fragrance resembling something nice in the palm of his hand, and then stands there in the nude for an hour or so to drip dry. He doesn't have a towel, of course.

While he's in there drying, he thinks about a few things and notices a few others. He thinks about:

my mother saying "I want you to drink your milk, I want you to drink your milk."

losing my virginity to Maya Richter in the women's bathroom at high school.

Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca*.

the way Gillian Anderson looks so beautiful and so afraid in *The X Files*.

the couch in my father's living room was so uncomfortable because the cushions jutted out too far.

the elderly woman at my father's funeral who complimented the sandwiches at the reception.

how terrible it would be to die drowning.

the fact that maybe I should try to get some sleep soon, good sleep.

the fact that there's no good reason for me to actually try to find this Marjorie anyway.

the fact that there's no good reason for me not to.

my mother saying “I want you to drink your milk. I want you to drink your milk.”

He notices:

the mould on the roof is a funny constellation and looks a little bit like a rabbit trying to chase a zebra, but then he looks at it for a little too long and the zebra transforms into a man with three legs limping along trying to get away from an alligator, and the alligator is much bigger than the man so he’s definitely going to be eaten soon, but in this glorious pre-death moment he’s still fighting, this man with three legs, he’s still fighting, and it’s there cemented on the ceiling in a patch of mould, a crystalline moment of terror in a public shower, it would stay there forever if only the mould would stop growing. If only the mould wasn’t alive. A living organism creating an accidental portrait of death.

above the towel rail (of which, of course, there’s no towel) on the windowsill is a key. God knows what it could be used for – there aren’t any locks around – but Barni takes it anyway. He isn’t taking any chances.

On Facebook

they look so wholesome
family barbecues
and island vacations

ugly sweaters at Christmas
lots of hugs and smiles

photos of him
with his daughter
at graduation

shots of her with coworkers
and friends from church

nobody would ever guess
how well she sucked me off
while he filmed it

or how the two of them
snowballed my cum
after he handed the camera
to me, and said—

Here, make sure
you get a close-up
of this

Brian Rihlmann lives in Reno, Nevada. His work has appeared in many magazines, including *Chiron Review*, *The Main Street Rag*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, and *New York Quarterly*. He has authored three collections of poetry, most recently *A Screaming Place* (2021) by Cajun Mutt Press.

Sadist's Corset

Mercurial fluids flow back up into a sweaty bag of
 pinched neurons forming a head. Do you
 remember when we crushed those with our
 sphincters and they PAID us for it? They let us do
 that to them. Hell, they MADE us.

*Meat eats meat to produce
 more meat to eat*

Hey listen I'm not the one going in circles here I
 can't stand being dizzy ALL the time, it's only the
 nitrous oxide I let fuck me now. And I don't care
 about a monkey's paw being on a blowout sale
 I'm reckless enough with my wish fulfilment as
 it is and besides it's always too late
 to go back home, isn't it.

*My name's the sound a dog
 makes when it's all alone and
 in heat*

Have you ever tried dirt before? It's pretty over-
 powering, reminds me of that suit and tie prick
 that probably gets off smearing his own
 fermented shits ("aged like fine wine, baby") all
 over the national treasury before leaving with the
 fool's gold they've kept stashed in there ever
 since they stopped printing money and switched
 to fully automated corporate credit.

*"For [the martyr],
 everything is easy, because
 [the martyr] accepts
 everything. Nothing is
 alien to [them]."*

I LOVE scissoring you, I really do, but
 I wanna know what scissoring a
 foreclosed house would feel like.
 I need liquidated assets to rain down
 from the newly domed sky and sit
 on my face until I remember what being
 fucked by consumer-grade subjectivity
 feels like.

*The world is a
 representation of Capital
 (read: God) becoming Itself
 through Itself—*

Sometimes all you need
 is a puppy or a pretentious square of

chocolate or a dream about stabbing
someone who always dreamed
about being stabbed. The good news is that
Big Pharma heard our cries for this
American Dream 2.0 and is marketing
a drug that stimulates one's stabbing and
dreaming capabilities, thus leading to a
much more efficient trauma-release cycle
that can be (re)produced exponentially
with
minimal effort!

*All hail the tears of blood
de Sade cried for the
narcissistic shitheels
who think they can become
a singularity by beating
their reflection with a belt
in public*

This has been a public insanity
plea on behalf of America—
I'm sorry and you're welcome.

Cade Miller (they/them) is a person currently living in Chicago who sometimes writes poetry and other times does theory. Having recently received their MA, they hope to pursue a PhD so that one day they'll have the privilege of indoctrinating the youth before we all die of a bad case of late capitalist decay meets total climate collapse. They love cats and vegan pizza.

Born in the Summer

Josh Peterson is an American writer and collage artist. His work deals with abjection, beauty, childhood, and desolation, most often simultaneously. Two nonfiction novels, *Granite City Blues* (2019) and *Spring Rain, Summer Heat* (2020), are published by Amphetamine Sulphate. He lives in Vermont.

See What Comes of This

1.

I just want to know who the actors are cuz that little twink was emo as hell

The kid isn't used to having sex yet.

It's hot watching a boy get deflowered ;-)

2.

But you can just tell from his personality that he's not like that at all. He's hardly some promiscuous, life-of-the-party, centre of attention. It's all about wanting to be liked with him – that need for some sort of validation, even if just a smile. Confrontation, disapproval – this kind of shit breaks him. He's not strong like that. I'd love you to meet him one time. He's a kind soul.

3.

This video genuinely concerns me and I don't know why

Why

Those moans...

Yes! Depraved, degrading, brutal, aggressive. Utterly masculine.

Hot right

4.

I could barely even leave the house for a few years after I turned 17. I was so depressed I didn't even want to die. Just vegetate online, not eat, be haunted. Read books written by authors who'd died decades before I was born. You'd think this would be a total red flag for anyone around me in a position of care, or authority. Fuck, for any potential future relationships, were there any chance of those. But, I guess, sometimes the red flags also attract the bulls. I hadn't really counted on that, or was too naive, or whatever. Maybe I wanted it.

5.

he doesn't seem happy

I just thought he was emo

Haha, same

I'd give him something to really suffer about, fuck his little boy pussy till he breaks down

6.

After all that, they told me there was nothing wrong with me. Right. I am going to try to sleep again, because it is too cold and dark to do anything else. The cats are fed and it seems one of them wants to cuddle up. Life is shit and then you die... but at least we have cats showing some love... even if they are just seeking warmth.

7.

Hey Jeff if you want I can get some of my friends and then we all can take turns fucking and breeding you if that's what you want that wouldn't be a problem for us to do that to you we can travel to you fuck you piss on you torture you

give the poor kid a break.

A break... and your loads...

8.

I got caught in a summer downpour heading to school this one time. The rain soaked me to my skin, my shirt sticking to my delicate frame. Some girl in the year above called me Pigeon Chest and a load of people laughed. It stung.

The guy who, a few years later, would pay to stub cigarettes out on that same chest, whilst jerking off and talking about his kids, reminded me of that, inadvertently. He would murmur things about my body feeling so fragile, like a bird skeleton. He liked knowing that he could shatter me.

A couple of the kids tried to keep the Pigeon Chest nickname going, but it soon died off. I suppose even they didn't find it that funny.

9.

Wish this is how I spent my teen years. Being used by older men. When I was attractive.

You still are. You just lost your confidence, that's all.

That kid could be me at age 15-16 when I would cruise the bus station and park toilets to suck cock. I never knew about the truckers and service stations or I would have been there, too. Although a kid my age would have been suspect in that sort of venue.

Fuck yeh. Wanna DM?

Jamie Giles is a writer and artist based in the UK. He is forever getting deleted from Instagram but is currently on there as @jamiemieseroticartist_. Other links can be found at linktr.ee/jamiemieserotica.

Beautiful Corpse

Every date I go on is dissected
as though the spirit of Dahmer
has been resurrected in my mind,
even though I was eleven when he died.
Each final kiss an opening
for a chloroformed love letter
written in the drag marks through
a wooded wilderness,
signed in blood and finished
with a decapitated head
as the final period.

I cannot look at a naked body
without seeing the lines of the autopsy
I want to perform across its
barren landscape.
The pretty face that initially drew my attention
shattered beneath my fist.
There is no beauty that I cannot
rearrange with my bare hands.
If butchers are meat artists,
then I am a meat poet,
reducing beauty to its purest form
without changing its structure.

I have a thing for the poet Ocean Vuong.
Each time I hear him speak,
I want to shut him up with my cock.
Silence those beautiful words
with an erection so solid
it would shatter his teeth.

Blood and cum could be the inspiration
for the next poem he will never write.
Whilst riding his ass, I'll stamp down
on his hands as I orgasm,
crush them to dust so that they can
no longer create the beauty they desire.
Broken fingers like the broken cocks
of Greek statues. Adonises
with a secret lost to fantasy.

Self-made, this boat is not looking
for a port to settle.
A relationship is not the end goal.
An archipelago of asses, islands of flesh.
I'm not dating guys for their brains.
A drill and some battery acid will render
a sexy man into a sleepy-eyed cum dump,
silent in their servitude.
Sex is not about them; it is about me.
My pleasure in their beauty,
or rather the destruction of it.
The destruction of innocence.

A body floating in the crook of a river bend.
Naked and bloated,
coloured black and blue.
An exotic water lily flowering
with the scent of decrepitude.
The beauty of life is its decomposition.
Like Ocean Vuong wrote:
On Earth we re briefly gorgeous,
but in our decay, we are exquisite.
In our deaths, we become angels

before returning to infinity.

With my hand around your throat,
I want to see the light fade from your eyes
as I shoot life up your ass.

The circle only ends
when you sow seed into dead earth.

A kind god creates beauty,
a wise one destroys it.

An honest person knows
even the ugliest pig
can become a beautiful corpse.

Dominic Lyne is a London-based writer. Drawing from personal experiences, his work aims to shine a light upon the darker sides of humanity and society.

Hair, Scalp and Skin Oil Makes for Great Lube

My eyes fixate on the Saturday sunlight that bleeds through the slits of the venetians. I squint to make out the time on the digital clock that sits on my desk. *1:05 pm*. I got in pretty late last night. I went to the booths after work. I wasn't that tired, but horny as hell. I got my dick sucked in the parking lot by some dirty redneck. We could have gotten busted by a deputy, but what the fuck is life without risk? I'll do it anywhere, anytime when I get like I do.

I'm up and I got a hard-on from hell. I pull the covers off and massage it through my underwear. That and a T-shirt are all I'm wearing. The air conditioner is broken, and all I got is my ceiling fan, so less is more. I'm thinking about that hick's warm mouth on my dick. Damn, he gave good head. The ceiling fan swirls frantic above me. I slide my fingers into the panel of my underwear and take my dick out. It's so hard. I think of Jeremy from work as I play with it. I wonder how big his is. I've asked, and he says, "I'm not telling you that!" He's nineteen and straight as hell. I tell him I give such good head; I can make a man's knees buckle. "C'mon, man, that's nasty," he says.

Precum forms at the piss slit. I smear it around with the tip of my index finger. I put it to my lips for a taste. Not too salty. I wish someone was here to suck me off. I wish Jeremy was here sliding his dick down my throat. I love to jack off. I reach down and slide a finger into my ass crack. It's so hot and sweaty. It opens right up when it's getting rimmed. I miss Billy. He was good at it. He would tug my cheeks apart and really get his face in. His mouth felt so good on my asshole. It was just the way he would lick and suck it. Just thinking about it has got my dick so fuckin' hard right now. I feel like getting nasty. I'm out of lotion. I used the last of it after I showered last night. I go to the bathroom. I don't want to get out of bed; I don't want to take my hand off this dick. I search for a substitute. I think of toothpaste, but it's too thick and it burns. I look into the medicine cabinet of pills, cough drops, and Alka-Seltzer until I come to a bottle of hair, scalp and skin oil. It's all I got, so it will have to do. I've used everything but this. Baby oil, hair grease, pancake syrup, even butter. I lie down, flip open the top, and squeeze just enough into the hand I'm jacking off with. I slather it on slowly. Fuck, it feels good! Doesn't burn either. I peel off my T-shirt and drop it to the floor. I pull down my underwear to my ankles, then fling them off my feet. They land on top of my dirty sneaks that stink up my room. My dick is getting harder as I pinch my nipples with oily fingers. I'm thinking of Jeremy taking me from behind. The two of us butt-ass naked. He's not so big, so I can take his dick to the nuts. "Your ass is warm like a pussy," he says to me. I bet Jeremy can fuck. I jack my dick between my thumb and index finger. Damn, it feels good. I love jacking off. I'm fucking my fist. This stuff is so slick. The air from the ceiling fan is cool against my skin. I give more attention to my dickhead. It drives me crazy with pleasure. I want it in somebody's mouth, some down-low thug's lips wrapped around it. I wish Bill was here to suck on these balls, eat my

asshole. I apply more oil, lots of it this time. I stain the sheets with the stuff, but I don't care. I'm fuckin' horny. I'm fingering my asshole while jacking off. My asshole swallows my finger. I want someone to teach me to be a better bottom. I'm sick of being a top. I wish someone was here fuckin' me right now. More like ten or so fat, hairy hicks bomb-rush in here, tie me to the bed, and have their way with my black ass. Yeah. Hell yeah! All musty and stank on top of me, one dirty dick after another fucking me, their grubby fingers in my mouth. They're all taking turns using my mouth and raping this booty with their fat, stinking dicks. Mmm, I'm so horny! I need to get fucked! I wanna suck some cock. Oh, Jeremy! Fuck me, Jeremy! Take this ass! Fucked from both ends. Dick in mouth and ass! Eat my butt, Bill! All that dick in me. Damn, this feels good! Big black dick! Love jackin' off! Fuck yeah! I'm gonna come! Feels so good! Finger-fuckin' myself. I wish someone was here to sit on my dick right now. I bet Jeremy's got a tight asshole. He would never tell me. I bet it's so sweaty after work. I would rim him so hard. Damn! Jackin' this dick! I wanna taste Jeremy's asshole. I want him to sit on my face. Lick his asshole clean, suck his balls. Ram that twink cock down my faggot ass throat. Fuck yeah! I'm gonna shoot a huge load. Jeremy's ass tastes so good. I can smell it on my lips. Suck hard on his asslips. I wish someone was here right now. Anybody. Big dicks, tight assholes. I need a stiff dick in my mouth. Somebody fuck me! Who wants to fuck me? I wish there was someone I could call to have phone sex with. Collin and I used to have phone sex. He was good at getting me off. Collin can suck a mean dick. I'm close to coming. I'm thinking of Collin sucking me off, riding this dick. He's got a deep asshole. Shit, this feels good! All that dick in me. Fat, nasty rednecks taking their turn. I'm such a slut. Fuck me, Jeremy! I wonder what Collin is doing. I wish he was here on this dick. Come in my ass, Jeremy! It's so hard to get laid in Tallahassee. My finger deep in my ass. I'm about to come! Go for it! Go for it! Fuck me, Collin! Somebody fuck me! I'm comin'! Ah fuck! Jeremy, fuck! Feels so good! Black dick. Sweat-oily booty hole. This stuff is good lube. Give me some dick! So fuckin' horny! Oh fuck, I'm comin'! Oh, Collin, ride this dick! Fuck me, Jeremy! Somebody fuck me, pleeeassse!

Shane Allison has had numerous poems and short stories published over the years. His new collection, *Sweet Sweat*, is out from Hysterical Books. He lives and hates it in Tallahassee, Florida.

Finish Line

1. The Hurdler

Coach Williamson's ass crosses the finish line first; his dick, delts, and elbows follow not far behind; the hurdler named Nash finishes third. Leaping over the body at the last moment, Nash lands awkwardly on his left leg and feels a sizzling bolt of pain scream up to the base of his hip. As Nash writhes on the ground next to Coach Williamson, the stench of shit and body odor fills the spring air.

Later, when the ambulance crawls down the center of the track, its blocky white body clogging lanes two through five, the runners, coaches, and parents from both schools whisper among themselves while the cinders quietly crunch beneath the slowly revolving tires. Both Nash and Coach Williamson end up in the back of the ambulance. During the drive to the hospital, Nash is awake and talking to the EMTs. Coach Williamson is not.

A few nights after the surgery on his torn Achilles tendon, Nash lies in his hospital bed and dreams of Coach Williamson. In the dream, Nash is running in the finals of the 110-meter high hurdles at the county meet, and Coach Williamson's body is a felled sugar maple lying across the finish line. As Nash gets closer to the end of the race, his stride maintaining the perfect rhythm of a three-step cadence, he sees that Coach Williamson's sugar maple body is split open and rotting on the inside. Black, fleshy heartwood yawns open to the gold sunlight; cardinals and blue jays suck sap from the porous bark. Just before Nash reaches the final hurdle, Coach Williamson turns his rotting wooden head and bellows the two words he's been yelling at Nash during every race for the past three years, ever since he caught the fourteen-year-old Nash smoking a joint and crying by himself underneath the bleachers beside the football field.

Left leg, left leg, Coach Williamson says. Left leg!

But Nash can't lift his left leg. He just keeps running at full speed. Moments before he crashes into the last hurdle and seriously fucks up his balls, he jolts awake.

Gripping the thick plastic railing of his hospital bed, Nash gulps a few wheezing breaths. He reaches for his balls to make sure they're okay. He raises his left leg an inch and gently lowers the heavy cast. He's okay. His dick and balls are okay. Everything is

going to be okay. But Coach Williamson is still dead. And for the first time, Nash understands that someday he will be too.

2. The Shot Putter

Lying on his back on the track, the waistband of his jeans cutting into the sides of his spread knees, the shot putter named Krug slides a second finger, this one the pointer, into his ass. He nearly shoots his load when he feels the sweet little stretch and pop of that second finger nosing through the tight halo of muscle ringing his asshole, but a wash of cold wind and the bark of a distant dog distract him at just the right moment. His dick twitches once, twice, then relaxes a bit.

With the image of Coach Williamson's beautiful face hovering in his head, Krug gropes in the dark for the bottle of peach schnapps he stole from his mom's not-so-secret stash in the basement linen closet. Ever since his dad died five years ago, his mom has spent her life sipping schnapps during the day and stumbling through a three-to-eleven custodial shift at the middle school during the night. Even when she's home, she hardly misses Krug; she won't miss the schnapps.

Finding the neck of the bottle, Krug takes a long swig and swallows. Then he takes another drink and spits the schnapps into his right palm. A feathery sunflower of warmth blooms in his chest. A twig snaps behind a bush a few feet away.

Krug wraps his dripping right hand around his dick and starts pumping. Closing his eyes, he imagines Coach Williamson lying naked beside him, kissing the sensitive spot behind his ear. Krug rolls onto his side and pistons his asshole with the first two fingers of his left hand. At the end of each stroke, the knuckle of his left pinky smacks against his tailbone.

A cold, sparkly feeling wells up in Krug's stomach. As the feeling expands, Krug thinks back to all the secret moments he shared with Coach Williamson over his past three years on the track team: the sad smiles, the loving stares, the lingering handshakes that seemed to last forever. That time they talked about their alcoholic mothers for two hours straight while riding the bus up to Syracuse for the state meet.

Moments later, a loud rustling comes from the bush beside the track. Krug ignores it. He's so close now, so connected to Coach Williamson, that he wouldn't stop for a bulldozer. Warm tears skitter down Krug's cheeks. He bites his bottom lip and hisses through clenched teeth.

Oh god, fuck me, baby, I love you so much, I've loved you since the day we met, please come back to me, Coach, I can't live without you, I can't—

A guy's voice cuts through the frantic huff of Krug's breathing.

"Jesus Christ, Krug, what the fuck are you doing?" the guy on Krug's left says with a laugh.

Jolted out of his fantasy, Krug barks a startled yelp, curls into a fetal position, and squints through the dark in the direction of the voice. Standing over him is a distance runner named Anson. Anson is holding his phone at arm's length and staring at the screen.

"Nothing! I—" Krug says. He rolls away from Anson and starts pulling up his pants when he realizes Anson is holding his phone like that because he's filming a video of him. "Jesus! Shut it off! You fucking asshole!"

Anson presses a button on his phone, and the flashlight clicks on. He laughs as Krug flails on the ground and scrambles to pull up his pants.

"Looks like someone's got a hard-on for our dearly departed Coach," Anson says with another laugh. "Literally. I mean look at that python. Not bad, Krug."

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Krug yells. "He just had a heart attack right in front of us! What kind of psychopath are you?"

Anson shrugs.

"Eh, he was a dick," Anson says. "I could take it or leave it."

"Jesus, you—" Grunting in shame and anger, Krug struggles to bend his stone-hard erection into his jeans; when this doesn't work, he grabs the half-empty bottle of schnapps and wings it at the tiny white sun blazing from Anson's phone.

The bottle misses the phone but hits the man holding it. Anson drops his phone and clutches his head with both hands; blood leaks between his fingers. He slumps to one knee. He groans, laughs for a few seconds, then groans again.

Hearing this laughter, Krug scrambles to his feet and picks up the schnapps bottle. He slams the bottle against Anson's phone. The flashlight cuts out. The screen fractures into a spiderweb. Krug bashes the phone three more times, then turns to Anson. Anson falls to all fours. Dark red blood scuds over his eyes, his nose, the corners of his mouth. Moments later, Anson makes a sound that's either a cough or a laugh, but at this point, Krug doesn't care which it is.

With his slowly softening dick flopping in the chilly air, Krug begins smashing the bottle against the back of Anson's head. Following the first strike, Anson crumples to the ground and shields his head with his arms. Following the fourth, Anson goes limp and sprawls face-down on the track. Following the seventh, the bottle breaks at the neck and slices open Krug's palm. Feeling no pain except for that of his tired, aching arm, Krug clambers to his feet and sucks in a long, cold breath. He looks up at the glowing silver moon and laughs. He tucks his jizz-slicked junk into his jeans. Trudging back to the parking lot, he climbs into his truck and starts the drive to the highway.

Steve Gergley is a writer and runner from Warwick, New York. His fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in Atticus Review, Cleaver Magazine, Hobart, Pithead Chapel, Maudlin House, and others. In addition to writing fiction, he has composed and recorded five albums of original music. He tweets @GergleySteve. His fiction can be found at stevegergleyauthor.wordpress.com.

AFTERWORD

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