

SCAB

ISSUE #10

CONTENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE.....	1
KILL BARNEY (TODD MATTHEWS).....	2
LIKE CHAMPAGNE AND ROHYPNOL AND A FINGER UP THE ASS (JOHN SWEET)	6
INTENSE-DESIRE-AS-SELF-LOVE (TOM BLAND).....	9
LOVE ON THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON (F. MICHAEL LAROSA).....	11
JEREMY (SHANE ALLISON)	15
SPIT SPREAD, SURROUNDING HIS STILL-BOYFRIEND'S DEAD-WEIGHT HEAD AS IF IT WERE SOMETHING TOSSED AND FORGOTTEN AND CAUGHT IN THE RAIN. (DREW ZEIBA).....	16
UNCLEFUCKER (SINGER JOY)	20
NO TITLE (GEORGE BIDWELL).....	23
DERACINATED ENFORCING HUMAN "NATURE" (AUSTIN MILES).....	25
SOFTCORE (RENÉ BENNETT)	26
IT SUITS YOU SO WELL (RAY VINCENT).....	27
SOME THINGS (JCK HENRY)	28
A FRIDAY NIGHT IN DALMENY (R. A. GALLAGHER)	29
FLOATING THROUGH THE TRIBUTARY: A GLITTER (JOSEPH GOOSEY).....	32
OBSOLESCENCE (KRISTIN GARTH)	34
MATTHEW 26:27 (CHARLOTTE HALEY).....	44
THE COOKING OF FILTH (ADAM ODRZYWOLEK)	45
CUERVO AND BONES (NICHOLAS ALEXANDER HAYES).....	49
OMAR [AN EXCERPT FROM THE DEVIL'S RANCH] (DAVID KUHNLEIN)	51
GOD COMPLEX (DANIEL SHEEN).....	54
BEATING THE DEAD (RICHIE FOUL).....	55
COVID FUCK #F20BBX (DOMINIC LYNE)	56
THESE THINGS NEVER REALLY LEAVE YOU (JAMIE GILES).....	59
AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN STUART BUCK (BEAR CREEK PRESS) AND MARK WARD (AUTHOR OF HIKE)	65
AFTERWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	70

EDITOR'S NOTE

What the fuck. The 10th issue! Thanks for all the love & support & filth & body fluids over the years! Look what we've made again!

March 2022

D.

Kill Barney

All the kids on the playground talked about killing Barney, but I was the only one with the cajones to actually get it done. I snuck out of our trailer in the dead of night and hitched a ride down to Dallas where the Barney studio was. This was back in '09. I'd just turned seven. My mom and my stepdad were passed out on booze or dope or whatever on the couch. I made myself a couple bologna sandwiches and tossed them in a paper sack with some Ding Dongs and four-packs of Oreos. Carefully, I placed the sack lunch in my backpack along with a flashlight, two cans of Diet Mountain Dew, and my stepdad's Bowie knife. Then I walked past the couch and out the door. They didn't wake up. Just lay there drooling on themselves. It was pathetic.

It took an hour to walk to the Cracker Barrel by the entrance to the interstate. I sat on a rock by where the trucks pull in, and this guy with no legs in a rusty Corolla picked me up right away. He had fake metal legs he used to press the gas and brake pedals, which I thought was pretty awesome. His car was filled with empty Coke cans, and the ashtrays overflowed with ash and cigarette butts. "You want a Coke?" the guy asked. "Sure," I said. He cracked open a can and handed it over. "Can I have a cigarette, too?" I asked. "Damn, kid, you already smoke?" said the man. "Shit yeah," I said. It was true. I smoked my mom's Virginia Slims all the time. Sometimes my stepdad's Kools, but I had to be careful with those. If he ever noticed any were missing, there'd be hell to pay. This was before everyone started vaping. I hate that shit. Vaping is for pussies and fags and no one else.

From Pauls Valley to Dallas, it's a two-hour drive. The guy with no legs lived in Sulphur, but he said what the hell, he wasn't doing anything anyway. He told me he was on disability. He couldn't work on account of the fact that he lost both legs in Vietnam. He said he was never married but that sometimes he went to Oklahoma City to have a Chinese hooker masturbate him in a massage parlor. I smoked seven of his Marlboros and drank three Cokes. He gave me a pack of Raspberry Zingers, too, "for the road." I put the Zingers in the front pouch of my backpack for easy access. I was going to stick them in my sack lunch, but I didn't feel like unzipping everything. I almost thought the guy was going to try and get me to masturbate him, like one of those hookers from the massage parlor. But he didn't. He was a nice guy.

When we pulled up in front of the studio, it was still dark out. I'd told the guy I was going to be on TV, and that's why I needed the ride. I'm not sure he really believed me, but what did he care? "So long, kid," he said. "Sayonara, sucker," I replied. I opened the passenger door and hopped out. Five

or six Coke cans clattered out after me. I slammed the door shut, and the car sped away. Then I snuck into the studio and waited for Barney.

You think Barney's a pushover when you see him on TV. All he does is sing those stupid songs and teach kids about math. But in real life, he's an imposing presence. He's a goddamn T-Rex after all. Do you know how big those things are? How fearsome? Each of his teeth was as big as my head. Giant claws like daggers. Back in his dressing room, they fed him whole troughs full of rabbits. I know this because I saw them wheel one in on a dolly. There were thirty or forty rabbits in the trough, all stacked on top of each other, eyes wide, wiggling their noses frantically. I think they all knew what was about to go down but were powerless to stop it. I waited until the assistants wheeled the empty trough back out of the room before making my move.

Stealthily, I crept into the dressing room and hid beneath a chair. Barney was huddled in the corner, too focused on the syringe sticking out of his arm to notice my entrance. He kept pulling the needle out and sliding it back in. I guess he couldn't find the vein. Every time he missed, he'd mutter a few curse words under his breath. Flecks of greenish spittle sputtered from the edges of his mouth. Finally, he gave up trying the arm and went for one of the veins in his foot. Barney was massive. That's something that gets lost on TV, too. He's tall, yeah, but he's also fat. Engorged, swollen. Like late-career Brando only purple. To get to his foot, he had to lie on the floor on his side and curl up in the fetal position. It was sad. I saw him poke the needle through the scales on his foot, then ease the plunger back. The blood that squirted into the chamber was pink, like Pepto-Bismol. He pushed the blood back into himself and coughed, then rolled onto his back in ecstasy. His head lolled all the way back against the floor, and he looked right at me hiding beneath my chair. Our eyes met. He didn't miss a beat.

"Hey, kid," said Barney, licking his lips. "Kid! You want to fuckin'... suck my dick? It's fuckin' huge, man. Dinosaur dick. You wouldn't believe it." He laughed. "And guess what? I jizz fuckin' ice cream! Isn't that nuts? I've got ice cream for jizz. You're gonna love it. Fuckin' white chocolate Haagen Dazs ice cream wit' raspberry fudge ripple swirl. You want to try some? You want to lap it up? Just milk it out. Get over here and milk it out. Milk it right out of my dick, you little fucker. I can tell you want it, you little cocksucker. Get out from under there. Come on, kid. Don't waste my time."

So I didn't. Waste any time, that is. The dressing room floor was carpeted in half-crunched rabbit bones and clumps of blood-matted fur. I army crawled through the filth with my stepdad's knife clenched between my teeth. Barney was forty feet long from snout to tail. Lying on his back, his chest rose a full six feet off the floor. I had to climb him like a tree. Weird, stiff funguses grew from

between his ruddy scales. I used these as handholds to pull myself up onto his chest. I could feel his rapid breath beneath me as he enjoyed his rush. He barely even noticed I was on top of him. His eyes rolled back in his head until the pupils disappeared. All that was left were the whites, shot through with ribbons of rheumy pink. My breath caught in my throat. I wouldn't admit it then, or for years afterward, but I was terrified. Barney's mouth hung open. His sharp teeth glistened. If I fell forward, I'd fall right into them. I'd fall right down Barney's throat. I'd disappear into nothingness. Lost forever in the abyss.

I removed the knife from my teeth and held it over my head.

"Please, God, let my aim be true," I whispered.

"Shit!" Barney said, finally seeing me. "Just do it, kid. Fuckin' kill me. See if I care. Asshole."

I plunged the knife deep into his neck, all the way to the hilt. Barney growled and gurgled and flopped his head back and forth. Otherwise, he didn't put up much of a fight. I think he was probably ready to die. You don't get to the point where you're shooting up meth on the floor of your dressing room if you're a happy dinosaur. I sawed back and forth, over and over, all the way around Barney's head. I dug the knife in deep to sever the spinal column. Barney's pink blood coagulated as it gushed from the wound. It hardened to a texture somewhere between chewed bubble gum and blackhead pus. It was up to my shoulders by the time I'd finished. I sat there for a while in the pink goo, panting and sweating. Then I used a bathrobe I found draped over Barney's chair to wipe some of the blood from my arms and chest. Barney's head was too big to fit in my backpack. Plus I didn't want his blood to get on my flashlight or my sack lunch. There was an oversized gym bag in the dressing room closet, and I shoved the head into that. Then I sat down in Barney's chair and began to eat my sandwiches.

Things were different for me after that. Everything changed. No one called me a baby anymore. They never spat on me or called me names. The girls on the playground didn't chase me or try to kiss me or put me in the birdie boiler anymore. Nobody pushed me off the monkey bars ever again. I used my stepdad's knife to skin Barney's head. Once his leather was tanned, I started wearing Barney's skin mask on the playground. To show everyone who I was. What I was capable of. I wore that thing every day for years. It was awesome! I wrapped my Louisville Slugger in barbed wire and dragged it on the ground behind me everywhere I went. The teachers were too scared to say anything. The other kids just left me alone. I could show up to school, or not. It was my choice. My stepdad stopped hitting me. He let me take as many Kools as I wanted. When I started getting hard-

ons a couple years later, I began to fuck him, too. In his sleep, when he was nodded out on dope. I think he liked it. He'd wake up rubbing his ass, and I'm sure he noticed my seed leaking out of him when he went to take a shit. But he never did anything about it. Never said a word. He knew who the boss was. They all did.

I know I'm lucky. A lot of people don't get a happy ending. Barney didn't. But you don't get a happy ending without causing a few sad ones. I don't feel bad about Barney. Not even a little. I wouldn't ask for his forgiveness if I saw him. Which I will someday, I guess. In Hell. But even then, I won't apologize. Because for me to live, he had to die. For me to grow, I had to betray him. It's a tale as old as frost. As old as the wind. I'm sure Barney gets that. On some level, we all do. It's survival of the fittest out there. Eat or be eaten. That's the law of the universe. Of nature, and of God. I live with my grandma now. Both my parents are dead. We watch Hallmark Channel during the day and baseball or tennis in the afternoons. I boil eggs in the morning. We eat egg salad all day, then ice cream and chocolate milk for supper. My grandma's insane, but I love the old bag. She just sits in her chair all day in silence. She doesn't look at me or talk or acknowledge my presence, except once every evening when I kiss her good night. Then my lips brush against her wilted, wrinkly cheek, and her watery eyes well up with emotion. Her thin lips curl upwards in a weary approximation of a smile, and she speaks. Sixteen words each night. Never more, never less.

"Good night, honey," she croaks. "Sleep well. And always remember: It's a great life if you don't weaken!"

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like champagne and rohypnol and a finger up the ass

and it was later that same year, i think, the land of
nod and the sea of static, my father the captain and the
captain was dead and the ship was adrift and nikki
was gone but the days still had some warmth

the end of summer, maybe early autumn and it was
always friday afternoon, i think, a little later, the
shadows stretched out like de chirico on a mellow trip and
tony b's trailer way down in the back of the lot,
the two cars always up on blocks, the smell of pot,
and he smiled when he opened the door

he smiled, said *sorry to hear about the captain*,
and then he laughed

then his hand was running down the front of my shirt,
was sliding down the front of my pants, and the
mechanic's wife on the couch, naked and spread-eagled and
laughing, bleach blonde, and i remember she was counting
backwards down to zero, was laughing, and tony b, and
she didn't look anything like nikki

she didn't look anything

didn't look, but she was stoned, was laughing and naked
and tony b ran a hand down the length of her body,
said he'd been finger-fucking her, said this and he
squeezed my cock with his other hand, said eric was
on his way, said lisa and tami, said joey and a few
others, and i remember that this was the year

this was the place

fridge full of beer and a couple cases of booze in the
bedroom, said chrissy would be here as soon as
she could ditch her boyfriend, said she had the pot,
said he'd just smoked the last of his but a pile of
crank on the coffee table and the mechanic's
wife had that look

turned to me and said *it's the season of the
spit-roast* and she just kept laughing and
the captain was dead

the ship was adrift and tony b in the bathroom on
his knees, college kid grabbing onto his hair and someone
was talking, but the music was everywhere

guy who owned the trailer park kept trying
to dry hump the mechanic's wife, kept telling her
he loved her, but a couple lines helped distract him and
then the music was louder

the door was opening, sunlight and clean air and tony
b's cousin up from virginia and she's brought a
couple of friends and did one of them look
just a little like nikki?

yes, and then no

and no, and so i closed my eyes for a second and
it was always that same day

it was always the end of an era

the ship adrift,
the captain dead, and it
almost felt like a celebration

it was the mechanic's wife off the couch and
crawling across the floor, season of the spit-roast, and
tony b was laughing, was saying *goddamn right it is!*
and the college kid was walking out of the
bathroom fighting with his zipper

said he was working the late shift, had to leave,
did a quick line and then took a beer for the road

took the guy who owned the park, nose
bleeding, said he'd be back with some high school
girls he knew, and it was summer and it was the
first raging days of fall

it was nikki, but it wasn't because nikki was gone,
because the captain was dead and the ship off course
and everything had to be a joke because
nothing was funny

it was tony b's cousin or one of her friends and
she was on top and the music was everywhere

pale skin in a darkened room,
but i remember it was sunny

i remember i was trying to forget, and she
told me to wait

told me she wanted to cum first

tony b in the doorway,
laughing

John Sweet continues to run in circles in the unforgiving desert of upstate New York. He is a firm believer in writing as catharsis and in the idea that political correctness will be the death of art. His latest poetry collections include *A FLAG ON FIRE IS A SONG OF HOPE* (2019, Scars Publications) and *A DEAD MAN, EITHER WAY* (2020, Kung Fu Treachery Press).

INTENSE-DESIRE-AS-SELF-LOVE

The rectangular bed
hung from the
ceiling, held in place by steel chains,
attached to each of its
corners. I had painted the word

DESPAIR

on each side:

every time I forced myself up, I was
climbing into my own fucked-up-ness.

Despair was an emotion
I already
knew in the way others
knew love;

an all-consuming tingling warmth that
made my heart race into fear that
seemed

to be love. I lay

in the
bed,

and as I shook the thing,
swinging
in all directions,

my foreskin
tightened, making the cum cause

a shooting pain up my spine

even though the semen was going

in the opposite direction.

No

windows. I had painted the
room black.

The point was to obliterate
the idea of things,
to vanquish even
the idea of possessing

but this was alien to you.

It was alien to anyone

who possesses anything.

I broke my mug.

If it was madness, it was a
madness of being alone

with the body as me or you.

When I came, I mopped it up

with a crumbling piece of carrot cake,
sliding it in my mouth.

Jesus said in *The Gospel of Thomas*,

*For what goes into your
mouth will not defile you, but that
which issues from your mouth will.*

It was the only way
I could come back into myself;

I consuming I.

The bed was a cradle.

I sucked my thumb and went
into the foetal
position and
got inside a latex industrial waste bag.

I sewed the opening
shut until I had to
rip it open as the air became
too tight.

My plan
was to die in life, to be constantly
on the cusp of death at all times.

Sometimes I snorted coke
before climbing into
the bag and then, after sowing it shut,

I would put a bag over my head, the blue
kind from the
office licence,
sealing it with a belt around my neck.

It was despair as self-love,
death as self-love, nothingness
as self-love. In that order.

It was impossible to tell when or
if the visions would open but I yearned
for them like a

child for

a teddy bear.

I screamed until I forced
my mind to twist and turn

into into into into into into into
into into into into into into into

the ocean of jellyfish

that haunted my electric mind.

Tom Bland is a writer and performer who lives on top of a hill next to a forest on the outskirts of East London. He has two books out, *Camp Fear* and *The Death of a Clown*, with Bad Betty Press.

Love on the Dark Side of the Moon

I'm there early Monday morning, standing amid weeds and garbage outside Jeri's trailer.

My boy has set the bags outside again, and dogs have strewn the yard with remnants from frozen dinners, Pop-Tarts, cigarette packs, and six packs of beer and Diet Coke—artifacts from the plate of Lexington County's own not-so-health-conscious supermodel. There is a tattered Mazda parked nearby, and I am hesitant to knock—afraid to know if someone else is wrapped in the sheets with my beloved.

I say that as though I expect to be the only one—as though Jeri and I have talked our myriad issues through civilly and decided he would be exclusively mine—as though I have some control or even input into the rules of the game we play these days. This relationship belongs to Jeri, as do I.

I belong to my wife, Marsha, and to my kids, who are probably just now rising and shining to early morning cartoons and bowls of oatmeal or fruit loops and glasses of OJ in our bright little kitchen, and to Jeri. I pull the heaviness that I am from sleep each morning and know I should work, that I have calls to make, a territory to cover, a mortgage to pay, groceries to buy, a boss to please. But most mornings, I drive here, not quite into the country, to Jeri's place—one of what seems like a hundred shabby trailers on a two-acre sandlot.

I go to the back door, which is closest to the bedroom, and begin to knock. It is a long time before I hear him muttering "okay" and fumbling with the knob. He sighs heavily when he sees me. He has had a rough night. He is wearing pink cotton panties, and there is mascara around his eyes, the remnants of lipstick smeared across his pretty lips. His long, dark hair is a mess—stiff with hair gel, all over his head. He is pale and smooth and delicious, and I notice he has painted his toenails red. He rolls his big, brown eyes, steps aside, and gestures for me to enter.

The trailer stinks. Jeri is not a housekeeper. What twenty-year-old man is?

"I saw a car outside," I say. "Are you alone?"

Jeri snorts laughter and wags his ass down the hall toward the kitchen. The bedroom

door is closed. I follow him and feel the chasm open in my chest. I am in love with Jeri. It's that simple. I'm a thirty-five-year-old man with a wife and three kids. I'm a Methodist from a long, proud line of Methodists—a fairly high roller among those who tithe, and a pious shaker of the preacher's hand. I take my kids to their grandparents' house for cookouts on Sunday afternoons, play golf with the father-in-law, and am in love with a boy who wears women's clothes and makes a living, if you could call it that, mouthing the lyrics to pop songs for a roomful of drunk queens on Sunday night.

Jeri is almost as tall as I am but much thinner and incredibly soft—very much, I think, the woman he wants to be. He finds a robe—the cool, pink, shiny thing I bought him last Valentine's Day—amid clothes and other debris on the ratty sofa and continues into the kitchen. I watch him fill the kettle for instant coffee. He knocks some unopened mail off the seat of a torn dinette chair, plops his sumptuous little fanny down, and crosses his long legs like a woman.

I move some clothes off the other chair and sit. Jeri lights a cigarette, inhales deeply, exhales.

"So," he says. "What brings you to my humble abode, as if I didn't know?"

I say nothing. I never know what to say to Jeri, who has grown tired of asking for more than I am willing to give. I reach over and take a Salem from the pack and light it.

"I thought you quit," he says, and he rolls his eyes and snorts laughter.

"You make me smoke," I tell him.

"I don't make you do shit," he says, blowing smoke. "You do all this shit, and you find someone to blame. Do I look like your fucking scapegoat, Tommy? Do I look like somebody who tolerates this kind of shit?"

My face is red. "You look," I tell him, "like a goddess."

He snorts, sucks hard on his cigarette, exhales. Coughs. We are quiet for a moment.

"How much did you bring?" he finally asks.

I shrug. How much cash I've got in my wallet has not always been an issue with Jeri. In the beginning, I simply loved him—simply expressed the poetry I felt in my heart for this frail,

delicious creature who is a boy who wants to be a girl. And Jeri gave himself freely and dreamed, I suppose, of sharing my life, my house, my pool. He was, in those dreams, a housewife, complete with my three little boys knocking about at his big, mannish feet. I skated between the worlds I lived in—the bright and the dark sides of the moon—and I fed him lines of shit, indulged him so that we might lie in the afterglow and dream together.

"How much, Tommy? Twenty dollars?"

"How much do you need?" I ask.

Jeri snorts. Sucks smoke. Blows it at me. He sees the kettle boiling and gets up to make the coffee. "I need a million fucking dollars, Tommy. Am I worth that—am I worth a million?"

"More," I tell him, knowing how empty and foolish it sounds.

He brings two steaming cups to the table, sits, puts his cigarette out in a saucer, takes another, and lights it. Inhales deeply.

"I'm sick of this shit, Tommy. I ain't your goddamned whore."

"I know," I tell him.

"You know what? Do you know I got a lover in the goddamned bedroom? And he *loves* me, Tommy."

"Oh, yeah, I'll bet he does." I am sarcastic. "What is he—some limp-wristed little bitch you picked up at Partners?"

He snorts and shakes his head.

"And what are you?" he asks me. "At least he doesn't come in here, suck my goddamn dick, and leave twenty dollars on the table like I'm some kind of cheap whore."

"You don't want my money?" I ask him, my voice rising.

"Yeah, I want it," he says.

I stand up and move into the den, rake clothes, CDs, and other junk off the sofa, and sit.

"Come here, Jeri." Jeri looks at me flatly.

There is defiance in his face, and I know that my beloved will not tolerate me much longer—that this is the price of my cowardice. But could I bear to watch my wife wrap her

powerful wings around my boys and fly away with them so that I might bask in the dingy light of Jeri's lair? Soon, I will lose the opportunity to touch the one I desire—to feel Jeri's body pressed against my own, to kiss his pretty, lipsticked mouth, run my fingers through his long, dark hair, and caress his soft, pale skin. I think of Jeri all decked out in sequins and high heels—a prince-turned-princess, perfumed and powdered, with rings flashing and bangles rattling on his arms. I think of his long legs, shaved smooth, wrapped in nylon and balanced like antique Coke bottles on heels most women wouldn't dare to wear—think of his tight, silk-pantied ass twitching like a woman's through some dark and crowded bar, and I don't know why a boy all dressed up like that makes me ache with desire.

He sits next to me, cradled stiffly in my arms and staring at the wall as though he can't bear the sight of me. I try to kiss him, but he turns his face and sighs heavily, so I pull him closer, breathing in his smell and letting my hand work the crotch of his panties while I dream my own sweet dreams.

Jeremy

Wants nothing to do with me
We used to talk every day
Told him about the dicks I have sucked
Of the guys I have fucked in cheap motel rooms
That smelled of curry chicken
“That’s too much information,” he would say
But he would tell me minutes before a shower that
It was okay to picture him naked
Lather from the bath gel trickling down his chest and stomach
Dripping from his teenage balls between the crack of his goth-white ass

We were best friends until I said I wanted to blow him
Now he can’t stand me
Says the sound of my voice
Makes him want to punch a wall
He broke three fingers one time doing that
A conniption fit of rage
Jeremy wants nothing to do with me

Spit spread, surrounding his still-boyfriend's dead-weight head as if it were something tossed and forgotten and caught in the rain.

A hole vast in the painting's center, or as vast as the painting was itself: not very. A small thing, twenty-four by twelve, maybe, blue and black scribbles once language layered to illegible oblivion, now eruption, now exposition of lurking white wall. propped beside the "bed," a mattress on the floor

the floor, its weight, that warmth,
his face
hobnobbing with fingernail clippings and lost coins and dust mites and his, The Other's face, sweaty, pressing the laminate's slick surface and...
You belong, assured a voice.
Yes, he did. That warmth.

...

Pour a little powdered pile out, dirty dishwater dun. Make neat little lines, no more than three-quarters of an inch long, thin.
He sniffs two lines through a five-dollar bill straw. A third. His head throbs with thoughts' remainders, his foot with splinters of paint—though that must be imagined.
The throbbing stops. The voice hums.

When The One'd arrived, stumbling on to the lolling half-breathing boy, he'd felt something like terror: an urgency, the reality of being body, that body on the bedroom floor, that brittleness...

...

The flares of torn canvas propped by The Other's limp skull looked ridiculous, flanged like a cartoon stomach shot by a cannonball. It was so self-centered, really, so fucked up he ruined his painting, so fucked up he made The One have to shove him away as The Other tried impotently to absolve his guilt, drunken begging, snotty and fake-teared, throat-caught speech spewing false apologies, truer accusations, apologies again—

yes, okay, he said he would quit, but the aches, his neck bruised with finger marks, a large welt on his chest. Only recently had their altercations gotten physical—escalated by The One, he tells himself, but knowing that not to be entirely true...

The One's desire for The Other was not absent but distant. He registered no disgust at the drool pooling on his floor, in fact, the spilling puddle touched him, the honesty of

abjection truth, connection or connection's possibility: both their bodies vessels for spit, for sperm, and sputum, and here heroin, here cough syrup, here regret, here beer, here bruises ... The One's body beating itself from the inside out in terror of maybe losing this one last thing, The Other, a loss not of his choosing but done to him , done to him by The Other, he realized, becoming, for a moment angry, for a moment... but no, The Other seemed fine, or not fine, but alive, breathing no more slowly, no need for paramedics, no need for wondering whether he'd call them, no need to watch his will to control slip away

He perceived the painting and immediately it vanished. Or no, remained, but became lost, lost to perception, lost into the slipping past which perceived it, a past not his,— or barely once his:

given up by him. Now the ruined artwork was transformed, an object unnamable, unknowable. You don't know much, the voice said, which instead of angering The Other, comforted him, the raspy sound swaddling him like the rocking weight pulsing vaguely against him, that warm rhythmic weight.

...

He realized he'd never viewed The Other like this, with elongated time, with precision, apprehending the curveless calves, arching hip bones, the jut of blue veins. He could watch now, secure he wouldn't be seen back by unslumbering nonwitness.

Working his left hand vaguely over the front of his pants, The One watched the slim parenthesis of The Other's body heave on the floor and his cock swelled, scratching against his fly; he wasn't wearing underwear. He would say there was something beautiful in the scene, but there wasn't.

The One knelt on the floor beside The Other, looked into his eyes, gray and pointed and staring somewhere far beyond the wall he faced.

Taking off The Other's shirt— he wanted to do this right —he observed the orbs and half-moons, the truncated ellipses of bruises and welts over his neck and chest where The Other had started to grow hair— The One had thought of telling him to wax it, but decided the request was moot, their relationship being now nearly ascetic.

- It had been a while since they'd fucked;
- it was hard to fuck someone who had grown so real;
- so go "relationships," The One figured;
- but, here, hardly breathing, hardly animal at all, The Other's ass still bouncy, usable, despite his sickly waning frame... smelled foul, not feculent, but like mud and moss and some originary subhuman stench, so The One used his fingers, wetted with his own spit, instead of his preferred tool, his tongue, to apply sparing lubrication, plunging his cock into the constricted pink hole that punctuated obscenely those glassy, milkish baubles, which like this, The Other a drool-haloed cherub, The One

was appreciating as if they belonged to someone fresh, someone he didn't know.

...

He seemed to whimper,

or maybe it was an illusion, a manifestation of The One's displaced guilt, he considered, self-psychoanalyzing even now, or of some kind of hope hope enough to keep thrusting, almost dry enough to hurt, like rubbing folds of rough fabric over the length of his cock, but The One didn't want to add any spit, knew he had earned himself some pain. The Other's face already so slimy anyway, why add to the mess with more spit?, he didn't think The Other would mind, wasn't sure how much he'd remember, even if...

he'd wake, eventually, feeling sore and used and uncertain and ... shit streaking down his deflating, purple cock, a scatological racing stripe; he wiped it against The Other's thighs and stood up, leaving The Other unclothed and rasping. The Other started to turn his head, failed to rise from the floor: "Make me come." Was this guy fucking serious? Sick piece of shit would be turned on by the whole thing. The One slapped The Other in the face a few times just to be sure he was awake, that the voice wasn't hallucination and The Other stared at him with an imprecise look of accusation, and then past his head, somewhere out of the cramped bedroom altogether: "If you're gonna use me, at least give me something" ... an arousal more primal than anything he'd managed for a real human shoved his flaccid flesh still ripe with shit into The Other's gashish red mouth, his prettiest feature. He knew he wouldn't get hard again but it didn't matter. The One twisted himself around so his head was by The Other's crotch, propping himself up on one arm while he let whatever drool or snot or bile The Other had left dribble onto his own cock, took The Other's semi-hard slug of a penis in his right hand and jerked it roughly for a few minutes, slapping his balls and mashing the bruises botching his still boyish body for good measure till he felt The Other's mouth slacken and assumed he had passed out again

...

so fucking base but hole was hole and speaking of, his cum sputtered out of The Other's and while the shit and spit seemed not his problem, that sperm was after all his

responsibility. He tore off a flange of the wrecked canvas and wiped the pearly, white tears leaking from The Other's rectum now stretched and raw.

He thought of shoving the piece of painting into The Other's mouth but that seemed cruel when he had just given so much, given himself up. The One folded the soiled canvas and set it instead by the remains of his small piece, RIP.

...

was horrible to love, *horriblehorrible*, The One thought, undressed, tapping lightly, much more lightly than he had pressed The Other's, the bruises inscribing his frame. If this was hurting him then what of The Other?, The painkilled Other, lying there, still unstilled:

breathing more rapidly now, now not just pale but an inhuman chartreuse ...

"You're gonna clean this up," The One said in a voice so deep it felt not his own and The Other's face contorted into a childish and pathetic mien affecting enough that instead The One felt compelled to get paper towels to mop up each copper-green chunk of rancid food upchucked and in the shower The Other, trembly, tried to cling to him and it taxed him, maintaining the restraint not to shove him away and even more taxing not to reciprocate the embrace and the pressure of this other bruised body upon his own made him want to scream, and The Other, croaking callow as if he was waking from feverish sleep, dehydrated and faint, asked "Can you read what it says on my skin?" and The One said "Not every shape's a symbol," and leaned out to retch into the toilet, shampoo-y water splashing in from his head after his own dinner.

...

The sheets of the limp twin mattress dampened under their twin lines, they both pinkish from the shower's scorching heat, pinkish under the streetlight halogens and an LED cross across the road. The Other's voice surprised him with its certainty, its unemotionality: I don't think we should ever fuck again.

The One pretended not to hear, quietly pressing his own bruises to find where it hurt the most.

Drew Zeiba writes criticism, journalism, and fiction. His work has appeared in publications including *Artforum*, *Frieze*, *New York Magazine*, *Foglifter*, and the monograph *Andy Warhol: Love, Sex, and Desire* (Taschen) and been performed and exhibited internationally, most recently in the 13th Shanghai Biennale.

unclefucker

i.

soft-incest-core watch now
 raised in the frat house / liquor store
 my stepdad ran a tab up into the thousands and never paid it off. good fucking guy.

his dad died today

with the haunted house decor and Hercules dolly
 the safest girl in the Pike house
 yearns to lift kegs, age eight

they were all my uncles. not the legal kind. trained me in the unsubtle language.
 laughed at me until i was no longer a laughable prospect.

drunken conquest, i thought
 s'ch who wore Hollister and foundation
 and straightened her hair into straw. you seen girls like that?
 i bet you went to high school with. she was your first Hallmark choice.
 sororities could be brothels in disguise so we don't have any.

their gross language nurtured vileness , i
 aware of the dangers of feminism from a young age
 proud sandwich-maker, called a mudshark
 with whitegirl dreads, longed for their
 Natty Lite breath recliner threesome.

my uncles were disappointed when i shaved my head and started dressing like them. green
 camo cargo pants. tshirt with a tiger. necklace with a shark tooth. one earring from the local slut-
 with-a-piercing-gun, my mom. jerkoff bukkake demeanor also mom-borrowed.

from dreaming it so long i know what it's like to have a cock i promise you
--

it's ravishing outward, peeling backward, plunging vomiting again again, i know

they wanted me to wear a bra though i hadn't breasts yet.
 i kept fucking my first boyfriend over and over again.
 South Park-pilled butch living at the convenience store.

ii.

what the father-insecure does with

mature cock 18+ read below

vomit kink isthisgoingtobemyfirst

i vomit constantly

overemotionally with crying *and* tears, which are unrelated

it's pink foam in grass and all he said, foot on the lip of the car

is "are you coming?"

15 underage live sucks whippits that my mom

gave me

is "are you coming" from the DIY
show bench

is "are you coming" from the lip of
the driveway

after begging so long

and blonde stubble the first time

B/D baby begs down woozy from the whippits on the hippie bus floor

i apologize several times i feel like and he doesn't respond and that's okay

he undoes his fly with one hand (i think this was after his other hand stopped working right

because of the metal rods) and i help

i fucked the uncle with metal rods in his hand,
not the uncle who glued on his own ear

i fucked the uncle i had a crush on when i
was five, not the uncle i had a crush on when
i was twelve

he's cautious and wet and i squeeze him for good the first time i ever meant it and really wanted
it, the first time that counts. is it what's made me not right since? or was that before

small in concentric rings muscled: it's actually good

it's interrupted by an aunt it's lonely but comfy. i haven't showered

nor would shower, grown-in dirt from the liquory floor, stickiness

not deformity-worthy hardcore porn invigorating but

clit skin lipsmell of beer, like a man i think or don't

think rather worth heavy cock know gutfeel *yes* in the lightest quietest way

i have earned it no sidepony bitch but a freak

in

his

frathouse

15 but old enough

stay, stay
keep me warm

iii.

i vomited again but this time kept behind a stall door and sopped with shitty paper towels til i couldn't stand the pink juice all over everywhere but this time he didn't know and this time he's not an uncle and this time he's not married and we're at my dad's so he has to promise to cum on my stomach and not the bed and i have to promise not to love him but i still vomit

it wasn't like **that** but that's easier.

it wasn't like the last time except
that it was. it wasn't like him except
that it was. it wasn't like loving
except that it was.

it was like soft-core, barely a meme

neither end nor again. species.
cis men 5'10"
ceiling the same between
their shoulders.
bodyfeel different, better with time

Singer Joy makes flowery anarchist theatre, asexual erotica, post-industrial polytonal music, etc. She has had writing published by the weirdos at *Leste Mag*, *The Brooklyn Review*, and *Erotic Review Magazine* and has been performed by numerous theatrical and musical ensembles. Find her work at singerjoy.com, her bad takes at [@singer_joy](https://twitter.com/singer_joy) on Twitter, and her collages at [@venus_in_leather](https://www.instagram.com/venus_in_leather) on IG.

Pittsburgh, 1950. The States.

An ooze laid across his every orifice until he practically sparkled with this concoction of sweat, salt, sludge, and scarlet claret. It made the rain slide off his face as he walked. Wrapped across his knuckles were a pair of pants, stained from their position below an undercarriage. Prior to this, the underwear belonged to Lenny, the only boxer whom Paul had ever known to have long hair. Lenny got mocked for it, but he liked that every man felt as though they could take him on and win. They couldn't. Lenny in the ring was unlike anyone Paul had ever seen fight, in or out of the ring. Paul worshipped him though Lenny was a dirty fighter who was only fighting in Pittsburgh function rooms as he lacked the self-control for the stages of Vegas.

Lenny didn't know Paul had these pants. He had stolen them from the changing room and wrapped them so tightly around his knuckles that they looked like bandages. He approached the building with its sloping structure and half-empty windows. It was home for Paul, or at least one of the rooms was. He rented, as did all his neighbours, a cheapish room with no heating and electric that ran on an extortionate meter.

He walked into the lobby that, aside from the staircase and a desk, was more a narrow corridor you could squeeze down to pay the meter. It was along here that Stan started her assault. Paul never liked her because she was an economic parasite who he paid half his wages to just for a box room. She never liked Paul after he questioned the name Stan for a woman.

She was a stocky lady with tight, grey curls and broad arms. She began her assault with a verbal tirade for a reason only she knew and finished the rant by smacking the back of Paul's head, telling him to shape up. Her bulky hands packed a mean punch. Paul's knuckles, wrapped in the underwear of an unrequited lover, packed a meaner one. He turned from the meter. He began with a jab to her stomach, and she wailed. This made Paul jump and throw an uppercut. Things got nasty, with a series of slow, heavy hits. A few stomach jabs and a hook to the right, and she stopped wailing, focusing on her breathing instead. When she fell silent, Paul no longer felt her and found himself alone, punching. She began to sink, breathing slower, and her eyes closed for good as a final punch sent her to the floor.

Gut instinct sent Paul to his room, where he pulled a pre-packed suitcase from under the bed and, with bloodied hands, threw his laundry into it. He, for the final time, looked out of the window at the Pittsburgh night. A drunken man climbed a roof, a landlord was kicking his tenants out, and a boxer called Lenny was looking for his underwear.

The author is George Bidwell. He is a twenty-one-year-old student of literature at Salford University with six years' worth of writing experience, including film criticism for the local paper at 13. His experience as a performance poet helped to establish his belief in the connection between reader and writer. His working background has seen him working in dive bars, factories, restaurants, and childcare to earn his way, all of which he completed alongside his few novels and anthologies.

deracinated enforcing human “nature”

blank wall

blank wall

those (ass)

those assholes

so that

so that

(so)

i cd

for anything, again

Softcore

The clouds are moving so fast
I feel like I'm in a time-lapse.
He asks me, how does it feel?
Like raining, circling the drain, licking
the blood off abrasions, spinning.
I think about carousels
as he pounds me into the skyline,
getting closer and closer to reaching
that synthetic heaven.
By the seventh minute
he says, "I hate my life."
Our cocks connect as I suck
my father's insomnia off his lips
and tell him, "I hate *my* life."
We come together in the center
and snip our mothers' benzo addiction
with our scissored legs under
the lithe, lapping sheets,
grappling to be felt.
The walls melt.
He starts to weep.
I pull him up and point to the buildings
slightly swaying though we can't see.
They have withstood more
migraines, chest pains, partisan fathers
than we will ever meet.
So let us pledge to desist from
inflicting any more damage
and savor, in the suffocation
of a mouth, this splendor,
this light.

René Bennett is a fallen angel hiding from God in Brooklyn. René's work can be found in *Crooked Arrow Press*, *Confluence*, *Fourteen Hills Magazine*, and others. Have you slept? Have you dreamt? How are you?

IT SUITS YOU SO WELL

it usually happens when i don't sleep. that is to say, it happens nightly. i find myself in a stranger's bedroom, unclothed, undone, kissing lipstick prints onto the chest of someone i know i won't see again.

"that's it, baby, that's it, sweetheart."

the dream is over.

it's 5AM.

i try to keep my eyes shut for as long as i can even though i know my nightly tryst is over. tonight, i'll be kissing someone new; someone faceless, nameless, someone i'll never see again. tonight, i'll make a real whore outta myself.

"c'mon, darling, that's it."

i wake up again drenched in salty sweat n come. i throw off my blankets n head to the shower. the water runs rust brown at first, then a dull yellow. I step in, boxers still on n filthy, n lie down on the shower floor. the water hits my stomach n burns my chest. eyes closed, i kiss my shoulders n arms n hands, leaving wet, red marks all over.

the water running, i try to sleep.

it's 6AM.

it's night again, n i've taken more sleeping pills than i shoulda: i hear they induce vivid dreams. i dreamt i bit a chunk out of a beautiful boy's arm, my saliva n red lipstick smudged n mingled with his arterial blood. he moaned. he wanted more.

i ate him whole.

"oh, that's it, that's it, darling."

i wake up n my lips are bleeding.

i look next to me n see someone else's boxers. there're blood spots like poppies on my white sheets.

it's 6AM.

in the kitchen, i find the boy i dreamt of last night brewing coffee for us, naked. he turns around to find my blood-crusting lips n says:

"you bit me too hard last night, lover."

he smiles n plants a rough kiss on my mouth n returns the favor by biting down on my jaw n neck. he wipes off the blood in a sweeping motion with a cloth.

i nip at his neck n chest n kiss a clean, wet trail down his body. i don't even know his name.

my head aches. i'm dizzily licking n touching n loving him until i begin to realize the sun is rising through my bedroom blinds.

i wake up alone.

the dream is over.

it's 6AM.

some things

it's been a year since we fucked.

the old nerves remain,

hands shake when i knock on the door.

he looks different, scruffy beard, a little weight

but tastes the same when he cums after five minutes of head.

jck hnry, a queer writer living in the deserts of s/e California, continues to challenge expectations of the real and the erotic. jck has a new book out, *driving w/crazy* (Punk Hostage Press), and bits and pieces published elsewhere.

A Friday Night in Dalmeny

I always leapt over our back fence after school on a Friday instead of walking around the block. Only on a Friday because Friday was our drinking day.

The old PC was at a desk to your right as you came in the back door. I'd switch it on, log into MSN, and wait for the rest of the boys to appear online. Then, I'd load up LimeWire and play some bottom-of-the-barrel dance tunes. The only time I could listen to that shit sober was a Friday after school because I knew in a couple of hours, I'd be out my face, and it got me in the mood. Big time.

I'd get into my one pair of jeans first and wait for our confirmed place of meeting. I hated jeans. Well, I hated buying them. I'd always make sure my top was designer, and I had a nice pair of trainers, but I detested spending decent money on jeans for some reason. Still do.

Lloyd was coming in for me, we'd be going in for Brad, and then we'd all head down to meet the Leith-based boys at our usual bit, the old industrial units just across the walkway from our high school. Nobody bothered us there, and it was a safe space to start drinking, even when it was still light out. The only cars that would cruise up would be the odd private-hire taxi looking for a place to chill and wank over their weird porno mags. Only a right pervy bastard would still be purchasing skud books in those days with the internet being around. They'd drive up to the wall at the end of the units, turn and head straight back out the way they came when they saw us all sitting around the place with our half bottles of voddy, bucky and MD 2020. I liked the units. It was our wee bit.

'Go text the birds, Lloyd,' Hoidy shouted over the music blasting out of a couple of our phones.

'I already have,' Lloyd replied.

'Well, where are they?'

'In Sasha's, mate. We've to meet them in Dalmeny at six.'

'Perfect, man.'

Dalmeny was a park we'd head to after the units quite a lot. It was split down the middle; one side was grass and usually covered in dog shit, and the other was grey concrete with a red metal swing-set and a multi-coloured truck that had a rusty, graffiti-covered chute protruding from its front. We'd always be on the concrete side of the split. Away from half of Leith's mutts' shit.

Around a quarter to six, we started making our way up Easter Road. You could get into Dalmeny from either side of two main roads, Easter Road and Leith Walk. We always went in through the Easter Road side and the lassies from Leith Walk.

I had got into the habit of drinking my half bottle of vodka straight recently. I liked the feeling of the burn in my chest, and I liked the fact that I was the only one in our group to have the balls to drink it that way. Or the stupidity. Whatever. The girls liked how I drank it too, and that made me feel good. Hard, if I'm being honest. A bit of a wild one.

We got to the park in about five minutes, and it was dark by then. It was November, see, and it was bitterly cold, but that never stopped us from drinking in the streets. We'd spent the previous Hogmanay steaming in the snow. It was Scotland; you got used to it. The girls were up by the metal truck, and I could see another of our pals was already there, drinking with them. Bozzy. A big, hulking, simple guy. He reminded me of Lennie from *Of Mice and Men*. Leith's very own Lennie. I liked him.

It was rowdy in Dalmeny that night, but it had been a good laugh, and I'd even managed to get off with Jade. I had a feel of her arse and a squeeze of her tits too, but she made it clear that's as far as she was willing to go, and I was okay with that. I liked that. In fact, I think it was how her voice

sounded when she had said it to me. She had a nice voice. Honestly, she was a little cracker. Her eyes were a strange shade of green, like a cat's eyes, and they always looked like something was swirling in them. A milky substance. I still think about her a lot, wee Jade.

As we were cuddling and talking, I felt something hit me near the corner of my eye. It made a metal sound, a kind of clink, as it landed on the concrete. Jade pulled away from me; she must have got a fright. It had been a bottle cap, all red and shiny looking in the light of the lamp post next to my feet.

'Who the fuck done that?' I said as I spun around, though I didn't have to ask. Bozzy was standing there, well, sort of swaying, with the most gormless-looking grin on his big, round, face. It infuriated me instantly. Would I have been as livid if Jade hadn't been there to see me looking like a spare prick? Probably not. I reached down and picked up her cheap bottle of Lambrini and, quickly and violently, with an underarm throw, sent it crashing into Bozzy's chin. 'That'll teach you not to embarrass me,' I thought. I did like him, though. Poor fucker.

R. A. Gallagher is a new writer hailing from Scotland's capital city, Edinburgh. Focusing on the trials and tribulations of working-class life, he is a great admirer of the work of Bukowski, Salinger and Kerouac, among others. He can usually be found either reading or writing under the watchful eye of his cat, Ed.

floating through the tributary: a glitter

& now that Em's gone, moved on
 to that atrocious jam band reunion
 on the moon, that kitchen on Saylor Street
 will be forever pristine.
 Down with dirt weed
 strewn across the borrowed table.
 Zero slang for ecstasy
 making love to ancient carpet.
 86 the missing jeans and undies
 somehow stuck to the wall like Gak.
Almost no more wine on the backsplash.
 Never again *Did we score some blow last night*
or make pancakes? Both?
How's your asshole tonight?
No matter, I'm famished!
 No mushroom addiction
 this side of Corpus Christi will bring that chaos
 back into perfect view.
 One lame New Year's Day
 I couldn't even remember their name.
Like the drug! Em sang,
 so I raise my cup
 & tilt my nostril toward stucco,
 toward the "the lawyers,
 guns & money" being sent
 not from dad, but from turntable.
 In the shower:
 a fantasy. In the life:
 a decline feat. laughter.
 I'd do my best to keep the seance going
 but no longer know
 anyone at all.
 I should've escaped
 that terrycloth Waxhaw coffin
 when given the chance.
 Now there's no personal referrals
 to local twinks in desperate need
 of an immediate out
 or friends with freezing benefits.
Unexpectedly reads this obit but is it?
 The way people are treated today?
 Some disintegrate but some are hurled
 through abandoned train tunnels
 with felonious fireworks
 & an awareness so staggering
 our stilts falter every day after.

Joseph Goosey lives in North Carolina. He is the author of the chapbook *STUPID ACHE* (Greybook Press, 2013) and one full-length collection of poems, *Parade Of Malfeasance* (EMP Books, 2020).

Obsolescence

Obsolescence: a loss of value due to reduced desirability and usefulness of a structure because its design and construction has become obsolete; loss due to a structure's becoming old-fashioned, not in keeping with modern needs, with consequent loss of income." Barron's Real Estate Handbook

Glengarry Glen Ross ended my college career. Guys selling people land they'd never see in Florida, bringing in 80 grand after one night's work. What kind of work? Talk. Talk was a game I was born to play.

In my senior year, scarily close to teaching history to a bunch of smelly, delinquent high school fucks, I heard Jack Lemmon talk his way into \$80,000. More importantly, I heard him say: "A man is his job."

"My father always told me all businessmen were sons of bitches, but I never believed it till now." John F. Kennedy on Steel executives who increased prices, April 11, 1962, in Arthur M. Schlessinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days*, 1965

My father left his wife and two sons for our neighbor, his mistress, when I was four. Never knew him when I was old enough to talk politics, but I'm guessing he was a Nixon man. My man was Kennedy. The guy knew how to talk. But this vitriol aimed at the businessman always bothered me. The businessman is the brunt of blame for all that's sordid or unclean in the modern world. For Kennedy to make such a slur because some men were making it hard for him to put on the JFK show in Vietnam – it speaks of the naivety of a sheltered son.

And it reminds me of Amanda. Amanda considered the art of salesmanship to be completely obscene. She thought the idea I studied and practiced persuasion revolting. Uncharacteristically chatty, even on coke, I'd confessed once a small infraction in a real estate transaction I had to amend in an inconveniently rapid manner. It involved a faulty heating system that was now going to cost me bank. Like a pussy, I was looking for a little

sympathy. Instead, my “opening up” was met with flying plastic wheels, mine only one pink wedge from victory, flung by her thin, angry arm across the room.

“How would you like it if your mother had to deal with people like you?”

This was particularly brutal and unfair – my mother and I were tight. Spent every Sunday afternoon together, and, humble brag, I’d paid off her house last year, my proudest accomplishment. Amanda’s aggression was certainly amplified by the coke, but it betrayed her simple view of the world. What could one expect, though? She was quite insulated from the world of money or any “harsh dealings.” She was an adjunct creative writing professor at the local junior college, where her solid moral convictions were doing little for her pocketbook. So did her poetry:

*“For everything that hurts, there is a pill.
If you go out at night, all dressed in blue,
the handsome man will always pay your bill.”*

That’s why I was the one who always bought the cocaine.

“In the business world, everyone is always working at legitimate cross purposes, governed by self-interest.” Harold Geneen, *Managing*, 1984

Ours was, explicitly and transparently, a limited partnership. I concede to that definition with all of its connotations. In real estate, this means essentially two things: one partner is taken care of, and one is screwed, in a financial sense.

The latter, of course, would be me.

Certainly, there are those who would disagree with my assessment here. I acknowledge other perspectives. For example, Lane Pearson, the lanky faux-intellectual fuckboy proprietor of the punk bar *Jeckles*, where I met Amanda – and a few girls like her in the past – had unfriendly words for me the last night we spoke, the hypocritical fuck.

“You’re like that creep in that film *Kids* except your fetish is hooking drug virgins on cocaine.”

“What in the fuck are you talking about?” We were outside his bar, on the street, and this supposed businessman in untied combat boots and Woody Allen glasses was berating me loudly and publicly with his slander. “You want to reconsider your libelous speech right now?”

He’d just laughed, the curly haired dipshit, scoping out the babes in the bay window of his decrepit bar “library”. It was what brought all the overdressed suburban princesses with romantic Nirvana delusions in their cotton candy brains to this hovel. And the fucker knew it, too – deciding right there, in the midst of screaming at me, who he was going to screw that night. Couldn’t keep his eyes off them for five minutes while moralizing to me about my treatment of women. It answered one thing I’d wondered about ever since meeting Amanda here – she’d most certainly fucked him. She fit that sheltered girl going wild profile we obviously both enjoyed – whether one of us wanted to admit it or not.

“Okay, asshole. How’s Lenore Tesco these days?”

“Wow. You’re gonna blame that on me? I could ask you the same thing.”

“Ha,” Lane more screamed than laughed. Everyone was looking at us now, mostly underage skater punks haunting the sidewalk outside his club when there wasn’t an all-age show. There were some smokers, too – Rand, for example, who owned the cigar bar down the road, an actual potential customer hearing me being libeled by a libertine. Fuming, fists clenching, ready to knock this fucker straight out, I was determined not to demean myself with such puerile antics, much less go to jail for this joke.

I was the gentleman here. Everyone knew it. It was my actual nickname – Gentle Jay – because I had manners and the right haircut and wardrobe. I’d probably hate me too if I were Lane, and he most definitely did. His skinny pink face puffed up, and he huffed like some kind of beast as he continued the complaint he’d obviously been holding in his scrawny chest for a while.

“Oh, let’s see, before Lenore Tesco knew you, she was in school halfway to being a librarian and didn’t do a drug in her life. Remind me. Where is she now?”

We both knew the answer though I hadn’t talked – or anything else – to her for months before the rehab. After we broke up, Lenore fell in with a rough crowd she’d found, I’d heard, at the after-hours rave club across the street, a place I didn’t even frequent. When Lenore and I had been together, we’d partaken of our substances at home and played board games and fucked, like civilized people.

“Had nothing to do with that. From what I heard, she was a fixture across the street months before that happened. I certainly never brought her there.”

Lane leaned in close now, stooping dramatically as if to lord his Jack Skellington frame over me.

“No, you just gave her a taste of something she couldn’t stop until she was too much of a coke whore, and her eyes had lost their Bambi-like surprise. Then, you needed somebody else’s life to screw up for your fetish – like Amanda.”

My body shook with rage. Who knows what would have happened next except that Lane got pulled away by his chubby door girl in matching black glasses – a uniform here, apparently. She gave me an eat shit look but thankfully pulled her disturbed employer to some actual crisis of business.

There were too many bars in this town to bother with this one again.

Amanda called later that night.

“Can I come over?”

“It’s late, dear, and I’ve had a pretty shitty night. I’ve got two sits and a load of paperwork before lunch, then Angelo’s heater has to be dealt with before he calls the fucking broker.”

“Please, Clark, we could get something, you know.”

“Amanda.”

“Please, Clark.”

“Have you got cash?”

It was poor form – I blame it on Lane. The financial liability in this partnership was mine and mine alone. There are worse things to lose than money.

*“The moon will turn to purple, then turn black.
And when you shake, he’ll know just what to do.
For everything that hurts, there is a pill.”*

“Limited partnership: one in which there is at least one partner who is passive and limits liability to the amount invested, and at least one partner whose liability extends beyond monetary involvement.” Barron’s Real Estate Handbook

Nights with Amanda became increasingly expensive. I’d never, of course, phrase it like that. Very few women like being called a whore – when they’re on their feet. Never gave her cash. Neither of us would have been part to anything like that.

*“You’ll feel your mouth go dry, the night go black.
You’ll wonder how you ever made it through.
The handsome man will always pay your bill.”*

When money was low, we could always go see Jack. Jack was an ultra marathoner known quite well in Pensacola for two things: the size of his trust fund and the size of the lines he cut. Jack brought out a mountain of cocaine on a mirror, and all he ever wanted was to touch her hair. The first time I brought Amanda to see him, she bowed her head to do a

line, and he crossed the room to hold her hair out of the way. With his fingers in her tresses, he had – no other way to say it – a cum face.

Now, it was a tradition of brushes and braids and ribbons and her lying back on his bed while he brushed each lock straight out and arranged them into a mane or halo on his bedspread. He took pictures. Whatever the fuck; she mostly didn't seem to mind until he started asking her to take off her clothes so as not to pull focus with the distracting pattern of her dress.

"I don't know. I–"

But I'd whispered in her ear that it was fine, Jack Truit was our friend, and she'd transitioned to this new phase with little complaint. Amanda was a good girl at heart, from a good home where she had learned manners, the kind of girl I could not resist.

"Never open your mouth until you know the shot." Al Pacino, *Glengarry Glen Ross*

"The guy I moved out of my parents' house to live with – it didn't work out," Amanda told me the first night we met at *Jeckles*, in response to my question about how could somebody so innocent and sweet be living alone in the big city.

"One day, I came home from class earlier than I should have, and he was on the bed holding a needle to his arm."

She paused, waiting for me to say something, but I didn't because I wasn't exactly sure where this was going, and I don't walk into traps.

"I– I'd never seen anything like that before. I mean, in movies, but to see it in real life... It changed everything. Only ever smoked pot after I'd moved in with him. Didn't even like it. We'd experimented with molly a couple of times, and that was... interesting."

Her eyes hit mine at an angle that instantly made my dick hard as I imagined her pupils wide on molly. I looked forward to interesting.

“This just terrified me. Not what I signed up for... I ran out down the stairs. Knew I was just way in over my head. Couldn't go back home to my parents; I'd done so much to get out of there, and they'd never liked him. He called later and tried to calm me down. Told me that he slipped up – that he had a cocaine problem. I didn't know how to process it, but I just knew I couldn't be around that. It terrified me. I started looking for a place immediately.”

So many thoughts swirled through my head at that moment. I said nothing for far too long, losing control of the narrative.

“Can I just ask something without upsetting you?”

Her whole body turned to me, breast heaving, childish curiosity and fear mixed in her eyes.

“Was it the needle or the cocaine that scared you?”

Now, she was silent and blushing.

“I didn't know that he did anything like that. Cocaine, it just– I know it sounds foolish, but I just grew up thinking that I'd do a line and die or something. It's my fucking religious parents in my head.”

She took a breath. I loved hearing about those parents. Every girl I desired had some version of them.

“I mean, you know, logically, of course it was the needle.”

I smiled. “Of course.”

“And the dishonesty.”

“Dishonesty is inexcusable.”

She nodded.

“I sell houses. You teach. We’re good people. We contribute to society. We’re responsible. I also always have cocaine – molly, too. No needles. No pressure. Won’t mention it again. But if you ever want to try it, it’s there. Just want to be upfront.”

It was a bold risk. But I kept my word and didn’t bring it up again. Knew I wouldn’t have to. Second time we had sex, she asked for the molly. Politely and shyly, as I knew she would. The next time we had sex, she asked to try the coke.

“What does that mean – tame?”

“It is an act too often neglected,” said the fox.

“It means to establish ties.”

The Little Prince, Antoine de Saint-Exupery

I have to admit I was never interested in developing any feelings for Amanda. Mean nothing bad about the girl. I’m no moralist in flannel and Woody Allen glasses. Willing to be the villain of my own story.

One night, doing lines, playing Memory, Amanda was losing miserably, as usual. I’d won all the clothes off her back and sat across from her, fully clothed, as she shivered delicately, hiding her long limbs in all that dark hair, eyes big as coins and shining.

“Come here.”

I held out an arm to pull her to me across the pile of sundry cards and shag carpet. She looked defeated.

“I only want to hold you.”

She looked at me like she didn't understand. I didn't really understand it myself.

"And when it starts to fade, he'll bring it back.

He'll hold your hand and offer something.

For everything that hurts, there is a pill."

Can't say when it began to happen. Need becomes addiction. It happened to me, too. I was wanting her with me more than I could afford monetarily. I was blowing off work. Amanda was losing weight. It sharpened her features and made her both seem younger and older at once. One night, in a panic, when we heard noises by the window at 4:00 a.m. and feared the police or home invaders, we pressed against each other in the darkness beneath my raised bed.

"Your heart is beating so fast." I could feel it surge against her skeletal ribs. I coaxed her out and pulled a stethoscope from a drawer at my bedside. At Christmas, though I'd insisted on no gifts (boundaries), she'd brought me a child's plastic doctor kit. I'd shown her my real stethoscope then.

"Why give me toys?"

She'd blushed at the time, and her eyes welled up. I'd stroked her cheek, realizing I'd hurt her. I mean, what had I given her? Besides the usual pleasures.

I did the same now as her waifish frame shook against the cold metal of the stethoscope I put against her chest.

"Am I going to be okay?"

"Of course you are, dear."

I sounded so sure of myself, as I always did, whether or not I was at all.

“It is not a world of men.” Al Pacino, *Glengarry Glen Ross*

Broke things off with Amanda after I met a girl named Jillian – a curvaceous cutie who still giggled and blushed. Just moved into her first apartment in the city from the suburb across the bridge and decorated it entirely pink. It was one of the first times I preferred partying at the girl’s place rather than mine, outfitted to my own comforts. It felt dirtier fucking her there, being the darkness in all that pink.

Met Jillian at a lime-green new age lounge that opened three doors down from *Jeckles* and quickly usurped the professional nightlife – leaving the actual punks to their punk bar. *Chartreuse* had overpriced charcuterie and designer cocktails and immaculate bathrooms. Was it any wonder that it put the squeeze on the great feminist Lane Pearson? Enjoyable for that reason alone.

I ceded *Jeckles* to Amanda. Tried to let her down easy. “Don’t be sad. All that it means is that we can’t have sex or do drugs anymore. We can still talk, sometimes, if you want.”

It was a dick move, as sex and drugs were what we did – and board games and, yes, talking, but the latter only after or during the former. It was something Lane Pearson probably said to his library princesses in between yelling at businessmen on the street like an animal. It would have been cleaner if I’d said obsolescence. It would have at least been true.

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Matthew 26:27

As I stand n stare down at the piss in the bowl
Dark orange, dehydrated, so unlike
That which I love
That crystal clear almost blue
Champagne urine
Angels' share
Pale ambrosia for the alligators
The rats in the pipes
The mouth beneath me
I fear
I dread
This is what they want you to drink
This is what foretells the end
It's over for you
Girlboss, dried up,
You failed to stay hydrated
You failed to achieve clarity
You failed to be the Chosen One

But don't believe everything you've peed
And don't despair
Just wipe and
Go to the kitchen sink to
Drink

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THE COOKING OF FILTH

If dirty words frighten you, I really do not know how you have managed to live so long. People are full of dirty words. The only time they do not use them, most people I mean, is when they are describing something dirty.

– James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*

He who is filthy, let him be filthy still.

– Revelation 22:11

I am a filthy man. The gratifying shame of my perversions is beyond the courage of thought to the larger part of the social strata. Inconceivable. A no-go subterranean necropolis of thought. Instead, a pig emoji on the apps and profiles elevating the sense of sleaze to a cute animal icon, extracted from the vastness of ideas, attractions, ventures, rendering the self into sorcery. What do they see? Off-limits aversion to the rotten over-indulgence of lost men, the terror of STDs, the unease of exposure to own compulsions. To own your compulsions! So they do not initiate the conversation, they block me from their view while I virtually wrap myself in their arms and inhale deeply their fear and drink their vigilance.

At the age of twelve, I already knew I was filthy. The knowing was present long before, or the sensing. A mist spreading through my being, petrichor flowing in my veins, contained still within the sack of my skin, with time proliferating, extending to all the members, legs moving, hands desiring, penis merging. Few laughed at my voice breaking then while I heard no change in my tone. Felt for my throat's swelling Adam's apple, felt no embarrassment, no self-disgust. Vividly remember discovering the first, lonely pubic hair in the bath, a reed in the plain, contemplating shaving it off. But the swamp of the mind's meander did not let anyone feel for who I was. Puberty, poverty, and expectations consumed other boys in the class. Then Howie Musk invited me after school to see his dad's collection of porn magazines, a massive close-up of female genitalia spreading over two pages was staring at us, astounded. Howie unzipped his pants and lay back on the click-clack sofa bed, stroking his small dick, asking me to stroke it for him too. Another time, Howie, Jamal, 'Sparrow', and Mike were all stroking on the same sofa watching German porn nicked from the VHS rental shop. The dicks and the pussy in the video were unrealistically big and juicy, all was set in the Bavarian countryside, but the boys were gazing at each other. Sparrow had the thickest stump of a dick, with a thick black bush of pubes we all admired. Mike never took his trousers off, his hand still throbbing in them. Jamal's dick had a tight foreskin, and once he managed to pull it down, it was covered in a white nebula. Oh, I and Howie wanted to wash Jamal's dick, perversely. He lived in a dilapidated house with an alcoholic mother, and bathing was a

weekly chore, in a sink. Jamal's shame was like the bad graffiti on the wall of his house: DICK. None of them knew anything yet, and our futures were already set. At school, I was stretching my hands in front of me on the desk, head down, forehead resting on the cold, high-gloss wood effect, gathering my thoughts into a swarm, my senses withdrawing from the outside. Felt myself in an instant. Felt I could fart out an anthem for our future, how tense this fixation directed me. The lonesomeness operating my vision eradicated any trust to disclose myself to anyone. I saw the boys' eyes gazing with no focus, not worth the revelation. The perversion grew quietly over the years, allowing me to follow some common reality of exams, family gatherings, holidays in the French countryside, intellectual pursuits... A plateau of a sort, it appeared, but how far from vegetation! Just before entering university, the end of summer, waiting at the East Croydon station, I saw a boy around twenty years old wiping blood from his grazed elbow. With my eyes shut for a few minutes, heart pounding as if to rip out of my chest, only the bloody elbow in my head, I recognized how, underneath the distractions, the forces were still in me, active, robust, making up the bones and the blood of me. Legs, hands, penis. That day, I stood under the cool shower for what seemed like an eternal instant bringing the image back to my members and simultaneously allowing the mystery to take me over, come through. Legs, hands, penis.

On a cool, cloudy morning on the fourth of October, the London sky was smudged with steel colours from Constable's sea paintings as I walked to get a coffee and read Sartre's 'Saint Genet' in a cafe where no one paid to me any attention anymore. And Genet was my saint. I recall the day perfectly. I wore a navy trench found in a charity shop for a couple of pounds, old Levi's, brown desert boots, and a worn leather satchel. A portrait of an over-intellectualized student wrapped in destitution. The sky felt heavy, the coat hung on my thin shoulders, pulling the carcass towards the pavement. At the time, I ate occasionally but mostly drank cheap filter coffee and smoked Pall Malls. The weight of that sky, unforgettable. The usual weekday pedestrian traffic pushed from every side, and the plaster of people imitating movement, blurred shapes and patches of no colour in a shamanic trance, forcing their spells of yes and no, sorry, and thank you, grew resistance in me. I recall that day so vividly because suddenly I spotted a black pearl in the crack of the pavement, I fell to the ground among the frustrated crowd, and becoming fully aware, fully myself, I shouted: No! Enough! I AM THE FILTH OF THIS EARTH.

The days before the great awakening, I steadily melted into some nothingness. Pleasantly dissolving against space and time, I thought.

My forehead, back, and chest are shining with sweat, a long alien hand stretches over my chest, the stubble of a man pierces the skin of my shoulder, his leg covers mine. Our bodies consumed, confused, amalgamated, exposed now to the cold air of the room create condensation on the

window. Recollection of Doc Martens next to my face, 'Hey... hey, buddy...', he lifts me off the pavement, the street widens, the crowd distorts into a blur, only now my eyes burn. Zoom on my grazed hands, muddy, blackened blood paste burns. Legs, as if disowned, carry us to the nearby toilets, and only now I see his face. The coffee bean glow with a perfectly inverse blade of Matisse-like seaweed across the right half. Not a fault, not a vice, not a crime. His hand separates the fine gravel from my hand and blood. Reality is exploding. He talks something I cannot hear, my head melts in slow motion. The lav fills the veins with a tsunami of familiar aromas, piercing floor disinfectant in pine, bleach, and citrus urinal block, middle notes of shit, and a ton of piss, everything sitting on the solid base of stale piss biting into the eye sockets. I could drink a gallon of it now. Piss vapour shroud embalms our faces, tongue wets the lips to taste the sediment. To run your tongue over the floor tile, to rest your face on those cool tiles, to find comfort, peace there. My hands slide into his, and I look like an idiot, a dumb child. Human fucking pity triggers me, and my hands tremble. And then we are in a small room taken by the bed, damp fills the air, there's some Baldwin on the windowsill, empty gin bottle, dead hibiscus plant. Empty, stinking ashtray, an empty glass, and a lamp with a naked bulb on the bedside table. The walls and bedding glow grainy grey. On the wall shelf, an opened packet of cheese slices, half a block of butter. He lets out a quiet, rich fart, smoking the hydrogenous molecules of the studio. Merging, merging, merging with the iridescent black of the cosmos, I begin to drift in the primordial ocean. Not even *me* but *something of me*. Centuries and milliseconds pass at the same speed, rust grows in this ether, and that *something of me* is not alone. He lights a cigarette, now I see, he must be over fifty, silver throughout his beard...

- You've got a nerve, brother - slips through his bold teeth in a heavy accent.

- ... the fuck? - *something of me* now suspended in the net of eternal decay while the body remains on the smeared bed sheet, sodden with body fluids, wonders.

- A hungry varmint got a treat. Or maybe a prince? - strong hand digs through the ribs, breathing heavy, one can attune to the vibrations of his nasal hair – a prince of the barren earth, in a godforsaken castle – organs rupture. A sigh of relief or ecstatic trance thrusts *something of me* impending, closer to the pinnacle, the auguring of its presence.

- Don't stop... - through clenched teeth, convulsions jolt the body forward, so convenient.

- That you want? - whole hand squeezing half of the face, thumb pressing deeply in the skull. The noise of the traffic outside, no vomit, only glue of saliva, acid juice of the stomach over-spilling around the cheek. Snow of ash falls on the bed.

- The little prince wants to marry the ancient polliwog? Is that so? - his breath, like grey anal mucus, clogs the lungs. The net expands infinitely, implodes on itself, shimmers with plastic chairs, bacon rashers, irises, Sanskrit, milk, hummingbirds, bursting head emojis, acorns, gametes, Paṭikkūlamānasikāra, storms, gasoline, haemoglobin, drums... *Something of me* is situated universally sucking in the planes. The brain of the ancient polliwog glows brightly as it undulates in.

- Papa got the little prince. Easy, easy... You got to the edge of the cliff. Straight in. Follow the fanfare. All those things you've been told to wait for. Drink it, drink from the chalice - frigid voice scratches the synapses. The nipples erect in the cool, the notochord twitches, tongue swells beyond the container. Drowning. Papa sings countertenor:

With these hungry eyes

One look at you and I can't disguise

I've got hungry eyes

I feel the magic between you and I

Pixelated shit of a sky realigns above *something of me* sticky with grime. All is done, *something of me* is ready.

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Cuervo and Bones

cum on
spikes of grain
drops on

unfolding
fallen
the belly

lips pressed
drool-shining

upon glory
against anger
hickey

rock
of sorrow
head wet

fists empty
in your
with drool

kernels root
the unwanted
whose fresh scent
carries

in
boy
he

earnest voices
in the freedom
flaccid skin

bleed
of
folds

onions
world

open
reflecting
our souls

in the
off

broken
spikes and
spoiled grains
spill from bellies
absolute beauty

onions
reflecting off our

open in the world
souls

flower
dreams within
flower dreams drip
with drool and semen
on loose lips

rock
of
head

fists
sorrow
wet

empty
in your
with drool

flaccid

singing spheres from the bottom of the sea fold
flesh

Nicholas Alexander Hayes is the author of *Ante-Animots: Idioms and Tales* (BlazeVOX, 2019) and *Amorphous Organics* (SurVision, 2019).

Omar

(an excerpt from *The Devil's Ranch*)

At the end of my tines, I work the ground around the graves. Once the sun has slid along its path and the clouds peel like muffled bells, I bow down, waiting to be warmed by rows of bodies.

Cleaner counterparts of the dead string my neck. Sifting japa through thumb and middle finger, I chant separate stations. Bones shaped like people sit rapt, propped with hangers in the spine, loose bits harvested for jewelry, any clinging gristle cleaned by bugs. I pull a sacrifice out of the grave by his arm. Head like a split bag of tea, clothes much too tight, like he's been doing pushups down there, my flaxen friend. I stand in an uncultivated instinct, kissing withered neck to navel, embroidering the leather. I ride him on my shoulders, swaying back and forth, eyes shut while his limbs caress. We're hammered to the same altar. One by one, hands shoot to the sky, asking to be called upon, pleading with me to wear their clothes, urine cakes on stones and bones, mitosis of wetted lips.

I know many who marry for love. I'd bottle their screams if I could. To cherish the illusion of an unwashed dream, I should like to be buried alive, closer to my husbands. Together, we fatten the world.

This is the boy I bathe with cheap soap, my every end tinged with longing, and watch him bob awake atop knock-knees.

"The devil born in jeans, my scraped-together night," his voice burns slower than a candle.

"Pull up a chair," I tell him, and imagine unwrapping him with my pitchfork, from his pant cuffs up. Beneath his crabbed, severe face, he reminds me his name is Omar. I've damned myself to skim through his age. His skin tastes like an algae penny. Whatever he relates of hell insults the one we built on earth. Muscling through Choronzon, a Tinkerbelle between us and the abyss, a stole stitched from skinned Minotaurs, there is only zero. I beg myself

pardon, sticking pins in him till we retch, far too bloody to come. My live-in voodoo doll speaks in spent trimesters of orgies to aid the yield of crops.

“A man’s life means nothing less than the creatures he treads.” Mother taught me to discriminate between sounds of terror, torment, and agony. The Pink Zone welcomes our ashen type, culled from the remnants of Gomorrah. Omar doesn’t protest when I dress him in women’s clothes, our ritual before heading to brunch. I vowed never to bring home a woman. Old-school religion has us resting on a giant tortoise, resting on the shell of one even larger. So it is for me, but my mother, instead, goes all the way down. Omar feels this way about the murders I’ve joined with his. He wants me to build a bistro in his grave. The living don’t wilt as well, there’s too much flux, light sleepers easily perishable, rarely worth respect – nothing like his scent to potentiate my shower mist. Because his stink is stronger, Omar matters more.

x

At Los Sombreros, we drink straight whiskey and smoke cigars. Waffle-bellied fat boys grin in an atmosphere besmeared by pool tables, pinball machines, thick cut fries, bowls of mustard, empty glasses rimmed foamy, and pin-up girls shining with lordosis. All I see are x-ray bones, tabloid bogginess. Mexican knaves elbow green felt, nodding in somnolence, squinting through the hullabaloo of human pollution. My self-made mafia started from scratch with Palo Monte and police protection. “What’s that, rabbit fur?” A man’s belt is grasped. “Take another guess,” he whispers names of the scalped. Every feather on my jacket was plucked from hatchlings in first flight. My cousin Elio is chewing a human ear. Most of these fags walk like one. I do a wheelie on my spurs, order another 7Up, enough fond memories to rattle the bottom of a pop can, and settle in my corner. A mariachi band sings to the sewage, an echo stung through the grated stink, x-ing out the yellow eyes of anemic cats below. Something of an abeyant gender flags the barback hopelessly. I’ll turn her a her, an obedient sweetheart. The hem of her skin radiates my name. I imagine the blood lettering of us carved together. If the lord plays favorites, imagine what I’ll do. The jukebox sings: *Mephistopheles is not your name / I know what you’re up to just the same*. Playing host to this six-foot essence would suit the extra coffin. I order her a flight of drinks. One by one, she puts them back. I want a dozen children with

her, as a type of vengeance, to corrugate the grave. Even if I polish my teeth to peel the spices from her skull, she will be a beaten dog for my nganga. Everyone to their punched timecard, one life or the next. No more bubbling liquor in which to drop my coins, no more cheers to make.

Fingers play a tone on her banking shoulders, my BMW keychain indented between. I set churches on fire in her eyes. She's so drunk I could pull an arm off her body. A survey of tension turns a profit on proximity. "Priestess," I whisper, offering sweets. "Sara," she counters, necklace dangling from her inner shirt, a rune dipped in blood. Its rattle refracts like rubber quartz. I imagine a chamber pot broken beneath her, some wooden placenta running out. My shadow is black enough to blanket us both. Men poof into piles of ash in the bed before us. Street whores sign the cross on our way home. First our clothes decompose. We fit under the sheets like clawed meat. Nets cast between nightmares entwine us by the sex. For two days we live off each other's sweat, upside-down saltshakers spilling fire ants. Omar whimpers, hogtied in the shed. She's escorted away, endless cloud of a tongue still unspooling. The veins in Omar's forearms have become scars.

In the afternoon, we drink coffee in silence. "Please don't stay away so long next time." He massages his wrists where the rope was and starts to cry, inaudibly. Nausea gurgles in my stomach. The copper spots cranked damp across his façade rankle me.

David Kuhnlein's fiction is featured or forthcoming in *Ligeia*, *Surfaces.cx*, *Fine Print Press*, *OOMP!*, *Tragickal*, and others. He edits the literary review column *Torment*, venerating pain and illness, at *The Quarterless Review*. He lives in Michigan and is online [@princessbl00d](https://twitter.com/princessbl00d).

god complex

my father, the god complex, says i'm the prettiest boy
with the unbuttoned shirt, bleeding knees, faggot mouth
like a wound, a snake in the grass

more like angel dust under my skin
the rot at my core attracting flies
broken promises littering the ground like roadkill

and so i make of myself an offering
shaking knees, pumping blood and kitchen knives
and during his worship, i set the trap while he engulfs me

years later, i find a nice boy, an angel, who has the hands of my
father

and i cry, whenever he touches me
for a god is only a god

because we allow him to be

Daniel Sheen is a queer multidisciplinary artist living in the UK. He is fascinated by the idea of modern fairy tales. He has been published in *XRAY Lit*, *Misery Tourism*, *Expat Press*, *Bear Creek Gazette*, *SCAB* and more. He is currently writing his debut novel. Find him at danielsheen.net and [@DanielSheenUK](https://twitter.com/DanielSheenUK) on Twitter.

Beating the Dead

The battered body and manlier face and sexier innards he can't stand.

The ones you wish you had tattooed on yourself or given away to friends or taken to the grave as your babies, never to be named.

No sooner.

Then gone.

Nameless. Dead.

Shoving it to the back burner.

Cooking and crying and fucking and licking and fucking some more. And I whisper this then.

I whisper this.

The days pass.

And the weeks. And the months. And the years.

And I would like to point out that you are not the girl I met in 2008.

COVID Fuck #F20BBX

Dissatisfaction is the footnote of quantity.

All those Ken doll torsos so bad in bed;
bench press five-hundred reps but can't suck a cock,
washboard abs with cheese-grater teeth.

It's midmorning, he's been fucked twice, sucked off,
came zero.

Catch number four circles the bait, bites,
the sun is beating down, he's already sweaty. Oh well.

He's let in and led through a labyrinthine building,
stunned silent by the beauty of the face reveal.

There has to be a flaw about to surface, a danger,
a plastic bag around his head and throat cut.

Left bleeding out on some dusty floor
whilst Adonis fucks his ass bareback;
another name to a body count, a detail,
just part of a story, not the main attraction.

They make out, no hands grab his neck,
everything normal, if somewhat nervous.

How could that be nervous of me? he thinks.

He begins to strip. Turns to lock the door as asked.

Looks back. *Oh shit.*

Adonis is on all fours on the bed, complete with fox tail,
he wags his hips and it sways limply.

"What does the fox say?" ... "Grrr?"

Fuchs has a girlfriend elsewhere in the labyrinth,
unaware of the bestial appendage... or his,
which he has to use protected for that reason,
when all he really wants now is to: de-tail and breed.

Reset. De-tail and breed. Reset
until the heat of the day melts them both
into a puddle of sweat, cum and whatever drug
the universe took to create this scenario.

Luke 9:58: *“And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes,
but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”*

He has a nice sweaty *fuchs* hole to lay his heads,
both his sheathed dick and his naked tongue.
Insecurity can eat the confidence and will
when caught reflected in a mirror,
normally, but not when blessed with such detached benevolence
of this play acted out by divine marionettes.

Momentary pause. Glass of champagne, sip of water.
Adonis is fucked, coked out of his head.
That truth fell out his mouth hole mid-fuck number whatever;
apparently the cocaine well has dried up,
but the occasional escapes to piss make sense now.
Doesn't change the narrative, he's not here for that,
he's learnt to flow with those like a river, or
a dribble of semen out a freshly bred ass.

Clock faces change somewhere in the room,
reaching a preset time of importance,
forgotten, with his face fastened tight, inhaling ass.
Shit. Silence the noise, but the ass calls back.
Disappear into it again. Beaten and tenderised.
Dripping wet with spit, sweat and lube,
missing only one ingredient:
all his pent-up cum.

That would be the perfect end to the film,
the final act showdown. The September Eleventh.
Cum in that hole, plug it up, and give it a slap.
De-tail and eat that ass-tini out. Shaken, not stirred.
Noise. Reality. He blinks. *Shit*.
Fucking alarm. Fucking life. Commitments.
Disconnects from the ass, stumbles for phone.
Silences alarm with one hand, pulls off condom with the other.

He looks from clothes to bed, bed to fox.
Fuck it. He jumps back onto the bed.
He lies down on his back and lets Adonis mount him,
cock in his mouth, sixty-nine, the juice from his ass oozing.
He requires cum. If he can't use his own, by proxy it shall be.
His mouth is fucked like a cunt and seeded,
he inseminates the fox with a kiss, and stirs with his tongue,
the liquor it creates makes him shoot his load into Adonis' mouth.

He arrives at his destination. Late.
Late. Unwashed. Stinking of latex and lube.
Condoms, lube, spit, ass and semen.
He can taste it. Smell it rising from his body
whenever he lifts his hands to text.
He waves to his approaching friend halfheartedly.
"What have you done today?" they ask him.
"It's lockdown. Self-isolated." One of his piercings is missing.

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.
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These Things Never Really Leave You

Meanwhile, in suburbia:

1.

Fuck, she was sore afterwards.

2.

They'd broken up a few months ago. It was pretty painful for both of them. They'd met up a couple of times since, trying to patch things up for the sake of their friendship. They went for a walk in the woods. It was a favourite pastime of theirs. They ended up fucking, hard, fists and spit involved, there on the soft ground. It didn't solve anything. They didn't get back together. It just made them feel cheap and tawdry. It extended the pain.

3.

Meat serving meat.

4.

I rimmed him right there on the lounge floor. His kids were asleep upstairs. His wife was out of town for the night. I knew I wouldn't see him again after this.

5.

Her tears made her mascara run and made him push balls deep.

6.

She thought she was having a laugh with the boys. The attention was fun. They bought her drinks. She went back to theirs. Yet, when the first of the four cocks pushed past her anal muscle, she finally began to understand the situation she was in.

7.

He made the boy leave his socks on.

8.

He bumped into his girlfriend's workmate in a club. She was already hammered. He bought her more drinks. At the end of the night, he said he'd walk her home. Led her behind an office building where they made out until he realised she was so drunk she'd started pissing herself. He watched her sit down on the floor. He thought about taking out his cock and wanking over her face.

9.

He began to feel like nothing. Worthless. Less than worthless. He didn't understand how he had ended up here.

10.

This was my ex-girlfriend's younger brother. Within hours, I would have regret for the rest of my life.

11.

Friends with no benefits.

12.

His friend's mother. She'd always been a bit of a wild one, always so cool for her age. Perhaps why she drunkenly allowed him to fuck her in the arse one afternoon when the house was empty. She laughed at him afterwards and asked, 'Does your little girlfriend at college let you do that?'

13.

Before the hour was up, they'd both been in all 3 of her holes.

14.

I love this dark-haired, troubled punky teen look. Especially when combined with the bad stuff.

15.

He promised him he wouldn't fuck him. Only look. But once he had him tied, he stroked his face and said, 'I have to.'

16.

They had a night out drinking together. They'd been friends for years. She said he could crash on her couch, but in the end, they continued drinking on her bed. She'd changed into her pyjamas. As she took his cock in her hand for the first time, he thought of her boyfriend, on a night shift at the hospital.

17.

It got out of control pretty quickly.

18.

This endless fucking haze of drugged fog and his orifices being used.

19.

The kind of girl you call your sweetheart, who breaks your fucking heart when you realize she's done crazy shit with other guys.

20.

They made the skinny slut dress in a school uniform for his piss-drinking session. He looked miserable. He needed the drug money. He didn't get any sympathy from the cameraman.

21.

Look at your-fucking-self.

22.

She was texting her boyfriend whilst his friend thrust into her. She read out loud the message 'C U soon baby, love u xxx,' and seconds later felt herself flooded with cum.

23.

Gag. Use. Ejaculate. Repeat.

24.

Just because you're showing a flicker of self-awareness there doesn't make this any less true.

25.

Why the fuck had she agreed to this.

26.

She went to a hotel room with him, this man she'd never met, this man with whom she'd only spoken over Tinder and WhatsApp. It was going well. He seemed charming. She undressed for him. He took his camera out. He called her a slut.

27.

He was a film fan. So of course he told him to squeal like a piggy when he buttfucked him roughly over the couch.

28.

Waiting for the arrival of the two men she had agreed to let beat her for money.

29.

Funny how fucked-up some people's lives end up.

30.

I hope that's your old school tie that you're gagged with.

31.

It won't feel like play when my cock is making you want to shit yourself, you dumb fucking waste of air.

32.

Looking bombed out of his mind...

33.

Sometimes I just can't control myself.

Jamie Giles is a writer and artist living in England. His works have been published in *SCAB* and *Misery Tourism*. His (oft-deleted) Instagram is currently [@jamiegileseroticaartist](#), and he is on Twitter as [@scumbooks](#).

**AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN
STUART BUCK (BEAR CREEK PRESS) AND MARK WARD (AUTHOR OF *HIKE*)**

HIKE: *HIKE* is a hallucinogenic and surreal journey through Bear Creek, told through verse, haiku, and much more.

Pre-order *HIKE* here: bearcreekpress.bigcartel.com

BEAR CREEK: Bear Creek is a fictional town existing on the very edges of weirdness and the *Bear Creek Gazette* is the monthly newspaper whose task it is to try and make sense of the high strangeness that takes place there.

Featuring some of the very best creatives around today making extremely strange art, the *Bear Creek Gazette* is a one-of-a-kind online publication that pays its artists, loves its creators, and aims to change the world.

Visit Bear Creek here: welcometobearcreek.com

Stuart Buck: *HIKE* is a weird little book. Where did the inspiration come from?

Mark Ward: Well, I'm not too sure to be honest. I definitely wanted to see more of Bear Creek, and I figured that a trek through it would be the best way to do so. I love haiku and semi-secretly write it a good bit and have plans for a haiku collection down the road. I remember reading and loving Basho's *The Narrow Road to The Deep North*, a haibun travelogue that mixes prose and haiku, and I thought something similar with Bear Creek could be cool.

I knew there'd be more haiku than in standard haibun. I find they're great for clean, precise images, and I wanted to explore Bear Creek, so I wrote sequences as well as single haiku.

Beyond that, mainly, the idea grew out of the articles I wrote for the *Gazette*. I'd set up these places as half jokes, but then I'd want to know more about them, like The Dunes.

Bear Creek kept pulling me further and further in, and that's how *HIKE* came about. Also, whilst all these ideas were occurring, you said you were thinking of starting a press, so I decided that settled it and started writing it.

SB: Bear Creek has a history of being a place where people feel they can be themselves. Do you believe you can be who you want to be when you write?

MW: I don't think it's about self-actualisation for me, generally, although maybe it is, in specific instances. I get caught up in an image, a snatch of dialogue, and I want to know, just like any reader, what's going to happen next. There's a moment in *HIKE* that I won't spoil that came as a shock to me, but when I wrote it, I went *ooooo yes*.

As for Bear Creek, I think it attracts all the best weirdos; it's a home for misfits – both the in-world characters and those who write about it.

SB: If you could go hiking anywhere in the world, with any person, where would you go and with whom?

MW: As I am rubbish with exercise, it would have to be with someone super stimulating. I'd like to go on a HIKE around Fire Island in the summer with gay writers I admire: Armistead Maupin, Thom Gunn, Philip Ridley, and Edmund White.

SB: Your use of haiku to tell parts of the story in *HIKE* is inspired. What made you choose that specific style, and do you have a favorite haiku?

MW: As I mentioned Basho earlier, here's one of my faves (trans. Jane Hirshfield) and one of his most famous:

*In Kyoto,
hearing the cuckoo,*

I long for Kyoto.

Another recommendation: I don't have a copy at the moment (and this will need to be rectified!), but there's a *fantastic* collection of modern haiku called *Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years* that is chock-full of astonishing haiku.

SB: You've met a cute guy. The chemistry is electric. He wants you to take him to your favorite place in Bear Creek. Where do you go, and what do you do when you get there?

MW: I'd bring him to the outdoor cinema on the beach. The observatory does a "light show" – well, that's what they call it, but it looks like a portal to a galaxy where the planets and stars are softly dancing. They currently have a retrospective of Harmon. Have you seen his films? I love his 80s horror phase – *The Customer is Always Dead* is my fave; it's a zombie movie set in Lloyd's Supermarket on Main St. The zombies win in the end; it's quite moving.

SB: A lot of your work focuses on the seedy side of physical and spiritual relationships. By contrast, *HIKE* is a much softer take on things. Which part of a relationship do you prefer? The spit & pickle or the cuddling on the sofa talking about your future together?

MW: So, firstly, I was a complete innocent until we met, Stu, and had never read anything remotely seedy. Nu-uh. But seriously, I think it was only after getting back into writing prose – something quite unfamiliar to me – and having been reading some of the new weirdo lit mags out there, and notably Damien Ark's monolith *Fucked Up* (Expat Press, and a recommendation from you, Stu!), that I got drawn into writing dark little stories (links [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). That said, we all exist on a spectrum – I have honest-to-God unironic love poems in both of my poetry collections (forthcoming). *HIKE*, despite the darkness there, was always meant to be softer, more hopeful. It's a seduction.

As for what part of a relationship I prefer, honestly, all of them – from the fucking each other in every room in the house to cuddling under blankets watching TV, from the first flush of meeting to someone fully knowing who you are.

SB: Given your fraught and often volatile sexual relationship with the Mayor of Bear Creek, were you surprised that this book got made? Were any bribes involved? Do you have photos of him doing horrible things?

MW: Honestly, yes. Soon after I moved to Bear Creek, The Mayor showed up one morning as a Welcoming Committee, with vouchers for a 2-for-1 meal at Carluccio's that had both mine and his name on it. We went and had a wonderful time. He was sweet and funny and charming. He managed to keep the other Mayors under control until I'd fallen for him. Then, they erupted. The Mayor of 1806 kicked me, literally, out of bed one night calling me a *som-dom-ite*. The Mayor of 1931 cried on my shoulder for about three hours about the Great Depression and how we weren't having it here in Bear Creek and how she was sad. It became too much. I was dating him, not all of them, so I left. He didn't understand, of course.

As for the book, I said that I was going to write it. He told me not to and threatened me – I won't repeat what he said. But by then, I knew enough about the other Mayors. I sent The Mayor of 1806 a link to the Westboro Baptist Church, and he signed off on the formation of Bear Creek Press. I got The Mayor of 1931 into Emo, and she gave formal permission for me to publish it and indemnity against any backlash. Safe to say, The Mayor wasn't pleased, but there was nothing he could do, apart from slander me in the press. Which he had done anyway since he saw that I'd gotten on with my life.

Also, yes, I have photos of him that he wouldn't want to get out there, but I wouldn't be low enough to blackmail him with them. In fact, I gave them back to him. That's when he knew the relationship was over – he couldn't understand how I didn't want to lash out at him. I told him I didn't care and that I'd moved on.

SB: Tell us about the things you have going on in your life at the moment. Writing, job, anything. What should we know about Mark Ward before we buy his book?

MW: So, at the moment, I'm working on my second full-length collection, *Real Estate*. I just published a Choose Your Own Adventure sonnet called *Faultlines*, which you can play over at Voidspace [here](#). You can find out more about my books and writing [here](#).

You should also know that the Bear Creek Mark Ward is a little annoyed at this interview, as he doesn't believe that I exist and thinks it's odd how he was only asked one question, and it was about his ex. So, he thinks this is a pretty strange interview. But I don't, so thanks!

AFTERWORD

The 11th issue of SCAB comes out in September 2022.

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scabmag.wordpress.com/submissions

For more overall information, please visit SCAB's homepage:

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