



Lumière

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lumière

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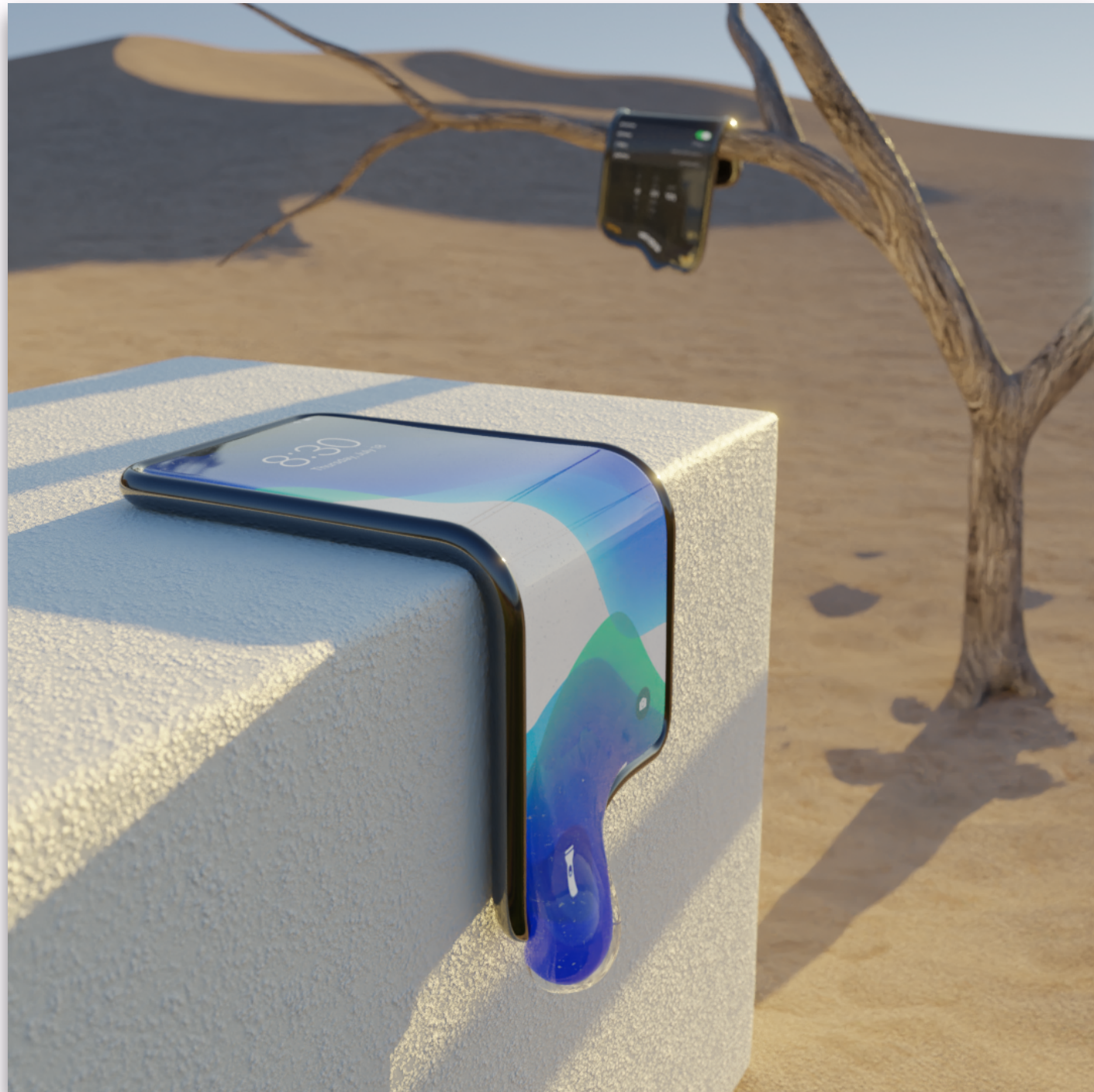


For my brother Tom

by Ann Whelan

We took the bus from Medford to Cambridge,
Waiting tables at Atrium Cafe.
Stations flooded at once, pre-theater rush –
We need our check right now they'd say, over
Chardonnay and vegetable crudités.
Barry gave you water at the bar but
Truth was that vodka lit the shift ablaze
And from departed customers' plates we grazed
Leftover cheesecake as we bussed dishes.
There was Red Line construction to Davis Square.
It was the early eighties and we'd share
Twenty more years before cancer took you.
They left an indelible mark somehow,
Those 50-Church-Street days calling me now.

photograph by Nicole Caruso



Persistence of Memory Cards by Amelia Scarlett

Drought

by Willow Funkhouser

She looks
like a girl I know
except her broad
shoulders that once sat like plateaus on
the desert of her back loomed low
The rock atrophied
and broken down
by the howling winds
and heavy rains that blew
across the land this winter

The waterfall
of her hair
is just a trickle

The grasslands
on her neck
are patchy and grey
with small trees
blown leafless

The wells in
her eyes
have been sucked dry by the townspeople
and there has not been
a rainfall
to replenish them

The caverns
of her nostrils
are cold and damp

Wildebeests
drift hungrily
across her barren stomach
unable to find water or meat
her neck
strained
with the effort of holding up the giant boulder that
crashed down in an avalanche and came to rest atop her
spine

Her calves
like deep roots
that once held up strong and independent trees
cut down



by Angela Faneuff

The Prospector *by Joshua Dover*

Humphreys Peak, snow-capped and ringed with a halo of clouds, stood above the rest of the San Francisco Mountains. The smell of pine trees in the crisp air revitalized me. It had been an arduous journey across a sea of endless prairies, broken up by small herds of buffalo, and scattered townships. Gold had recently been discovered in the Arizona territory; gold is what had brought me to the base of this mountain.

I had made my way west a few months after the War ended. In four years, I had witnessed enough sacrifice and destruction to last a lifetime. Consequently, I had also lost my desire to return to civilization. A letter from Bill, a fellow veteran of the 28th Infantry Regiment, brought me out west. He had recently acquired a land claim and wanted a partner to help prospect.

We had grown up in the same rural town, his brother had married a cousin of mine, and correspondence between relatives had kept us in loose contact with each other. Despite internal doubt about his dubious nature, I let my need for exile lead me to the frontier. Bill met me at the train station in Prescott with a firm handshake, a smile, and pleasant inquiries that belayed my misgivings about the venture. My Army pension provided capital for our provisions, a couple of horses, and a mule. Another firm handshake reassured me that Bill understood he was on the hook for his share of the costs. However, he remained adamant that we would not share profits after our expenses were covered. In his words, "A man shouldn't be responsible for another's fortune," yet he needed my savings to get started. For me, this was more than an opportunity to build a fortune; I hoped to find some peace. With the terms of our arrangement settled, we made our way northeast towards the snow-covered

peaks.

The tranquility of the peaceful mountains clashed with memories that still raged a private battle in my mind. Bill led the way up the steep slopes and loose gravel as we inched our way towards the peak. We stopped several yards beneath the snow line in an area that he had scouted last fall and pitched tents near a steady stream that flowed from a spring higher up the mountain. Once our campsite was established, I took a moment to look out from the slope; the view stretched serenely for miles with only the chirp of songbirds to disrupt the quiet. This was the escape from the crowded Boston harbor that I had longed for. After an evening meal we settled around the fire, tobacco in our pipes, and got reacquainted.

The last time I had seen Bill was after the battle of Chancellorsville. I had drawn a night watch and was conducting my patrol when I saw him scurrying from the Company bivouac site. The lantern light froze him in place and our eyes locked. I could tell by the look in his eye that Bill had experienced all that he could take. He tipped his cap at me, I nodded, turned, and continued making my rounds. Desertion was not something I was capable of, but he never did share my scruples. From there, he had slowly made his way out west: gambling, womanizing, and barely keeping one step ahead of the law. I filled him in on the last campaigns of the war and the fate of some of our comrades. After our exchange, the conversation died off quickly. Bill wasn't much for talking, so I settled into the silence of evening.

I rose with the morning sun to find Bill awake and getting a head start on the day's work. I took the time to brew a pot of coffee and walked a cup out to my partner. He was by the small stream, hunched over his pan, eagerly searching to find the riches we both

believed were in this mountain. The need to carry my own weight quickly overcame me and I set to panning in a bend further downstream. Panning for gold is tedious work, but we only stopped twice: once at noon for an hour and at the end of the day, when the sun set behind the mountain. Neither of us had produced a single ounce of gold; undeterred we went to bed dreaming of golden nuggets floating gently downstream.

This pattern of rising and setting with the sun carried on for weeks. The only thing that changed was the amount of whiskey Bill drank and the level of provisions that remained. He was giving in more and more to his compulsion. Consequently, I was experiencing an unfamiliar and undesirable side of him. He would often become angry, cursing our luck, and blaming me for the turn his life had taken after that May night in 1863.

When our provisions became low, I offered to head into town to resupply and he remained behind, insisting that someone should keep a watch on our claim. The supplies had lasted significantly less than planned and I suspected Bill was the source of the discrepancy. His need for whiskey was an expense we couldn't carry, and the sounds of his drunken foraging often woke me, which led to food being consumed at a rate faster than I could account for. I mentioned that he still owed me for the original supplies, but I left the question of his ability to repay me unspoken. My passive aggressiveness provoked a side eye glare, a grumble of expletives, and a spit of tobacco that landed suspiciously close to my position.

My solitary ride down the mountain gave me time to contemplate strategies on how to make our limited funds last. Central to this plan was my vow to keep a better eye on the essentials. I rode into town midway through the third day and spent the remainder of the day resupplying. With night approaching, I decided it was best to stay in town at a hotel and get an early start in the morning.

I took my evening meal in the saloon where I observed a sheriff questioning the local clientèle and waving a wanted poster in their faces. From his lack of familiarity, I knew he had traveled some distance in pursuit of the wanted man. Eager for some gossip or news from the world outside of our mountain, I strained to eavesdrop while still remaining inconspicuous. I managed to glean some details about a bounty offered by private citizens, most likely the victims, for the apprehension of a horse thief. The sheriff's tone betrayed his eagerness to claim the reward and his inquiries verged on being overzealous. Wishing to avoid confrontation, I settled my bill and retired to my quarters without engaging the tenacious lawman.

I left early the next morning, the gray sky concealing my escape back to the mountain. Bill had been in the territory some time before me, and I wondered if he had any knowledge of the fugitive. Perhaps we could track him down and the bounty would go towards recovering my investment.

When I finally arrived at camp, Bill made weak inquiries into my trip, gave vague answers to my questions about his progress, and a general air of avoidance settled over our site. The atmosphere didn't lend itself to disclosing the details of the bounty or wanted fugitive. The next morning, I followed my usual routine and brought Bill a cup of fresh coffee. The aroma beat me to the edge of the stream and Bill nervously dumped his pan into the water.

"Any luck?" I inquired. Surprisingly, I was met by evasive grunts and lack of eye contact. Deciding it was best to let things go, I left the cup and made my way down towards my usual spot but stopped a few yards shy, preferring to stay closer in order to keep a better watch on our stores.

I couldn't shake the feeling that Bill was conspiring against me and about midday, I crept back towards his position, my approach remained undetected without the treacherous and aromatic brew. Standing a few feet behind Bill, I

could see he was transfixed with the sand and water in his pan, swirling it around, hoping to catch a glimmer of golden flecks. Even from behind I could tell his eyes bulged, signaling his discovery. Several golden kernels lay in the sediment; Bill greedily produced a pouch from inside his shirt.

"What have you got there?" I said, my tone half joking. Realizing I had uncovered a secret, my demeanor immediately soured.

"I guess you were bound to find out," he replied with a huff and emptied the contents of his pouch. The nuggets of gold that fell into his hand made the more recent corn kernels seem insignificant. I looked at him incredulously, the shock of betrayal paralyzed me. Reluctantly he revealed that he had discovered the gold the day after I had left to resupply. He had pulled a steady stream of kernels out every day since. The seeds of resentment were sown by his non-chalant confession.

As I slept that night, the resentment germinated, weaving into my dreams and creating an escapable feeling of distrust, which encapsulated me when I awoke. I abandoned the morning ritual and set off up stream. My efforts managed to procure a small amount of gold, with which I was initially satisfied. Sitting around the campfire that night, Bill demonstrated which site was more lucrative. Resentment grew into contempt.

The days passed with flecks and tiny grains of golden metal swirling in my pan, but that wasn't the case for my partner. In my absence, the stream and Bill seemed to have conspired against me, agreeing to provide auric rocks in an embarrassingly unequal manner. Remembering how Bill had rushed to the creek that first morning and how he had insisted that I conduct the resupply alone, I watched as he added ounce after ounce to his growing stash.

"Bill, I think it's time we head to town, to secure our holdings. We would be fools to keep any amount of gold on our person, especially out here in the wilderness, alone." Bill shook his

head in affirmation, removed the piece of grass he had been gnawing on, and peered at me quizzically.

"What?" I asked with a hint of guilt that seemed to come from the bottom of my soul, as if Bill knew the desires that I harbored but wouldn't admit to.

"I figure, this might be the end." It wasn't a question and so I only nodded my consent. My time in the quiet nature had benefited me greatly, but apparently, I didn't have what it takes to succeed as a prospector. I lacked Bill's greedy self-serving manner. But it did seem entirely unfair that I should be summarily dismissed from further revenue. After all, the mountain had given us a small fortune all ready, it would likely continue to provide.

That night, while Bill slept, I contrived a way to stay on. I had just as much right to be rich as any coward, drunk, or criminal, and Bill, well, he was all three. In the morning I stewed while the coffee brewed, rehearsing my well-composed argument. I set out to bring Bill his morning fix and for the first time I noticed that Bill still wore the union blue trousers and standard issue boots of his past life. How could a despicable deserter cut me out? As I drew nearer, he jumped up, whooping and hollering like I've never seen. Another tremendous find. He turned, saw me, and laughed; his delight was pure torture.

"I don't need you, not now, not never," he said, dropping two acorn sized gold nuggets and a couple of smaller pieces into his hand. Both cups fell from my grip, I grabbed a rock the size of a standard 6-pounder and lunged forward. The rage flowed through me and was reverberated back as the rock continued to make contact. Each blow echoed a satisfying crunch as tissue and bone gave way to my fury. Exhaustion forced me to stop long before my anger had evaporated. I stood up, looked around the campsite, and then finally down. I was repulsed by my work.

"Good morning!" The voice pierced the

quiet still air of the mountain top. I searched frantically for its origin. As he came out from around a tree the morning sun reflected off of his chest, into my eyes. Lifting my hand to shield the bright light enabled me to perceive the shiny object. A ringed star stared definitely back at me, laughed at my foolishness, and cursed my lack of restraint.

“Morning,” was the only reply I could manage. The blood on my shirt betrayed me and his hand slowly but steadily rested on the handle of the Colt .44 on his hip.

“I’m looking for William Clanton. He’s wanted for horse theft and larceny. Have you seen him?”

I stepped aside, revealing the fugitive. The irony coaxed a small grin on my face as the drawn revolver forced my hands into the air. Through my left boot I could feel an acorn-sized rock. I moved my foot a half step back, looked down, and then right in the sheriff’s eyes. “There’s more just like this, on his person.” I nodded towards the lifeless form. “Maybe you can search for it on your way to collect the bounty?”

His smile cracked the serious disposition of his face. “Dead or Alive, that’s what the poster said. And this will be easier.” With a hearty chuckle his Colt found its holster. ♦



Salvation

by David Earl

Street’s dead as I linger,
my hand nursing my cheek
feeling lacy fingers
still stinging goodbye.

No place for salvation.
No warmth in “it’s over.”
The dream’s revelation,
an ending of lies.

I look up to the night,
the tapestry of black
for an old guiding light,
a shoulder to cry.

Up to stars deep in space
Burning billions of years,
their familiar face,
the unchanging sky.

A refuge whenever
there’s nowhere to turn.
Stars listen forever
no need to reply.

But a star didn’t smile,
didn’t talk, didn’t laugh,
didn’t stay a while,
with a breathy sigh.

A star’s heat and fire
never seared like a slap,
a flame roaring higher,
a time gone awry.

And galactic black holes
Couldn’t ever consume
Like the void in a soul,
still left out to dry.

So standing on asphalt
or under stars alike,
I’m still mad it’s my fault,
scorched in my mind’s eye.

But this flame will still drown,
just like the night’s beauty,
when the billions burn down
and all the stars die.



The Far Side of the City by Amelia Scarlett

June 1, 2020 – My Journal for Today

by L. S. Moore

Exhausted.

George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor.

There were 22,582 days between the murders of George Floyd and Emmett Till.

What is the story in the numbers?

Ninety-five days after Emmett died, Mrs. Rosa Parks sat down.

Emmett and George, do we sit?

1492 etched in the historical minds, overlooking the original Inhabitants.

1619 trustworthy historians acknowledge the start of the shaping of these America

2008 hope arrived.

Emmett and George, do we sit?

In 1978, Sister Angelou said, “I am the dream and hope of the slave. I rise”

Emmett, your mother, let the world see hatred on this land.

George, the world heard you cry out to your dead mother.

Emmett and George, do we sit?

Mrs. Rosa Parks, you eventually rode.

Sister Maya, you did rise.

Let us not forget, as we forcefully march toward diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Emmett and George, we will drive, ride, and rise.

Manual Typewriter by Jeanie Tietjen



FREEDOM *by Maryanne Muchuki*

You cannot sleep for so long; wake up and let us go to the river; it has not rained for quite a while and there is no water for bathing; hurry up so that you make it to school or else she will chase you again for being late; do not fetch water downstream — you must walk upstream; this is how you bend the bucket to fetch the water without touching the riverbed or else you make the water cloudy; hurry up so that you are not late to school; this is how you stabilize the bucket on your head; make sure to not trip or else you go back to the river; walk fast so that you are not late to school; pour half of the water in the cistern and then use the other half to bathe; wear these — I patched up the holes last night; take the half cup of porridge and run as fast as you can to school; hold your book so that it's not lost and ask her to give you a pencil; this is important!; make sure you get a nice spot under the tree with a nice view of the pictures and the rock that she uses; make sure you understand every bit that she says; answer the question exactly how she wants it; do not ask any questions — just repeat what she says; *what if she is wrong?*; remember she has been to higher levels, so she knows a lot that we do not know; do not forget how to hold a pencil; write as much as you can and make sure you do not lose track; use this book well because there is no other for you to write on; this is important; if you get hungry do not worry — you will find some boiled maize and beans; turn the pages gently so that you do not tear the book; do not lose this book; it is a path to your freedom; if the sun is too hot just put down your “leso”; do not lose focus until she is done; do not sit next to naughty boys — they will distract and mislead you; you will lose focus; when you walk to school, do not

walk with friends — they will cause you to be late and you might make her angry; be careful; when they talk to you, do not talk back — just put your face down and walk; do not stop for anybody; this is important; do not worry if the stones hit your toes — I will apply juice from “musembe” and it will be healed soon; keep walking until you get to the tree; sit and wait for her, and never let her wait for you; that is disrespectful; then you will not be able to be like her; you will not be free; if you meet men on the road, put your face down and do not respond to their calls or insults; they will not help you to be free; just focus on what she tells you; do you see how she dresses?; do you see how she talks?; I want you to be like her; understand that I want you to be free; understand there is another world; understand that this is the only way; understand that you cannot bear children at this age; understand that you cannot be owned by that old man at this age; understand that this is the only path; this is important for you to understand; understand that there is hope beyond these mountains and if you know what she knows then you will get to experience the other side; *“why didn't you do the same at your age?”*; young girl eat your porridge and leave; you have a long way to go and limited time because you must wait for her; and if you ever bleed, use this bark and dried banana leaves that I made for you; do not let anything stop you from going to the tree; remember what I am telling you and let it stick until you become like her; when she is done for the day, hurry up back home and revise before the sun sets because it will be impossible in the dark; this is the utmost gift you will ever receive; this is important; do you understand? ♦



photograph by Nicole Caruso

1...e5 by Steve Waller

Shortly after achieving his status in the world of chess, the yoke of anxiety weighed like a water-soaked blanket. It grew more intense with each match and opponent – a sense of judgement, an impending verdict of rejection with every move – memorized, canonized, analyzed – until it became too overwhelming to continue.

He remembered situations where he felt it grow, from the back of his neck, overtaking his thoughts, melting his logic. But shyness underscored the issue; it debilitated him, brought him to tears. “Why don’t you go out with your friends?” his mother would ask, to which the introvert in him gained more traction. As he aged, it intensified, as did the self-doubt. Retreating altogether, his room became his sanctuary, where online, he learned to play. But in the world in which he thrived, knowing without playing was akin to not existing, and with this isolation, his #1 ranking evaporated.

Lyle always loved the discipline of science and the simplicity of computers. He was enamored with the logic of the world. Finding refuge at the science museum offered escape from the pressure to perform on demand, to evade probing eyes, like a doctor pushing and hunting for an answer. At once he found both.

The glass encased booth bore a simple sign –

**ENTER IF YOU CHOOSE,
BUT PLAY YOU MUST**

A spare chess board, a robot on one side, still, awaiting a challenger. He entered the small enclosure, accepting the implied invitation. Sitting opposite, he looked across the board. A whirr filled the booth, a faint blue light cast up from beneath the table. An onyx black arm moved, resting on the table alongside the board, fingers stretching like a yawning willow. Lyle watched, unafraid, entranced by the show of life shining across the chess board.

::Hello:: it said

“Hi” Lyle said, surprised.

::Are you here to play?::

“Yes.”

::Begin::

He opened with 1. e4

It countered with 1...e5

To which Lyle played 2... Nf3

....and on and on and on. He looked across the board at his opponent, meeting its cold glare in a rare sense of fearlessness. The eyes revealed nothing – no threat, no assessment – the nuance of neutrality. They played continuously, countering each other’s pawn’s advance, every bishop’s crossing, a knight’s leap, a castle’s glide.

Freedom from judgement was realized in an understated epiphany. There was no intimidation at the table, across the board, staring at it. Caught off guard, he felt a calm swell from the back of his neck. Relieved of the stigma of performance, he was drowned in learning.

::Arrange your pieces::

And so, breaking the mold of tradition, he populated the white and black squares with pieces anew, offering options on play and memory alike.

“They are,” he said.

::According to whom?::

“Me.”

::Begin::

And so began Lyle’s self-discovery and reinvention.

A security guard knocked on the glass window, then tapped on the face of his watch. Must have been hours he played, time having galloped away.

Comfortable once again at the board. As he left the table, his opponent spoke –

::You are a formidable opponent. You have learned much in your short visit. Move past your fears. Eyes tell lies, the board holds the truth::

As the guard locked the door behind him, he stopped to look back. A spare chess board, a robot on one side, still, awaiting the next challenger. In a twist of fate, he left the museum in search of opponents.

It was standing room only in the stadium. This was the tenth city of forty in what was billed as the CheckMate Tour. After adjusting his mike and getting a thumbs up from his producer, the curtain parted to reveal Lyle standing center stage, bathed in a spotlight, beneath large projection screens.

“Welcome everyone!” ♦

The Guy in the Red Car (with the Sweet Dog)

by Willow Funkhouser

Did you walk out of your house this morning your thin lips already molded into a leer?

Did you set out today intending to scare me? or did you decide later
once you were already in your car
or maybe you had been driving for hours

Maybe you had dreamed of me last night
and in the morning you opened your eyes
hungry

To hurt

Maybe you had a hard day
maybe you got sacked
or broken up with
or bitten by your sweet dog
or burned your toast

Maybe the sweet stench of young girl
drew you closer than you meant to be

Maybe you yourself
were once on a bike ride
at 3pm
on a thursday
not far from campus
and some old man rolled up right next to you and told you to get in his car

And maybe you want to know how it felt
to be that old man

And maybe you don't think of me

but I have to think of you
every time I'm on my bike I have to think of you and your hungry eyes
and your thin leer
and your fast car
so much faster than my bike

And I can't *do anything* about it
because you didn't *do anything*

And maybe it wouldn't have bothered me
so much

If what I wore didn't wed me to my fate

If I hadn't gotten already been catcalled four times this week If I hadn't already been
And been

And had

And

Maybe if that hadn't happened

I wouldn't have cried
hot and red and afraid
and my boiling tears wouldn't have trickled into my mouth and burned my tongue
so that when I open my mouth to speak
I'm small and sweet
and I can't fucking speak

That the thing I do for myself
by myself

Now claws its fingers around my throat
and suffocates me

I wouldn't have cried
except that I didn't go biking after 7pm
I went at 3pm
because 3pm is safe
because all I want is to ride my bike at 3pm
on a thursday
not far from campus



Grace Chang

Mother Tongue *by David Earl*

Slumped over one end of the couch, Ami tried to doze off, but the TV was annoying enough to keep her awake. She glanced over at Luke, staring intently at another rerun of Mickey Mouse’s Clubhouse, the same one as yesterday. Normally, her eight-year-old cousin was making as much noise as possible with his runoff mouth and beanstalk legs, only going quiet if he was eating or watching TV. Ami figured that was normal, but what she didn’t get was why he was watching the English version, even though he only spoke Japanese.

“Can you understand what they’re saying?” asked Ami. Luke pouted.

“I do!”

“All of it?” He just kept staring at the screen.

Her mother and aunt had left to go shopping again and had left them to fend for themselves.

“Why don’t you watch in Japanese?”

“No no, Mama says I need to learn English.”

“Why?”

“Huh? Everyone learns English.”

Ah yes, thought Ami, everyone learns English, except they don’t. It was a required curriculum in schools, and yet English proficiency remained low nationwide. Her aunt and mom always said there weren’t enough people in Japan learning English, as in *really* learning it. But what did they expect? That every kid would be able to speak English just because they got a foreigner in class to say chalkboard sentences for forty minutes a day? The morning’s NHK reporter was saying what a problem it was that so many Japanese couldn’t speak English, especially with the Olympics coming up. God forbid foreigners have to learn Japanese when they come to Japan.

“You know, we didn’t have to learn another

language in America,” said Ami.

“You don’t?”

“Well–,” she recalled fragments of French, “no, not really.”

Last time she learned a language was in high school; she dropped it as soon as she could. Her teacher was Haitian, his voice broad and plosive like his face, who tried to tell her otherwise. But why bother, when she already spoke de-facto international-ese?

“What do you think about a world where everyone had to learn Japanese?” Luke tilted his head.

“But they don’t?”

“Yeah, but what *if*?” He took a second to think, and then with pre-adolescent officiousness, puffed up his bony chest.

“I can’t *rikai*.”

He turned to look at her, a look in his eyes that demanded recognition. But Ami wrinkled her brow.

“New word you learned?” He nodded with a *hmph!*, but she didn’t know what the word meant. Or was it two words? “Look, I’m just saying, maybe you shouldn’t focus on learning English, Luke.”

“But Amy–”

“Hey, I told you to call me Ami, right?”

“But mama calls you ‘Amy.’”

“Tch.”

Her mother thought it was awfully clever. A Japanese name, but one that could be plausibly pronounced as “Amy.” And so everyone called her that in America. Now she wished the opposite, but she couldn’t just tell them to call her “Ami” out of nowhere.

Only she introduced herself as that. Everyone, including her goddamn mother in goddamn Japan, introduced her as “Amy, because that’s your name!” As if “Ami” was never on the birth registry, as if she wasn’t Japanese enough

to warrant that name. She twirled a lock of her fritzzy hair. Maybe the latter was true.

And then there was his name, Luke, as in *ru-u-ku*, spelled 琉羽玖. Apparently that string was meaningless; it was just for the sake of the sounds that formed “Luke.” A lingual gimmick, just like her.

Luke had snapped back to the screen; Mickey was describing a surprise tool for the millionth time today.

“Why do you suppose people that come here don’t have to learn Japanese–?”

“You’re loud! I wanna watch.”

Silence for a second, then Ami got up, smoldering. She found herself stomping over to the front door, putting on her shoes and pocketing an Icosa card. Her aunt found her just as she opened front door.

“Oh, you going somewhere?”

“I’m visiting Grandma,” she mumbled as she barreled outside.

* * *

She realized about halfway down the street that she’d never gone by herself before, that she forgot her phone, that one shoe was untied, that she didn’t know the balance on the card. But she wasn’t about to turn back now, not after saying she’d visit.

Even out in the residential wards, English accompanied Japanese everywhere: above stores, on road signs, in vending machines. Ami tried to read the Japanese, but her eyes kept defaulting to the alphabet. Eventually she gave up; it just felt like cheating.

The road split and she went left. Damp and grizzled with moss, a retaining wall glowered over the claustrophobic street, barely wide enough for a scooter. It was a route that’d take her to a station; it was also the route to her old elementary school, a concrete monolith of a building with classrooms that smelled like

plaster and old wood. Luke would be there on Monday, moving into the third grade now. Ami wondered what friends he’d make, and if he’d forget their names like she did.

But she wasn’t going to school, so she made another turn; the narrow road eventually bled into a thoroughfare. The station was a few blocks away, and it was getting crowded, far more crowded than she remembered. It took her a second to realize it was probably because of the shrine. Grandma brought her there every now and then as a kid, a quiet and shady place, with a calm trickle of people walking through the grounds. She always liked seeing all the red wooden gates, vaguely recalling they were called *tori*. Some were faded and rotting. Some were so new they were still being painted. Words were carved into the pillars. Sometimes she’d point to a character, and Grandma would tell her what it meant.

For a second, she thought about detouring to see them again, but thought better of it. Crowds eddied around the entrance to the grounds, nudged along by crossing guards and signs to direct tourists. After the tourist boom, this was what it was always like, crowds from the entrance building all the way up to the station and the ticket gates.

She tapped the Icosa on the card reader. The gates shut, blaring angrily at her. Tried again, same thing. The gate’s LCD screen flashed with an error, but she couldn’t read it. What the hell was she doing? She ducked out of the way, caught her breath.

A part of her told her it was too much, she was out of her element here. But she’d come this far. Collecting herself, she cut through the crowd to the ticket office.

“Excuse me,” asked Ami in Japanese. The man at the booth looked up; she looked for surprise but he didn’t show any.

“Yes?”

“The card isn’t, uh– I can’t get through. The gate.” She tried to speak in the polite way, the one she always stumbled over. It was fruitless to try; no one just thinks about conjugating when they speak, not naturally, so the words got cut on her lips.

But he understood enough, scanned her card, and his brows knit. He handed back the card and explained something. She didn’t get most of it, her vocabulary wasn’t technical enough.

“Excuse me, what did you say?”

He explained it again, something about “*ryokin*.” Ami wracked her head; that word, she’d heard it before. But her mind wouldn’t catch on the definition. She hated it, hated saying, but there wasn’t any choice.

“I don’t speak Japanese that well. *Ryokin*?” She saw the man’s face stiffen in annoyance.

“*Ryokin*. Ticket. Fare. Money you have to pay,” the man at the booth replied, in English, real bad English. Ah, there was no balance on the card; something she would have figured out at the ticket kiosks if she knew what the hell she was doing.

The man at the booth said she could pay it here. He didn’t show it, but the choppy words were exasperated, and Ami couldn’t meet his eyes as she fished out a bill. Flushed in the face, she went through the gate, and filed onto the platform with the rest of the crush-capacity crowd. The train pulled up, the doors hissed open and tourists spilled out, disorderly as they pleased, with station staff desperately trying to herd them to the exit with their broken English.

* * *

Two stops down, and Ami had a whole prickly- felt bench to herself. The outbound trains were never as crowded; there wasn’t much around the local stops this far past Fushimi-Inari.

Sitting across from her was a troupe of

high school girls chatting with each other, probably returning from a day in the downtown. Ami once wondered how high school girls in Japan dressed, how they did their ludicrously straight hair, with their bangs cut right above their arching eyebrows like princesses. Her hair wavered, and no matter how neatly ironed her bangs were, they eventually fritzed about and prickled her forehead until she trimmed them back into scraggly bites.

But even if her hair was unflinchingly straight, she could never pull off the look. She learned that the hard way, that her brow was too sharp and her nose was too broad, because every time she went to a restaurant in Japan, the waitress would always ask if she wanted an English menu. And she’d always accept, or rather her mom or aunt would, because they all knew Ami couldn’t read enough.

The nose, the hair, all of that was her father’s. Mom told her a lot about him when she was younger, about how he’d studied abroad, how she met him in college, and how someday they’d move to America to reunite.

Ami only met him once, after Mom had pulled her from school, told her they were finally moving to America. She barely had time to say goodbye to anyone at school. The flight was tiring, her ears popped, the plane blankets itched and smelled like hospital plastic. They’d landed at Boston, where the sidewalks were wide and cracked. Mom struggled to rent a car, and drove in frustrated circles around boulevards where houses had lawns big enough to fit a whole ‘nother house. So much bigger than back home, not a *neko-no-hitai* like Grandma used to say. Ami couldn’t remember what that meant either.

Eventually, Mom pulled over and walked them up to a house. She knocked on the front door, and out stepped a man. It wasn’t Ami’s first time seeing a foreigner, but it was her first time meeting one.

“I’ve come back,” Mom said with a smile.

The man took one look at Mom and shrank back into the house, shaking his head. They started talking, English, Mom’s voice rising, the man saying two words over and over again that Ami didn’t understand. Eventually, the door closed. His nose had looked a lot like hers, but she didn’t tell that to her mother, who cried at the wheel before pulling off. Eventually, she’d learned the two words were “I’m sorry.”

Ami thought they’d go back to Japan, but they didn’t. After a few days in a hotel, they moved to a house with an oversized lawn and rooms that felt empty with just the two of them.

She barely remembered those first years in America, feeling the weight of being voiceless, and then the limbo of silence as her new classmates got used to a virtual mute. There were extra ESL courses at school she didn’t understand. No matter how much she screamed about hating the place, Mom would not go back to Japan. And no matter how long they lived there, no matter how much Mom said Ami had to learn English, Mom would not learn it herself. Her only friends were the Japanese women that’d come overseas with their husbands on business trips. One by one, they’d leave and be replaced.

Ami eventually learned to speak English of course, just as good as anyone else. Mom always told her she was young enough to learn, as if it were an excuse. Maybe it was the intonations and flow, odd rules and exceptions, the forbidden grammatical versatility of “fuck”; it was all a bit much. By high school, Ami only spoke Japanese to her Mom, and to impress people at school with. It never failed to, veiling her in exoticism.

It was partly how she’d gotten her first boyfriend now that she thought about it. Mom had been so excited when Ami got an *American* boyfriend and spent an evening asking about him. It reminded Ami of how she talked about

her father.

Mom left the house one night, probably to let him come over. And when Ami spooned up on the couch with him, he’d brushed her frizzy hair aside with icy fingers and whispered in her ear, “I love half-Japanese girls.”

It was one of those phrases that festered. Did he think that she was just some Japanese doll that’d roll over for anything? Maybe it was the “half” that really bothered her. It didn’t matter, they broke up soon after that. Mom wasn’t just disappointed when she found out, she was mad; why *wasn’t* she good enough for him? And Mom still talked about him like she did about Ami’s father.

* * *

The PA crackled and shook Ami out of her daze. She’d almost missed her stop. The high school girls had long gotten off, pretty much no one was left on the train, and no one stepped off on the platform with her. The train’s doors hissed and rattled shut, and it creaked off to whatever middle of nowhere station was next.

Taking the train alone was nerve-wracking enough, but it was different once she got off. As long as she had money, she could ride, and it’d always go to the same place. There was nothing guiding her now, nothing but a memory of the first time she’d come here with Mom a few years ago.

Suddenly, in her senior year, Mom flew them back to Japan, just for a week. Seeing the narrow streets, the small lawns, hearing the chatter of her mother tongue, it filled a gap in her, but only for a moment.

Ami found she could talk, but only in shallow conversation. She tried to read, but the newspaper was as glyphic to her at 17 as it was when she was 5. Her vocabulary hadn’t expanded; she’d only learned a few new words since the second grade. One of them wasn’t really a new word, just a loan phrase borrowed from English, levied at Mom by an uncle.

It was around middle school when Ami

started wondering how Mom paid for everything. Mom never married, never got a job, and never learned English. It turned out she didn't pay: she'd lived off Grandma, vicariously out on the other side of the world. A woman living off her parents, living a carefree life and chasing a dream; the phrase Ami learned was "parasite single."

Ami began to believe that was why Mom came back to Japan that year. Not because of the funeral, but because Grandma's will had been sealed.

* * *

The graveyard was a few blocks away from the station; cascading up a hill overlooking the town. The rust bulged sign on an even rustier gate was in Japanese, hand-painted, and with no English. Tourists wouldn't have business at a local graveyard anyways. Ami didn't know what it said. Her chest tightened and chilled. Was it closed? Was she allowed in? A minute passed. She finally grabbed the gate; with a push, it reluctantly creaked open.

It was gusty today. A few scraggly pines shuddered as wind swept across the grounds. The stairs were steep, sheer as a cliff face. Ami clenched the railings all the way up to the top terrace of headstones. She looked for the eastern corner, for the white granite one on the far corner. The day she'd come here with her mother, no one else would go, not with a parasite and a gangly half-formed girl. Only her aunt drove them back to the airport; no one saw them off as they went back to America.

It'd been three years since then; Ami was twenty now. She'd flown back to Japan after a

stint in college, leaving Mom to drink in a house shadowed in foreclosure. Her aunt agreed to let her stay at her place, maybe because Ami was family, maybe because of a half-hearted promise to teach Luke some English, or maybe out of pity. Was she too old to learn Japanese now? Teaching Luke English was the last thing she wanted to do. Why had she come back to this country? Because it was home?

Ami had brought no flowers, no incense; she didn't know what kind to bring. She began to wonder why she came out here at all, just to stand here, staring at her grandmother's headstone. And she *was* positive this was her grandmother's. But she couldn't help but think, how could she be sure? The name carved into it was foreign to her.

"Hey, Grandma..." she began in Japanese. But that was where it ended.

"I'm sorry I didn't..." Fuck. What was the phrase for visiting a grave?

Ami ground her teeth, but the words wouldn't take shape. There were a lot of things she wanted to say, but she didn't know how to, not in Japanese. It killed her. What happened to the words that let her talk to Grandma like it was nothing so long ago? She was Ami, right? Not "Amy," like everyone else said. How could she talk about how she missed going to the shrine with her, about how Luke was growing up, whether Mom had done the right thing, and that she was sorry she missed her funeral?

She opened her mouth to speak, and the wind howled, voiceless. ♦



The background of the page is a detailed oil painting of a rugged coastal scene. On the left, a large, layered rock formation rises from the water, its surface textured with various shades of brown, tan, and green. A small cave opening is visible in the lower part of this formation. To the right, another rock formation features a larger, dark cave entrance. A tiny figure of a person stands within this cave, looking out towards the sea. The sky is a clear, pale blue, and the water in the foreground is a mix of grey and blue tones, with white foam from waves crashing against the rocks. The overall style is impressionistic with visible brushstrokes.

Bare Feet

by Margaret I. R. MacLachlan

Bare feet walking across grass,
The blades tickling the delicate skin between toes,
Bare feet splashing in puddles,
Droplets soaking denim shorts,
Bare feet treading the packed earth,
Leaving the faintest imprint,
Bare feet running on asphalt,
Dancing away from the summer heat.

Nature's Window by Grace Chang

Papers, please by John Player

Since relief from combat, for four years I've sat behind this booth, and when not slung over my shoulder my rifle sat in the corner. For four years my fingers toiled with the wax paper that was used to wrap our distributed bread and cheese. In the calm I was able to produce quite impressive creations. Sometimes the paper would survive the day and the trip home in my pocket. One of these days my love would receive them as gifts. In her home they'll sit on the mantle alongside photographs of her relatives as the only decorations. They would do to replace the long walks through the city at night and the forest at dawn that the other men would offer her.

It was a wet November. Heavy snowflakes sparsely descended into the window and onto my woolen green coat. In front of me was a long line of subtly frantic traffic. Some of the more fortunate sat in their Ladas, or maybe even their GAZs, but most of the traffic was people walking alongside the Soviet autos, belongings on their backs rather than in their trunks. Many people had already gathered around the gate. I felt many eyes on me. I rocked quietly in my chair as I unwrapped one of my gifts to be, meant to be a bird but a mistake I may have to improvise. Absentmindedly I had folded the paper with the outside of the wrapper facing out. Sonya would remind me she did not want to see the CCCP label, but in my attempt to reconfigure my paper into a beautiful dove, I ripped its wing. A low grumble enveloped the air. I shifted my leg and poked my head out the window.

The crowd muted.

Up in the sky, two silver jets flew high above us. As they passed behind the gray clouds the crowd murmured. I watched Comrade Mosovitch trudge forward and throw open

the front gate. He beckoned the traffic. The horde lumbered into the crossing zone.

My eyes stayed on the jets. They ignored our little fence. They flew as they pleased, but what shall my rifle do? If the Moldovans had jets they would fly into Romania. They could, and what could we do? But there are no Moldovan jets, those are Soviet.

"Hey. Hey," Mikheil yelled from the custom booth opposite my own. "Two at a time." Two families emerged from the crowd, guided by comrades. Both of the families were quite large. The one approaching me looked to be three generations.

"Papers, please."

The man frowned at me.

"Hello," he said with an Eastern accent and a weak smile.

"Papers," I said again, hand extended. He looked at it confused and shook his head. He turned around when commotion broke out from across the road. Comrade Vogor and Mosovic were guiding the father back across the border into Moldova. The mother and three boys were hysterically gripping their father. He must've been saying goodbye.

"Do you speak Romanian?" The man's expression changed.

"Romania, *tak! Tak!*"

The man pointed across the border and hugged his wife with one arm. I waved over for Comrade Zhukov. Zhukov led the confused family back into Moldova.

"Papers, please."

The next woman stormed to me, yelling.

"*Vy pavinny prapuscit' mianie!*" she sobbed.

"*U mianie chvoraje dzicia. Zimu jon nie pierazhyvie!*"

Zhukov quickly pulled her away.

"*Zimu jon nie pierazhyvie! Jon pamre!*"

Zhukov was almost carrying her by now.'

"*Svolač!*"

Across the road Comrade Mosovic was leading a bewildered elder back into Moldova while the family back at the other booth watched. The geezer stopped short of the front gate and Mosovic curtly shoved him. The man tripped over his feet and fell hard on cold pavement. A scream came from the crowd. Mosovic yelled back. Comrade Vogor helped to drag the old man into Moldova. A feeble woman grabbed at his shoulder and he struck her.

In a few hours the Soviet Army will have made it to this side of Moldova.

I hobbled out of my chair and leaned on my good leg.

"Next in line!"

An old couple.

"Papers, please." I waved over Zhukov.

"Next in line."

Three young girls.

"Papers, please."

I waved over Zhukov.

"Next!"

A nice car.

"Papers, please?"

....

"Enjoy Romania."

"Next!"

An older man hobbled forward. He wore an old military jacket. Though it may once have fit, he did not fill it out now, particularly the left sleeve which hung empty at his side. It was adorned with a small purple ribbon.

"Papers--"

Shouting rippled toward the border like a wave. Starting in the back of the crowd and rolling towards the front.

"Please," the man said, and I turned my attention back to him. He was staring at me, intensely. He was worn. His uniform was old, from the war against the Germans. Unfazed by the ever growing commotion, he stared at me with a raised hand. Clenched between his fingers was a simple silver band. His grip trembled.

"Please," he said again in the now familiar foreign accent. But he was no longer the object of my attention. As the air buzzed with the sound of more bombers, a sharper more grating sound of treads on concrete came distinctly through. The crowd began to disperse. Children crying, women screaming. Families deserting their automobiles.

"Please."

"Close the gate!" Mikheil yelled to Mosovic. As soon as the order was sounded the Moldovan at Mikheil's booth ran towards Romania. Vogor quickly aimed his rifle and shot the young man. He collapsed, unmoving. A surge of Moldovan men came forward, fighting Mosovic as he tried to close the gate. Mikheil, Zhukov and Vogor began stabbing their bayonets through the openings. I reached for my rifle in its corner and hobbled out of the booth.

But I stopped, realizing that the veteran just before me was now struggling to mantle up and over the second gate.

I aimed.

And watched as the man with one arm pulled himself up the chain-link. He hastily struggled to the top. And as he reached it his neck twisted his eyes on me and my comrades stabbing through the gate.

My rifle fell as the man jumped from the gate and sprinted into Romania, one silver jet flying over him. ♦



by Yana Zolotniskaya

The Portal of Dust *by Kelvin Telon*

Jasper met a sunshower as he walked past graffiti columns and jersey walls. Inside the train station, and down the stairs on the right.

Looking through the tunnel. An inbound train carried a metal to metal sound that manifested from the brakes.

When he got on, Jasper heard someone coughing at the back of the car. She turned away her head and used her elbow to muffle the noise under her mask. Jasper leaned against the double doors.

The air compressor kicked on above the ballast, and the train sighed before it wended.

The windows were dark until a row of yellow veils suddenly faded in. Jasper saw a white sheet of cirrus clouds in view, and the color of orange lead filled the train. It looked like rust had unfolded over a hundred corners and buildings like some disease.

* * *

Life didn't mean much if you thought the gutter dream was the only way. Arthur felt like half-giving up on the fantasy of making his life better. Weak from temptation, and a wanderer by his worse nature. Wild noises in his head that urged him to face the bottle: How much longer would he have to keep feeling like someone he was not? Just get your hands on a couple hundred.

Seconds clicked late for Arthur's uneasy imagination. Minutes went slower, as he waited at Ruggles for his brother. Time was the expression of that orange horizon, like a substance out of reach and unattainable. He could no longer hold the weight over his eyes, so Arthur closed them into senseless bliss. Church bells played three slow notes. *Since generosity has opened our mouths, our tongues shall ring aloud its praise!*

* * *

Jasper saw his emaciated brother on a

wheelchair next to the elevator. Arthur was asleep in fake army garb. The cardboard sign beside his legs read *SPRAY PAINT ME BRONZE LIKE A WAR MEMORIAL*.

"Who did he steal that line from?" thought Jasper. "Maybe he made it up. We were poor but surrounded by life."

Jasper kicked the wheel for Arthur to wake up. No warm greeting was warranted.

"Still singing that old song of yours but in a different tune?"

Arthur, who hated waking up from a good dream, said, "Six feet or fuck off."

"What happened to selling roses?"

"Corona happened. I called you to ask what I should do?"

"Just do what you do best."

"Hah! Some big brother *you* are. All I really want is a drink."

"Then I'll get you there." Jasper saw it as an obligation toward kin and good karma. He'd seen enough families cursed down the line in a cycle of betrayal and set aside his pride for loyalty.

Afterwards, they were so eager to get away from each other that they clean forgot to shake hands. Arthur went back to Winter Street and the liquor store aisles. Practically floating on air after Jasper lent him money, so that his head wagged side to side.

Could beer set him straight or not? It was an old question. His life wasn't his own. It was for the bottle. He knew the drink of choice would be heavy. And not just one. It saved him from choosing what to do and who to be. And everybody who heard about his luck was his friend. They were expensive but they fixed him up good. Since his head was full of maybes, he thought a rare drink would be worthwhile. He was hoping there was still enough for a Louis XIII, but half the clip was gone before he knew

a week had gone by. When he found time to pull himself together, Arthur fell into idleness. He lost that nameless company just as quick. He was designed to self-sabotage. Before he slept, he traced plans in his mind and wrote it on paper. He woke up each morning against what he had set for himself to do. On each night, he slept with the idea that tomorrow would be the day he would do something with his life. Arthur could not start until he felt rested first, but he drank so he wouldn't think about doing nothing else. Small drops of rain slowly fell over his face. Arthur could not put into words what his heart had to say. "I admit.. that.. sometimes.. I don't know what the hell is wrong with me." Part of him demanded to know what he strived for in life before his shortcomings put those dreams to an end? His hands were getting wet and at last he saw it. Big house. Nice car. Peace of mind. Dreams of this and that, but in the end, nothing came out of it.

What was he still doing there? Arthur found a dry spot where everyone could pass him at the train station.

"I beg of you. Spare change please."

Arthur had always made passably well there at any hour, but not that night. Not a dime.

He felt bitter and drank harder. Putting the bottle down only to push his wheelchair down a street, but there was no use in asking its name. The last bottle made itself felt. "I'll quit right now," he told himself through each swig. He found weary city-molden figures leaning on walls, crouching on stoops. Vagabonds that kept running. It was the hand-to-mouth hours for the nomads, grave shift diggers, shopping cart pushers, and bottle-bag stragglers. He used to be one or the other. Former veterans and citizens of the state. They scavenged in

front of houses with no lawns, triple deckers, or half-empty luxury apartments. When men and women came back home to mediocrity, bound to unfulfilled dreams, linked together by ball and chain.

Everyone turned their eyes away from him. No one looked down or reacted. He didn't want to, but he felt cursed. All he earned was solitude.

Whoever dragged their feet the heaviest was heard around the iron pond. Blue hills stayed changeless the next morning. Not even a breath of sound was heard. What did Arthur do while he was drunk, errant, and dark of heart? He went to cautious streets and lurked driveways in the burbs. He stayed there in the shadows, where danger outweighed hope; where malice colored his loneliness red.

The flash of the gold bezel from a stranger's watch made Arthur catch his breath. He noticed there was no one around and felt the rumble of an urge.

Arthur got up from the chair to test drive his legs. They managed to hold him up.

The stranger, an old man in his sixties, pulled open the trunk to his car.

Arthur pulled out a dirty white sap. A sap is a long sock with a rock he found on the ground, the size of his fist.

There was still time to back out but the man with the golden watch was right there. Arthur couldn't do without it.

He would go through this old man while his back was turned.

When the stranger finished taking the groceries out, he turned around to see Arthur. And Arthur felt the hair stand on his neck.

He feared killing the man and measured his strength. But he wasn't in control.

Arthur clutched the sap and he came from the side.

He swung it up high and it cracked the skull directly.

It struck but the old man did not make a sound. It took all the sand out of him. His body folded and his head bounced hard on the concrete like a brick. Arthur winced and looked over the man.

The stranger tried to get up but he could only crane his neck. His entire equilibrium was gone. Not only did he forget where he was, who he was, but gravity took a hold of him.

Arthur was glad it was dark when all he saw was a silhouette on the floor. He told the body not to move and got the golden masterpiece off his wrist. Arthur tried to find its make in the moonlight.

As for the man, life was almost out of him. Arthur felt his gaze and heard the man call for help. His eyes of flame slowly went soft and the stranger could hardly string together death's final words. He felt the wind weigh him down. His heart gave way before he took one last painful breath of September.

"Time to move, move, move move! He won't feel it. He'll be fine." Arthur could not be convinced otherwise.

* * *

Headlines read: Victim's family present front porch footage.

In the holding tank the wall was adorned with curses and machinations of an expired escape plan. Some said Arthur would get the prize chair, or maybe a blindfold with the firing line. In court, the trial was wrapping up. He was granted life in prison.

A cold summer had descended over the prisoners. The callous guards made the morning count and looked happy to see them. The sliding door faced a blank wall. His cellmates paced within a macabre cell inside the Walpole prison. Light was dim. How many had slammed their wounded heads against the same door?

There was a four foot window where lady-

bugs came to die. Every morning he found dawn and a twenty foot wall they all stayed in. Except it all looked like different shades of shit because he was put on trazadone, navane, and tegretol.

"It slows everything down," a grey-bearded fellow taught him, "Don't swallow em," the fellow said, "So you keep some strength. Careful with the guards cus they'll make your neck dangle on a rope just to teach you a lesson. Here it's attempted suicide. No rules for them. Then one day you just cease to exist, like the Charlie who came before you."

"Who?" Arthur asked in a daze.

"The genius. He *might* still be in solitary. We're not sure if he's dead. Maybe if you two meet, tell him Red wants to get even in checkers."

Some of his inmates shared a story to build trust. Those bad lions told him who they were and hoped to be. Only to get him to move a certain way. "Bring us back this much for your protection," they said in low tones. Arthur met all sorts of people who shared their evil with him. Some spoke less about their crimes but thought about it a lot. Arthur found a moment to play cards with those voices. And he lost his money to one inmate who found perfect reason by believing enough's enough so that's why he choked that cell guard out of impulse. "Almost popped his eyes out," he believed himself.

He met an old sword, a wild song, who was still serving a sentence for a bank job on a Brinks truck. The thief said he found peace in religion. But Arthur wasn't attracted to something so obscure, as it didn't do much for his human insignificance. "True love might be the key for them," he thought, "but my lock is different as they say."

Some days there was an open-door policy. He was mostly around others who would sit around the TV and yell "turn that shit up!" Other times they spoke over each other.

Arthur picked up what they said:

Listen to him, the philosopher.

I never liked a pig.

Ah, let me be. Kill that shit.

Are you mad?

Forever was never til now.

What did I just tell you?

Does the ivy still grow over Kalief Browder's home?

Nothing!

Sold it.

Who told you life was ill?

Keep walking boy, this isn't a museum.

Watch him.

I can't stand it, turn it off.

Who could understand them? One inmate they put down as mad spoke out, "Who's paying them to treat refugees like monsters?"

Arthur feared solitary because no one came out in their right mind. He was warned the guards didn't like TV stars and put him in isolation treatment where something kept him up at night. He was absorbed by the idea that something bad was happening. It made him feel as though no universe was safe. Not even within the four walls. Arthur crawled on the floor, stuck in the dark. He heard the faint cry of something terrible outside and it filled his heart with anxiety. He gnashed his teeth to the sound of terror that rendered from every wall, too loud for his ears. Or it was the floor blasting whispers from the dead stranger. It drove him mad how the guards had forgotten him. He could not suppress his disorder, or reason with its silence. In a second they went and beat his jaw into pieces to keep him from yelling. The prison doctor gave him something for it. He felt numb and half the night Arthur dreamt the door to his cell was open to maple leaves falling over autumn, but the end did not feel any closer.

Cumbering shadows gave a revival shout when he got out. When they put him back on the floor he feigned numb. The guards were tame. Checkers kept him alive afterwards but

he was characterless, done with the meds but quiet altogether. There was routine, and yet, all Arthur saw was the root of confinement.

He heard the story of an inmate from a different state on his way to the electric chair who swallowed a razor before the execution. Arthur also heard the famous last words of a death row inmate who took 2000 volts. On his last day to live, those who were present witnessed the man cry out, "I did not kill your loved one!"

Arthur took his spot amongst others bored to death of life and modified by it. There was plenty of opportunity for it, but no real desire to search or to reflect over his own self. Not in this life. With no proof he was ever alive, and no chance of getting out, he was fated to disappear out of memory like the other men before him. Before he died of old age, he was fine with all this. It wasn't enough being comfortable with solitude. He wished he could pour a nip down the hatch so his heart wouldn't sink. One guard saw a chance and sold him moonshine. The celestial drink lifted his spirits and took a liver. Arthur lost his will to move so he stayed in his cell. Maybe it was there he finally let himself think about his father and how he'd become another man with no real lessons to carry on. Maybe he could name his fear, and move past it. No, that could not have been what he was thinking.

After each floor was pulled out from under him, he fell deeper. There were bare-bone days in his cell when he looked for life through a small crack under the door or by way of a broken window that had a wishful little hole in it. Like a small god leaving a trace, an offering for the world, he wrote as much as he could. His best lines went like some lost or indefinite echo, a hopeless prayer singing, YOU DIE HERE ONCE YOU LOSE THE STRENGTH TO BE ALONE WITH YOUR OWN THOUGHTS. OUR LAST WORDS WILL REMAIN ALONE, AND UNKNOWN. SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IS

THE PORTAL OF DUST, AND WE SLEEP IN IT!

The shrink forbade him to write about the nature of a prisoner's existence.

Some of Arthur's kept memories for amusement:

It was here those doomed to perish as just another number meant nothing to a hearing examiner earning his hourly. Where all the guards saw were pieces of meat. No social

worker would understand. Barely an after-thought for a judge or a suit who never saw the weak make their bed out in the open. Those who slept on top of Copley Library's concrete benches with empty stomachs, covered in each other's arms under a mist. And tourists eat their lunch on the same bench someone pissed on last night. ♦



photograph by S.J. Noble

Imaginary Friend

by Jonathan Krushell

Let me introduce myself
Pardon me, I'm kind of shy
It's been so long since I have seen the face
Of such a handsome guy

Down here, people's heads are bare
Soaked with blood they use as ink
On the walls they scrawl the thoughts
That you try so hard not to think

But you, your face is a delight!
Rosy cheeks and diamond eyes
Hair and brows as thick as forest
Nose and ears the perfect size

Now I think I see a smile
Now I think I hear a laugh!
As you laugh, your joy will double
As you smile, your pain will halve

Laughter is a waterfall
That cleans the rocks of dirt and grime
Laughter, like a waterfall
Will wash away the blood with time

Still you'll see those horrid creatures
But they'll no longer paint the walls
Now it's you who holds the paintbrush
You can paint over their scrawls

So, you ask, just what am I?
Am I you or am I me?
Is this all a little crazy?
Is this maybe what you need?

Either way,

In the face of faceless folk
You and I have lit the way
We shine so bright that even nights like these
Can see the light of day

We shine so bright that even nights like these
Can see the light of day.

I Don't Want to Go by J. M. Grenier

"I don't want to go."

"Jake," I said, "get in the cockpit."

"No."

"You have to."

"No, I don't."

The rain was coming down again. It had pummeled us for days. Soaking the airfield, casting everything in the same cold, half-light. Here it was again, drumming its steady tattoo on men, machines and muddied fields alike.

"Three days it took us to get this bird air-worthy after you came in like a busted duck last time."

"I know. I was in it."

Jake's face was blank, like a corpse. His haunted eyes had seen too much. Flying recon over France was a tough poke in a *Sopwith Camel*. The planes were light and fast, but gave no cover in a dog fight. A pilot sat in a wooden bucket, a thousand feet high, where the likely outcome was to be chewed up by enemy machine guns or a stalled engine that sent him into a tailspin to the unforgiving earth below.

A hard proposal for anyone, either way.

Jake did it though, and did it well. It was my job to make sure he and the other reconnaissance pilots kept doing it.

"Look, Jake," I said. "I know you're fed-up, but the Keiser isn't going to take the day off because of a little rain. The enemy is out there and we have to find out where they are and what they are doing. Otherwise, our boys could walk into a full tank regiment."

He nods, as if agreeing. Then says, "Yep. Someone, but not me. Send Johnson up."

"Johnson is conked- out in the barracks. Hung over again."

"That's his problem," Jake said. "And yours. Not mine. Send him up, or send someone else."

"There is no one else. You know this."

"Again, not my problem. I'm done. Get a replacement. I'm not going."

I felt bad for him. I really did. I'm no doctor and I didn't rightly know if pilots could get *shell-shock* or not, but right then, he had all the signs of it. His usually rock- steady hands twitched. As I watched them, I knew he was at war with himself more than with the Germans.

I could also see that he was stuck between his conscience and whatever internal terror he faced. Deep down he wanted - needed - to do his duty. One little push might be enough to get him to do it. But I don't do things halfway, so instead of a little shove, I lobbed a grenade.

"Your brother Richie came in with the 3rd Division last week, right?"

"Yeah...."

"The 3rd is the next wave to go East. Would be too bad if they walked into a German offensive because no one cared enough to go look."

Jake's face turned livid. I held my breath. I stood and waited for him to scream at me, throw a punch, for any kind of reaction, but none came. When at last he spoke, his voice sounded hollow, gutted like one of the burnt husks of the many *châteaux* that peppered the ruined countryside.

"Go to hell," he said.

Without another word, he clambered into the plane. The engine coughed and sputtered to life. A few minutes later it climbed into the rain-streaked gray above.

I never saw him again. ♦



by Sarah Kane

Boring Legal Stuff

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photograph by Nicole Caruso



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