



Howls and Pushycats is a quarterly literary thingy. We read and seek submissions all year long. We'd love to meet you. Submit poems, short stories, art and audio files to:

howlsandpushycats@gmail.com

We ALWAYS give personal responses to your work. We generally like people. We may even like you. Why not submit?

Spring 2011 issue is scheduled for April 30, 2011

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IMPORTANT NOTICE: *Howls and Pushycats* seeks audio files to begin a podcast edition of the magazine. Please submit audio files to howlsandpushycats@gmail.com. The inaugural issue will hopefully correspond with the Spring 2011 magazine issue.



A Few Words About Issue Two from M'sieu Pushycat

Welcome back to *Howls and Pushycats*! We've avoided the sophomore jinx and received a large pile of goodness.

Thanks to all submitters. We enjoyed reading and responding to your work. The pleasure is all ours. We select works that sang to us.

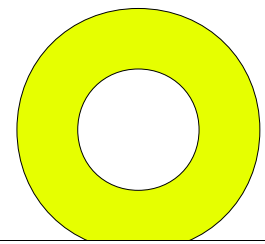
What's different this issue? We have a larger variety of material with more fiction selections. We also have people from different sides of the globe, different walks of life, and different phases of life. We have some alumni and some new blood. We hope you find something that speaks to you and something that makes you go..huh?

Part of our playfulness here is celebrating the many voices of the world. So sit back, relax, and read.

And remember, if something offends you, it is just you. We still like you, but really, you need to lighten the hell up!

Sincerely,

M'sieu Pushycat and Dhoktor Howl



Ring at the End of
His Nose Award!

Writer's Lump

By Shannon Schuren

It was the size of a kidney bean the first time I noticed it. Big enough to hold a name, but only if written fine and delicate like on a grain of white rice at a flea market. And while having my characters go nameless was a minor irritation, it didn't hurt. I still had pronouns.

Then it started to grow.

A bean to a grape, filled with creative juices I could no longer taste. Though I could palpate it, manipulate it, visualize plucking it free, I no longer had the words to do so. When it grew to a ping-pong ball, I stopped appreciating alliteration and took to staring at myself in the mirror. I obsessed at monitoring its progress. Had the skin always puckered? Was that a discoloration, or merely a shadow? When the fear and self-loathing swelled it to the size of an egg, the doctor became concerned.

An x-ray revealed the words trapped inside, pulsing and contorting, searching for a plot hole through which to escape. The adjectives were the loudest, the adverbs the most annoying. I asked for a print-out, but he refused.

We could lance it, he said, but I feared the torrent of gore and words and secrets splattering on the floor beneath the surgical table and across his expensive shoes. He'd crush some under his heel. Could I slip down in my paper gown and collect them in a peanut butter jar, take them home and sort them, piece them back together in a semblance of a story? A verb here, a nightmare there. All of it soaked with my blood and suffering. It would be a memoir. Or a comedy.

He'd said no, the hospital doesn't allow such things.

So I declined the surgery, choosing instead to stare at the empty page as agony and despair throb in tuneless rhythm, along with the other words still trapped inside my lump.

Two Poems by Michael Lee Johnson

Bird Feeder

Baby,

born

just

a

sparrow-

first flight

from balcony

to tree limb.

A chip of corn falls

from the feeder

to the ground.



-2007-

[\[Listen to Michael Lee Johnson read this poem\]](#)

Poem From My Grave

Don't bring the rosary beads
it's too damn late for doing repetitions.
Eucharist, I can handle the crackers and wine;
I love the Lord just like you.
Catholicism circles itself with rituals-
ground hogs and squirrels dancing with rosary beads,
naked in the sun and the night, eating the pearls
and feeling comfortable about it.
Rituals and rosary beads are indigestible
even the butterflies go coughing in the farmer's cornfields-
Cardinal George, Chicago, would choke on the damn things;
some of his priest would have thought it a gay orgasm or piece
remote found in scripture from Sodam & Gamora.
But my bones in ginger dust lie near a farm in DeKalb, Illinois
where sunset meshes corn with a yellow gold glow like rich teeth.
My tent is with friends there we said prayers privately like silent
moonlight. Farmers touch the face of God each morning after just
one cup of Folgers coffee Columbian blend,
or pancakes made with water and batter, sparse on the sugar.
Sometimes I would urinate on the yellow edge of flowers,
near the tent, late at night, before the hayride, speak
to the earth and birds like gods.
Never did I pull the rosary beads from my pocket.
It's too late, damn it, for rosary beads and repetitions.



-2007-

[\[Listen to Michael Lee Johnson read this poem\]](#)

Respect 101
by
Richard Cody

“He wears his wisdom upon his chest like a proudly polished medal, shining bright for all to see.”

The class was silent a moment.

“Very good, Elsa!” proclaimed Mr. Melody. “Eloquent if not quite accurate.” Gregory Melody was a popular teacher at The Institute. Perhaps the most popular, with students at least. The soft spoken and occasionally acerbic educator, prematurely gray at 39, liked to think this was because he understood the young minds in his charge and, what’s more, that they knew he understood them. He surveyed his students through thick glasses. “Anyone else?”

“Yes, sir!” It was one of the twins, probably Marshall, speaking up loud and clear. When Mr. Melody nodded, the boy stood and, in the measured cadence he’d no doubt picked up at his mother’s poetry slams, intoned thusly:

“He wears his wisdom
like a fine felt hat,
covering
his bald
and bulbous
head
with pageantry
and frills
to hide the fact
that there is nothing
there
at all.”

Mr. Melody chuckled and nodded his head. “Very good... er...”

“Marshall, sir.”

“Yes, Marshall, very good!” Melody turned his attention to the clock above the blackboard. “It seems we have time for one more before our guest arrives,” he cast an inquisitive eye about the room. Young Dodsworth in the third row, left, caught his glance and held it. Melody had long felt that the boy had great potential, and the way he squirmed at present beneath his teacher’s gaze confirmed this feeling. “How about you, Dodsworth?”

Elvin Dodsworth shifted in his seat and blushed a dull crimson. Reticent by nature, he had dreaded this moment as a man condemned to death at dawn must dread the rising of the sun. He dreaded such moments daily, as a matter of course. He coughed, once, and cleared his throat. The ungainly burden of expectation caused his voice to crack and falter as he began. "He... He wears... ahem! He wears his wisdom like... like an albatross of great and foreboding weight. Hung about his scrawny neck on a chain of martyred pain, it swings pale and perilous as he bears its deathly chill with a vain and studied weariness."

Pausing a moment, Elvin realized with some amazement that he was very close to running right into the dangerous extreme of verbosity; but he felt gripped by some strange fever of articulation and knew he could not stop yet. "He wears his wisdom self-consciously, like a canker sore festering upon the quivering curl of his gelatinous lower lip. He wears his wisdom like a shocking pink fright-wig which frames the soft curves of his uninspired face with dime store novelty curls! He wears his wisdom like a woman of the street..."

Elvin Dodsworth was silenced by the familiar squeaking of the classroom door as it swung suddenly open. "Good day, Melody!" exclaimed the bulbous headed, scrawny necked, gelatinous lipped subject of conversation as he strode into the room.

"Ah, Headmaster," replied Mr. Melody. "We were just talking about you!"

"How nice," smirked the Headmaster. "Nothing but positive things to say, I trust."

"Oh, nothing but, sir," chimed Mr. Melody, "nothing but!" He took the Headmaster's hand and ushered him to the front of the class. "And I trust that you are ready to "honor" my thoughtful and articulate students," here he turned a bright eye toward Elvin Dodsworth, "with your singular wit and prodigious wisdom."

"Certainly," harrumphed the Headmaster. "I am quite prepared to speak to these..." he waved an arm out toward the class and observed them dispassionately a moment before continuing with the word he thought he wanted, "*genteel* young people on a subject of the utmost import."

Mr. Melody nodded gravely. "And what might that be?"

The Headmaster harrumphed once again, adding a bit more "umph" to the confusion or amusement of much of the class. "The necessity" he intoned, "of respect. For one's elders. For Authority. For one's place."

Several laughs were stifled somewhere in the rows of students, and Mr. Melody sighed. The Headmaster, pulling his papers from an inner lapel pocket, appeared unperturbed – obtuse, actually. "That should be fascinating," said Mr. Melody, "just fascinating."

A Poem by A.J. Huffman

Ink Street

I am tired of the blue in my glass.
It is too thin.
And does nothing for the pain
or the page.
Dump it out.
And give me your wrist.
Mine is empty.
Yours is bitter.
And the combination,
I am sure,
will be art.

THE SOCIETY OF THE HOOD

by
Bob Petras

It was Percy who first formed the Society of the Hood, so named because the hoods of members' sweatshirts symbolized cloaks of secrecy. Membership consisted of laborers dedicated to truth, and they celebrated the truth by lying.

Percy developed this concept after an incident inside the supervisory office in the coal yard department. He was inquiring about the availability of the Kamatzu 500, a front-end loader he intended to use to stack fly ash.

"It's being used at the lime site," replied Jake Houser, a foreman. "There are other machines around. Don't do what Boomy did: try to load trucks with the Bobcat." He chuckled. "That was something to see."

The Bobcat is a skid steerer about the size of a lawn tractor.

"That was one of the funniest things that ever happened here," Percy said. "You should have seen Dave Boway's face when he caught Boomy."

Mike Forker was sitting at his desk, doing paper work. "Ain't that right Forks?"

"Yep, I was there. Queerest thing I ever saw here. Lucky for Boomy I didn't send him home."

The department supervisor strutted inside the office. He demanded all his subordinates call him "Sir." Back when he was foreman, he demanded "Boss." The electric company issued a white hard helmet with stripes of various colors signifying ranks to every manager. This manager always wore his white hard hat into the diners and pubs near the power plant, placing his hat next to the aisle so that everyone could see it. Currently, his helmet bore a red stripe, indicating he was supervisor of his department. His Cadillac had the words "Big Boss" stamped upon his plates.

Overhearing the conversation, the Big Boss said, "Old Buckhammer talked me out of firing Boomy." He acted as if Percy were not present. "Guys knew I meant business."

Percy shuffled out the office, saying nothing. He distinctly remembered the Boomy incident because he was the jokester who called Boomy and instructed him with a disguised voice to take the Bobcat to load fly ash into dump trucks. The incident occurred ten years before because Percy was on light duty with a broken left hand and was bored just sitting at a desk, basically twiddling one thumb, but he had a phone and a creative sense of humor. Dave Boway was the foreman then, since retired. Percy remembered Boway's reaction, his screaming at Boomy, threatening to fire him, and then later privately laughing with Percy, congratulating him for pulling off such a good joke.

Percy never admitted to anything.

Houser, Forker and the Big Boss had not yet been employees at the power plant. They

all arrived two to four years later, everyone an outsider, from different lines of work—Houser a laborer at a pottery, Forker, a city water works laborer, and the Big Boss, a used-car salesman. They all had relatives in upper management and were hired almost immediately into management positions. All of them were liars and flatterers. The joke around the work gang was that the white helmet of the Big Boss should have a brown stripe to match his brown nose.

At first, the Society of the Hood consisted of only a few workers from the coal yard department. They met in a back room of the Mile 58 Bar, inside which they anted five dollars apiece for a contest of who could tell the best lie—a parody of work. The only rules of the club were to maintain secrecy and to attract potential members with the utmost discretion.

Eventually, laborers from local steel mills and other collective workshops joined the Society of the Hood. They all wore black hoodies with the bar's Mile 58 red, white and blue highway marker logo on the back. Members constructed a portable raised wooden stage on which they took turns lying, these lies purging them symbolically of the bullshit they endured while trying to make an honest living.

On this evening, 20 society members attended. Five had already performed onstage, their creations ranging from lies about time travel to winning a logrolling contest.

Next to take stage was Morrur.

Morrur was probably cute as a kid, redheaded and freckled, gangly—a Norman Rockwell poster boy. As an adult, he was just plain ugly. To make matters worse, he stuttered horribly, except when he lied, and, when he lied onstage, his voice was creamy, resonant, deep, confident.

He worked for years as a conveyor operator in the stacker house, a position about as demanding as an elevator operator, mostly pushing buttons.

Morrur was ready to utter his delivery when the entrance door slammed open. In stepped the Big Boss himself, his white crown now bearing a gold stripe—the mark of a plant superintendant in charge of all departments. Morrur's mouth quivered. The room became so quiet one could have heard a mouse fart.

“What's the matter, boys?” the Big Boss bellowed. “You look like you just saw the devil himself. Well, I didn't get where I am today because I am stupid. Very little gets by me.”

The Big Boss waved his arms in a go-ahead motion. “Well, continue, More-Ass. I want to see you at your best.”

Percy stood. The veins of his neck jutted like steel cables, his face flushed, his perpetual smirk suddenly gone, his beach blond hair tousled, blue eyes fiery ice. “What goes on in here is absolutely nothing but lies,” he said to the Big Boss.

“I told you I'm in the know,” the new plant manager replied. “Go on with your spiel.”

“What goes on here stays here,” Percy said.

The superintendent nodded his head smugly. He then sat upon a folding chair and leaned back with his hands clasped behind his neck, his white crown still upon his head.

“As you guys well know,” Morrur said smoothly, “nobody works harder at his job than I

do.” Laughter peeled throughout the room, nobody laughing harder than the Big Boss.

“This tough, demanding labor made me rock solid. It was like bodybuilding, only I was getting paid for it.”

He rolled up the sleeves of his Mile 58 hoody and flexed his biceps, this action producing more choruses of laughter.

“I was becoming faster, stronger, more agile, and, yes, even smarter. So I decided to contact a sports agent, who soon got me a tryout in the NFL Combine. I tested out at the combine with a 4.43 forty-yard dash, benched 225 pounds 35 times and had a vertical of 42 inches. Now, every NFL team’s scouts are following me like little puppies, asking me questions, calling me the Roy Hobbs of football. Mind you, I was 32 years old then and even reporters are trailing me, trying to get the scoop on my mystery.

“There’s one guy in the group of scouts, not wearing an NFL logo on his trench coat. He pulled me aside, into a little pressroom. He reached into a pocket and pulled out his card. It read ‘M of Her Majesty’s Secret Service.’

“He had that highly refined English accent and said, ‘You are the type of chap we need in the British Secret Service. You have the athleticism, the genius, the poise and the handsome countenance to perform expertly in our covert operations.’

“Well, to make a long story short, I passed up number 19 in the NFL to become Agent 008 in the British Secret Service. Now, I am sworn to oath to the highest code of conduct not to reveal any classified information, but I can tell you my employment with the power plant is now a cover-up, that during my weekends, vacations and leaves of absence, I perform admirably for Her Majesty, the Queen. I can tell you, while during the line of duty, I have been to some of the most exotic spots on this planet and once even to outer space and had experienced plenty of adventure, including some prime time with most beautiful women, some of whom were duchesses and princesses.”

Morrus winked and then stepped down from the stage.

“That’s rich!” the Big Boss yelled over the applause. “You—athletic and a womanizer! I watched you work before! You look like a monkey fucking a football!”

The last performing liar of the evening, Percy, stepped onto the stage. “I don’t know how I am going to top that one. Whew.” He wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. “With the big Boss here, the pressure is on. But I never told any of you guys this before: how when our current plant manager was merely a foreman, I used to sneak out every afternoon and midnight shift for a couple of hours and fuck his wife.”

The room grew mouse quiet except for a few guffaws the Big Boss managed to grunt.

Percy paused to look over his audience and held eye contact with the plant manager, who tried to screw his lips into a smile.

Percy won most liars contest because of his convincing body language: his ability to look people in their eyes—unblinking—his unquavering innocent voice, his resonant soft choirboy intonations, his palms always open. But, of course, his imagination knew no limits.

“Oh, yeah,” Percy continued, “for two hours, sometimes longer, I was fucking both the

boss and his wife. I was a one-man gangbang. I did her in places and positions her old fuddy—that's what she called him behind his back—old fuddy, never dreamed of. Naturally, I have the package.

“She always used to say, ‘It's rare thing that a man could be so brilliant and so well endowed.’ She was talking about me, of course, my 142 IQ and my package. She called me Studdy.

“Our affair went on for a couple of years, all the while the Boss was signing my time sheet while I was doing time with his little woman. But every good thing comes to an end. The Boss became the Big Boss, and then there was Morrus.”

Percy paused, made his trademark eye contact, the longest with the plant manager, and stepped off the stage to a standing ovation. Even the Big Boss stood, waving a finger at Percy. “I will get you for this,” he said and then feigned a smile.

Later, Percy, with only Joe Maycheck, the sergeant of arms present, collected his winnings, smaller than normal, only 30 dollars. He felt better about his performance. Confession was definitely good for the soul, even if he broke Society of the Hood protocol. This time, he spoke the truth, every word of it.

Two Poems By Timothy Gager

the girl this weekend

caused me to clean my house
on thursday, but she didn't stay.
caused me to start smoking
again, took my breath away when
she ran out, couldn't catch her
with all the smoke
I inhaled

some marijuana on sunday.
it had been awhile,
maybe wednesday was the
last time "i did drugs".
a long time since
people used that phrase but
i'm dating myself,

my friend tells me that all the time,
meet someone, don't be by yourself,
but she's dating a lot--
haven't seen her much.
she says people must
fall in love with me all the time,
i said, you? she said, no,
who has time for that?

An Angry Mel Gibson Gets A Dog

Because I'm NOT getting a woman
I'm getting a dog
so I can leave it alone

when I go out
to paint the town---
I WON'T be available

emotionally, for a dog who
will NOT cause drama when

I get drunk and yell,
perhaps I'll kick
my new best friend;

because the old one had issues
with me doing things
like watching sports.

So, we will NOT be watching
Animal Planet or the Puppy Bowl,
and you WILL sit and stay
much better than that last woman...
I had to ASK to lick me.

Something Old, Something New
by
Alexandra Campbell

The florescent glow of the computer hurts her eyes. Hitting submit, she inhales deeply and stares at the screen. Craigslist prompts to confirm one last time. She reads over the Times New Roman print, making sure her spelling is correct:

Wedding Dress for Sale!

Dress size 12- Never worn! Beautiful train, lace bodice, sequin detailing.

Also comes with a carrying bag for the big day and a preservation bag!

Paid \$1,200, but willing to take \$500 OBO!

What a deal!

Call (555) 555-5555

She hit “enter” more loudly than she intended to. It had been three months since the wedding should have taken place. David and her mother were the most important parts of her life, but no longer. The ultimate betrayal. She'd canceled the wedding. Shaking away the thoughts in her head, she closes her laptop and walks away.

The Change

by

Cath Barton

It was at two o'clock in the afternoon on the first warm day of the year that Avril made the biggest decision of her life. It was a Sunday and she was sitting quietly at home, reading a book. The sun was streaming through the French windows. Avril carefully marked her place and closed the book. "Time for a fresh start," she thought. That was all it took. No drama. As if she had flicked a switch the change began.

Mind you, at first nothing looked any different. Avril continued to go to work every day as usual, to meet her friends for lunch, to go to yoga once and swimming twice each week, and to limit herself – sensibly, she thought - to two glasses of white wine of an evening, followed by a hot chocolate before bed to ensure a good night's sleep.

The town in which Avril lived was unremarkable. It might have been Northampton or Slough, though actually it was neither. You don't need to know its name. Neither do you need to know how old Avril was at the time of her decision, though you might think it relevant that she was of an age that she was beginning to despair of ever meeting the man of her dreams. She was single and had no immediate family. So that there was no-one with whom she had to share this decision. If there had been it would certainly have been more difficult for her to have made it. Perhaps she would never have done so. But in that case she would have carried on leading an unremarkable life in an unremarkable town for the rest of her days. Which would have been an awful waste of her potential.

Avril had always had an inkling that she was not like other people. And that the time would come when that would have to make a difference to the way she led her life. She hadn't expected that it would happen when and as it did, but then things rarely turn out quite as we expect them to, do they?

The change in Avril was so gradual as to be, at first, imperceptible. Perhaps the first sign, to anyone who had known to look for it, was her yoga teacher asking her to demonstrate to others in the class. "Look at the movement Avril's getting in her back," she'd say. They looked, but they didn't realise what they were seeing. Avril got into the habit from the day of her decision of doing five minutes' stretching every morning, first thing, and it was true that she was getting much more flexible. It felt good. Not that her swimming style was improving. Quite the opposite really, and after a bit she stopped going to the pool altogether.

If you'd pressed friends who met her for lunch they might have said that she had perhaps become a little more playful, though also more picky about what she ate. More fish, less veg. Did they also notice how her tastes changed from day to day? One of two of them wondered - and Claire actually asked straight out - whether she was pregnant, but Avril strenuously denied it.

What friends didn't know, because Avril had never been in the habit of going out with them for a drink, was that she cut down her evening wine ration to one glass, and then stopped drinking alcohol altogether. And replaced her bedtime hot chocolate with warm milk.

One afternoon Avril's boss walked into her office and was startled to find her asleep with her head on the desk. She quickly realised that she couldn't afford to let this happen again, so took to curling up under the desk for her post-prandial nap. Anyone who looked into her office when she was doing this could see nothing, and would reasonably assume that she was out visiting a client.

Colleagues and friends alike certainly noticed, with approval, that Avril got herself a smart new sleek haircut. Only the eagle-eyed noticed that she stopped wearing short skirts, or if they did notice, have any inkling why.

Avril realised, of course, that she would have to leave her job, and her town. She reflected for some time on what to tell people. The simplest thing really was to say she was going abroad. She invented a long-lost school friend who had contacted her on Facebook. Her decision to go and live near the friend in New Zealand was not seen as particularly unusual. Nor indeed was it – most people these days have a friend or relative who's done something similar.

The tricky thing was avoiding the big leaving party. What with the changes becoming more apparent day by day. But she managed it – there one day, gone the next. No problem for the company – they easily filled her position of course, in these days of high unemployment. And as for the sleek black cat who has been roaming the street where Avril lived, going from house to house asking for food, well who's to know where she's come from. She's found a home now, with old Jim at number 24, and she's very happy, thank you.

Three Poems by John Grey

YOU SAY "NO"

His smile recedes like beaten armies.
And how long is it since he stoked the fireplace.
If there's to be no heat,
he prefers that nothing be warm.
The flame is burning down to its foundations.
The last flicker flips the bird.
He lights a cigarette.
A match in lieu of a woman.
A drag, a puff, instead of sex.
Your heart's a suppressed hallelujah
His pride is ashy, dying coals
and a smothered cough.
And yet his smoke
won't let go your sweater,
clings to your skin for days.

AN EX CONVERSATION

My head's a rumbling herd of wildebeest.
Is that a red wound on my arm
or just the devil's scribbled plans for me?
Words are see-sawing from mouth to mouth.
Is there a possibility of real conversation
or are sentences just razors
eyeing your pretty throat,
my unshaved chin?
While a former acolyte sips tea,
a God-like figure is poised to offer her opinions
on everything from kitchen tile to my
enthusiasm for striped ties and punk CD's.
And there's the relentless choir
of wicker baskets, mood rings, lava lamps,
to bastardize a soundtrack for her speech.
You have a new man you tell me,
giddily, like he's a skylark in a mimosa tree.
He must sing some pretty melodies

despite his wooden leg.
How's his intestine, I wonder?
Does he fondle his love handles with kid gloves?
You know I'm glad your smile is a wreath,
your disgusted eyes are like a tongue
tasting liver for the first time.
I'd hate to doubt our recent history
And I'd like you to know
they're not wildebeest,
they're butterflies.
And that's not a wound
on my arm after all.
It's sun through the window,
a trick of the light
that's found its magician at last.

THE PLAN

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Of course, myself and assistants
for presenting the finished product
to management for approval.
And for management themselves,
too caught up in the bottom line,
to get up and smell the boozers.

Microdots in the Time of Annos Satanus.

by Shane Jesse Christmass

I

Winton Dalco pressed play on the machine and the distinct outline of James Woods appeared on the screen. It was the part in the movie where Woods implores a young woman to take a hit of cocaine.

Winton lived in a block of flats on the corner of Bulwer and Vincent Streets, just up from the Beatty Park swimming pool. It was a dismayed type of place, sandwiched between North Perth and Highgate, and nothing stood out. A real sham-infested part of the city and not much chop.

Winton was kicked-out on the sofa bed; blanket wrapped around his legs in a sloppy way. He had his shoes off and his socks stunk. Winton could've picked himself up and sat in his rocker recliner next to the window, but the sofa bed was welcoming and it was a drain to have to think about all that blood trying to circulate back into his legs, let alone actually getting up and into the recliner.

The phone rang, but he didn't reach over and answer it until it got to the sixth ring.

"Hello?"

"Yep."

"Okay, I'll be here."

"Not much; watching T.V. Thinking about what I can eat."

"Okay, see you soon."

Winton placed the phone back down and looked at the numbers on the front as though trying to decode some secret password. The downing sun trapped itself through the curtains like blood sponged onto a damp body. Suntraps. Suntraps and no buoyancy for tomorrow. Haunts of dusk nestled into him. Haunts of the dusk scared him.

The buzzer rang into the flat, startling him. He got up warily.

"Hello?"

"That was quick."

"From the shop?"

"Okay come up."

Winton opened the door before going back to the sofa bed. This bed was true comfort. Its four-inch innerspring mattress was made out of something called Dunlop Stamina Foam. The rests were tailored in genuine cowhide and the bed had something inbuilt called a Belgium bi-fold mechanism. The pillows yapped into amity.

A featherlike tap came from the door

“It’s open!”

The door swung forward and there stood a man. A grimy type of man. Like a mechanic, but one who had a nod to something desperate, like he longed to drink cinders and speak through a broken chin. It was his pal, Merrill Hill.

“How are the twits treating you?” Winton said.

Merrill wandered in carelessly, with the air of one who knew, and accepted, that his steps would cause the floorboards to cave in, but he no longer cared.

“Make of me what you will,” he said. “Shy and hide if you like, but I have what you want.”

“What’ve you got, Merrill Hill? What have you got?”

“Oh, I’ll get to that later. Coffee?”

Winton rolled off the sofa bed, begrudgingly, and made for the tiny alcove kitchen. He rumbled around in the pantry before sticking his head back into the living room. “Instant okay?”

Merrill nodded, lighting a cigarette. Smoke curled above his head.

Winton toiled around in the mess under the sink. “Say, I don’t think I have a kettle. Hot water from the tap okay?”

“Um, yeah, I guess. Never had it that way before.”

Winton turned the tap on and let it run so that the water was at its hottest. He went back into the living room.

“Sorry, no milk, hope you can take it black?”

“Ahh, yeah, great, thanks.” Merrill peered cautiously into the cup. “What’s this on the box?” he asked.

“Some movie. I think it’s called The Boost.”

“That’s James Woods, yeah?”

“Yep. James Woods.” Winton was growing weary with the conversation already.

“And that’s his missus, ahh—what’s-her-name.” Merrill clicked his fingers in quick succession. “Young something.”

“The cover says Sean Young, but Sean Young’s a bloke. He plays James Woods’ dealer.”

“No, that’s her, Sean Young. The girl in the spa there with Woods. That’s Sean Young. She’s a chick.”

“Okay, she’s Sean Young then. How’s the coffee?”

“It’s pretty gross actually,” Merrill said. “But seriously, do you know about these two?”

Winton gave a small shake of his head.

“She’s nuts. Well he’s nuts as well, but she’s also nuts, okay. I mean, he sued her. I mean, how messed around do you need to be to get sued for harassment by James Woods? The guy’s got an IQ of 180. He’s bonkers, but he reckons she, Sean Young, sent photos of dead animals and fetuses over to his

agent, or over to his house. She left a mutilated doll on his doorstep and then trashed his garden. I think he paid her out of court almost half a million or something. Who are these people?"

"Probably members of some Hollywood underground church or something. You know, like Sammy Davis Jr."

"The black guy?"

"Yeah, the black guy. He was involved in the dark arts, so to speak. Apparently he used to get it on in between bouts of wine and croquet. You know how it goes."

"Yeah, I think I know how it goes," Merrill laughed. "I do, I do, and I do."

"So what did you bring?" Winton took the conversation back to where he wanted it.

"Oh, okay, I see how it is," Merrill spluttered. He pointed over to his haversack, which he'd placed against the stereo. "In the bag, okay. In the bag. I got a bunch of acid, about forty of them and we're going to have a real good time."

"Are we going to get transcendent?" Winton cackled.

"Perhaps," Merrill said as he walked over and grabbed the pills from the bag.

"Check it out; they're shaped like little spacecraft."

Winton peered at a tablet. "That's a plane."

"Spacecraft."

"It's a damn plane."

"No, no," Merrill insisted, "It's like a space shuttle. A space shuttle designed by NASA. See? You see?"

"Okay, okay, I see." Winton tried not to roll his eyes. "How many are we going to take?"

"Look, I been thinking about this, they're not very strong, thirty micrograms, I think. I say we take six each and fly it out from there."

"Sounds juicy. Let's do it."

Merrill opened the plastic bag and doled out six dots onto Winton's open palm.

Winton looked at the black specks and then gobbled them into his mouth. The acrid sting scolded his tongue.

The phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Oh, hi—"

"No—"

"No—"

"I'm just going to stay here. No—"

"Maybe. Okay, I'll call you later."

He hung up the phone and picked up Merrill's coffee and took a slug, swallowing down the

acerbic aftertaste of the pills. "Let's get out of here," he said.

The phone rang again, but Winton didn't answer it.

"Who is that?" Merrill asked as they put on their coats. The phone was still ringing.

"I think my phone is tapped," Winton said suspiciously.

"Why?"

"Why? Why? Because Margot Jaillet keeps calling here."

II

Winton felt hot. The sun didn't shy hide; it stuck a knife into him, condemning him. There were no ropes, nor signs pointing to ropes, but Winton felt kept and encased in a steel cage. He had his eyes shut and he could tell his head was pointing at the sun, as the inside of his eyelids still had a pinkish hue to them.

The sun was washing in fast, laying more heat onto Winton. He squinted and flicked his eyes, so that his eyelids moved and the pinkish hue shifted about. But then, direct red smacked into his brain, slicking a palpable yellow across his irises.

Winton was trapped. He was on his back, his knees lodged up to his chest, but while he was in such a beautiful sunshine, he decided he'd persist in keeping his eyes closed. The cramped effect of the steel cage made him feel like the chief runt hanging out with a heavenly host. Still with his eyes closed, he refracted and played with the rays in turn. He could hear the groaning sky storm. He could hear footsteps walk and then stop.

"You okay? You awake?"

Merrill.

Winton opened his eyes and bolted upright. "It's a shopping trolley. I'm in a shopping trolley," he yelled.

"Damn right you're in a shopping trolley and by the way, it's afternoon."

"What happened?"

"We lost it. A helicopter started flying around the apartment blocks. You mentioned how a similar thing happened to you; well a girl you knew had a similar situation, and you thought the helicopter was her in purgatory," Merrill detailed in such a token manner that Winton hitched himself up and sat cross-legged in his shopping trolley prison. He ran a hand over his bleary forehead and through hair that felt dirty beneath clumsy fingers.

"Oh yeah, Inger Jose."

"Yeah, you said that was her name."

"Inger Jose, well it wasn't that she was purgatory, well she was in purgatory and the helicopter was coming to get her, but she wasn't sure if it was to be above, or below. And she just flipped out on the couch. It didn't bother me none, I let her go. I had the TV on, watching that Ricky Schroder show."

"The Ricky Schroder show?"

"Yeah, you know, his long lost father's a rich guy, but an overgrown kid. Anyway the show was

dealing with people who didn't have a house after Schroder found some homeless family living in a cave on his old man's estate. It was stupid. Hey where we are?"

"We're here," Merrill said indicating the door.

Winton stood up in the shopping trolley and leapt out onto the sidewalk. His feet landing with a loud thud. He looked around behind him to work out where exactly they were. "Oh right, Pier Street's over there," He said pointing to the railway, finally getting his bearings.

"Anyway I'm going in," Merrill cracked.

Winton looked up at the building. "Hey this is The Court. I drink here. Well, I sometimes drink here."

Merrill had already gone. Winton was proclaiming to no one.

He walked through the long corridor and out into the back room. He found Merrill sitting on a stool at the far end of the bar. Music, disco in particular, worked its way out of the jukebox and floated around the walls. Not many people sat drinking on this sunny afternoon: a couple in the far corner and a wasted-space of an old man perched carefully on a bar stool.

Winton walked over to his friend as the bartender, a small neat looking man with a clipped moustache, approached him.

"What do you want to drink?"

"I'll have a Vodka thanks, in a tall glass, no ice," Merrill said.

"You want it straight?" The bartender, whose name tag read, "Bob", looked as though he belonged behind the bar in an old western.

"No," Merrill snapped. "Vodka and Pasito thanks."

"What do you want?" Bob peered at Winton.

"What do I want? Well, I know I don't want a Vodka and Pasito, that's for sure. Just a beer, a pint of draught thanks."

Bob poured the vodka and then the mixer. He cocked the beer tap and rolled the draught into the pint glass. He slapped down a couple of coasters and placed the drinks on top. "That'll be thirteen dollars."

"I got this one, mate." Merrill reached into his back pocket for his wallet. "You can get the next one."

"Next one?" Winton laughed. "I'm not heading anywhere."

The two men leant in and sipped from their drinks. Winton felt the beer spit up and into the sea that was hitting his ankles. His body was wallowing in a dank substance. The Court Hotel was too moist and humid for a comedown.

"You know, I was thinking last night, and by the way did I tell you I went for a swim at Beatty Park?"

"How'd you get in?"

"I jumped the fence. I found some water polo caps as well. Anyway, I was thinking, lying in the diving pool, that all this, this search for happiness, kindred spirits, say the search for love and self-

esteem, what do they called it, the meaning of life, the search for answers, or just searching in the dark for a torch that still has its batteries working, all of that, won't mean anything in 10,000 years time. Good things don't last and the bad never goes away."

"I could have told you that," Winton said, screwing his face up.

"Really? Because I only thought of this last night. It's just replays of the same spats you were having ten years ago. And all that you know, all your knowledge and experience will just evaporate, perhaps decompose when you shuffle off. You can't embalm a thought, hell; this isn't even going to mean anything in ten minutes, let alone ten years. I mean, if the best we've got is Holocaust museums and wrapping yourself in an AIDS quilt, or you just enjoy crossing the boxes when you're playing church bingo, then I'm going to read the fine print, order a large pizza and get someone to check me out. It's a tomfoolery and lucid ruse and... Anyway, I'm losing myself."

"So, did you get me a water polo cap?" Winton asked.

"Well, no," Merrill said. "I was on acid. My hands were all screwed up. I had lips, here, and here, on my fingers." Merrill shuddered. "The last thing I needed was some type of canvas hat on my head."

Bob walked over to the far wall to answer the ringing phone. He put the phone on the bar and yelled into the near-empty room. "Is there a Winton Dalco here?"

"Shoosh. Shoosh." Winton flapped his hands at Bob as he stood up, almost tipping his pint over. "Put your hand over the mouthpiece," he said in a low voice, enunciating each word so that Bob was clear as to what his next action should be.

Bob placed his mitt firmly over the mouthpiece and leant in toward Winton, waiting for further instruction, a slightly bemused look on his small face.

"Find out who's speaking," Winton said in an even quieter voice.

"What?" Bob was getting exasperated.

"Ask who's speaking?" Winton snapped, forgetting to be quiet. "If it's Margot Jaillet, hang up. Just hang up, okay. I mean, she'll most likely give you some other name, like, I don't know—Camilla Lanzafame, or something. But you'll know. You'll know if it's Margot Jaillet." Winton's chest felt really tight and he was having trouble swallowing. He sat down heavily on his stool, his eyes flickering back and forth between Bob and Merrill.

"I don't know anyone called Margot." Bob was at a loss.

"Just hang up now. Hang up, it's her. I know it's her—it's her!"

"Ahh, Winton," Merrill piped in, a frown on his mucky face. "It might not be her, it could be a new type of salesman, you know random name, random phone number, and if you're the lucky guy in the right place with the right name, you win a high chair, or something. I mean, there must be a million Winton Dalco's in Perth alone. Say," he said to Bob, "can I get another Vodka and Pasito?"

Bob turned and stared open mouthed at Merrill.

"Okay, I get it, when you're done with the phone." Merrill shifted in his seat until he was facing Winton. "My point is, what if it is Margot Jaillet? Why give this bartender grief over it, let him make us, or rather make me, another Vodka and Pasito, okay?"

"That's your point?" Winton said, frowning. "Your point, what if it is, well, if it is, then I want

this guy to hang up. And take the phone off the hook, so we can all relax and....”

“Okay, look, give me second.” Bob broke in, looking a little desperate.

He spoke into the receiver. “Excuse me? There doesn’t seem to be a Winton Dalco here. If he does come in, can I pass on a message? Okay, let me see if I’ve got this straight, ‘Tell him Tony Minooka called’. Okay, will do.” Bob placed the receiver back down and raised an eyebrow at Winton.

“It was Tony...”

“I heard,” Winton said.

“You just win yourself a high chair my friend. A big old high chair for your future babies.” Merrill lit a cigarette, inhaled, exhaled and grinned.

Winton took a sip from his pint glass. The bartender slid a fresh Vodka and Pasito over to Merrill.

Winton practiced taking deep breaths.

“I don’t know what to do anymore, Merrill.” Winton said. He felt like he was back in the steel cage.

“We’ll have a few more and then we’ll decide what to do,” Merrill said, patting him on the shoulder.

“I’ll tell you what you shouldn’t do,” Bob said.

Both Winton and Merrill looked up.

“Sorry, I overheard what you were saying.”

“What shouldn’t we do?” Merrill asked.

“You shouldn’t go over the Horseshoe. You shouldn’t go over that bridge, not into the city, not tonight. Don’t head over the Horseshoe.”

“Why not?” Winton asked. “What’s wrong with the Horseshoe, what’s wrong with the city? It’s only a hundred metres that way. Very doable.”

“Just don’t go. Not tonight.” Apparently that was all he had to say on the matter. He walked off to the other end of the bar to serve a group of people who’d just entered.

“Okaaayy. That was a bit odd, don’t you think?” Merrill said.

“Slightly, yet slightly not also,” Winton said.

“Say, what is this bar anyway?” Merrill asked.

“It’s one of those bars.”

“One of those bars?”

“Yeah you know, in half an hour the disco lights will come down, the smoke machine will kick in. Boys will shout boys drinks; maybe those same boys will put their lipstick on the collar of other boys.”

“Oh...” Merrill looked like he’d forgotten his name. “Why do you drink here then?”

“Because it’s Perth. If I come here, no one’s going to hassle me, and I’m certainly not going to

hassle them. Besides the shows are kind of fun.”

Merrill choked on his drink. “Shows?”

“Yeah, you know, men on stage in gear that most men don’t wear, but most men probably want to wear.”

“Oh, okay, and you sure we won’t get hassled?”

“No more than those bars full of hussy and pussy.”

“Yeah.” Merrill winced. “Those women, they drive me insane.”

“Look, the only time I get hassled is when some old queen thinks that I’m wearing boots because I’m trying to stop walking Nellie. Some come up and ask me if I want to pull their pole, perhaps I do, perhaps they just buy me drinks and get talking. The conversations don’t get so bad really.”

“Well, that’s great.” Merrill chuckled. “I’m so glad you fit in. Right, let’s go outside and take some of that gear.”

“Sure, sure,” Winton said.

They sapped the rest of their drinks and rose from the stools. Winton had been sitting on his jacket. He shook it out and fitted himself into it. They took to the door.

Bob yelled out to them.

“Remember, don’t head over the Horseshoe, not tonight my boys.”

“What’s the deal with this guy?” Winton said. “I mean is it the Horseshoe itself, or is it just don’t go into the city? Because if it’s the bridge itself, we can just go across Beaufort Street.”

Merrill pawed about seven dots into Winton’s palm.

Winton guessed they really did look like little space ships.

“Who knows what his problem is? Let’s just take these and head across town and find out,” Merrill said.

They made for the Horseshoe. Winton couldn’t help but check behind him. One never knew where a Margot Jaillet was waiting.

III.

“Put the knife down, please!” Merrill screamed and begged and gurgled in his bloody agony. He lay on his back with his arms outstretched, underneath the Narrows Bridge, on the city side of the Swan River. He was trying to stop Winton from further gashing his body.

Winton had, in the last few minutes, stabbed and penetrated him some twenty-six times, yet he was still conscious and, perhaps more importantly, alive.

Winton had his back turned to Merrill, waving the knife at the Perth skyline. “I’m going to drown you in that river,” He burbled. “I’m going to dunk you surely and the first will be short. Each one after that will be longer until you pass out. You’ll be revived and then, you’ll start to talk.”

“You’re mad. Talk about what?” Merrill groaned, tears snuck from his eyes and he dug his

fingertips into sods of grass and tried to pull away.

“And then, I’m going to get some salt and throw it in your eyes...” Winton was delirious with ire. He convulsed and jabbered in an almost supernatural twaddle. Some may have suggested it was just lysergic tripe.

“Here it comes, the ascension!” Winton’s raw bellow ripped teeth through the air between them, and Merrill was scared.

“Blindfold; deliverance; binds; the abyss. The infinite! My bliss—angelic appendages...Rational Soul...Adam psychic! Primal Man, all divine-life, Lucifer-like, bodily manifests...Mind! Thought! Milk of the Matter! Mould of the Manna! Essence! Eyes...Presence! Turbid Water...Living Water! The fluid of the abyss...of the chaos...Satanic tribe of the souls! Truth bursting with hope...Expunge, expunge, expunge upwards with the Satanic truth bursting with hope to ascend upwards to find happiness.” Winton collapsed in the wet dirt.

Merrill cried silently through fingers that masked his face. He had to pull himself away from this insanity.

Winton cackled. He flailed his limbs about in the mud. “Don’t head over the Horseshooooo!” He giggled.

Merrill wasn’t fortunate. He tried to tuft away at a mound of dirt, hoping to dig his fingertips in and draw himself into public view, but he submitted to his wounds and clipped himself into the siding with death. The last thing Merrill Hill gazed upon before his final gasp was the clump of stairs, known locally as Jacob’s Ladder, which wound its way from the river’s foreshore to King’s Park.

Several sounds drained from Merrill’s ears and his wringing eyes shallowed, and then tied themselves shut as death was immediate after that. There were no angelic appendages, or fluid of the abyss.

IV.

Winton Dalco waited for his ride. He’d run down to the Barrack Street Jetty, placed a call and was now standing in the bucketing rain. He hunched over, sniveled and fisted his hands further into the front pockets on his jacket. He sniggered under the lamplight. His bones stirred under the skin of clenched fingers. He was noxious and wet and as he looked at the small tarn of water on the ground he saw his own shadow. He clung to the sincerity he saw in that shape.

His ride honked and the shadow receded to the corners. He opened the door and draped himself into the passenger seat.

“Nice of you to come,” Winton chuckled.

“No problem. I’ve been trying to find you all day,” Margot Jaillet answered.

“I’ve been out and I’ve been busy and I haven’t had time,” Winton said.

His voice was cold and he refused to look at her again. “Now drive!”

The huge carriages of wind pushed Margot’s car all the way to Winton’s flat.

It pushed them up the staircase and through the fly screen, into the lock and past the telephone, under the light bulb and over the electric clock and finally to flounder on the open sofa bed.

“I’m knackered,” Winton said. “I feel like a pharaoh in modern ages.” He giggled.

Margot had turned the television on and she now wriggled on the bed, trying to get comfortable.

A newsbreak interrupted the show. A body had been found at the Esplanade.

Winton picked up the phone and punched in a number.

“Hi—yes, yes, I’ll hold.” Winton put chewing gum into his mouth. “Yeah, yeah, that’s no problem. Say, that body, under the Narrows. It’s because of the Horseshoe, yeah, we were told about it and anyway, I know who did it, yeah, I did it! Yeah, the time is now, well, who will you be burying in your lifetime? No one, what no one? Yep, okay, I’ll be waiting, yeah, here. Not sure, just trace the call.”

Winton placed the phone back down. Margot was working out what had happened.

“You prick! You fucking prick! You make me come and get you. You make me an accessory to this shit?” Margot was long gone, out the door, down the stairwell and into her car.

Winton got up and pushed play. The movie resumed. A surfer was offering James Woods a joint, but he declined, as he was still trying to kick his coke habit. The surfer left in search of endless waves around the world. He gave James Woods a surfboard as a parting gift.

Winton giggled, incessantly—it was just all so damn stupid.

A Couple of Haiku

by Michael Frissore

You are not
turning Japanese;
you're just squinting.

I ordered a bacon burger
they gave me a
cheesesteak instead.

Career Planning

by

Thomas Sullivan

“Hi Rick. Welcome to ITT Tech. Please, have a seat. So, what type of degree are you considering?”

“Well, I *was* thinking about internet programming. You know, building company websites or something. But then I realized that by the time I finished, all the jobs would be over in Bangeldesh or something.”

“Well, that’s not really...”

“So then I thought about the military. But the other day something occurred to me. I’d gone to see my cousin Freddy over at Fort Jones. He’s in the Marines, see, and he lives in this crappy little house on the base. A real dump, with flaking paint and a sagging porch. I mean at one point we were having a beer and I looked down and saw a mouse running across the living room floor. And I said “Hey, Freddy, you’ve got mice in here.” And Freddy replied “That’s not a mouse, that’s a cockroach.” So anyway, I quickly ruled out the military. But then, the other day, I was reading the paper and they had this article about a guy that heads a company that makes release levers or something for those Predator drones. And they showed a picture of his house. And you know what?”

“What?”

“It was *faaat*. I mean, like this huge hedge out front and five stories tall, all brick with these huge windows and gables and shit. And the shed out back? The thing was bigger than Freddy’s whole house. And probably better made, too.

“So what’s your point here?”

“My *point* is, screw the military and screw these other low paying jobs and worthless degrees. I want to become a defense contractor. Make *bank*. Do you guys offer, like, a degree in that?”

“Well, uh, at this point we do offer a business degree. Two years, night classes, some can be done

online.”

“Yeah okay, great, but anything specific to weapons contracting? Cuz, I mean, that’s the cincher for me here.”

“Hold on a sec, let me check something on my computer here.”

[*The computer is not turned on*]

“Okay, yeah, it says we can structure that business major with a minor in Defense Contracting.”

“Cool. So what are we talking about, price wise?”

“Forty-two thousand.”

“What! I could do two years at State for like twelve thousand.”

“Well, maybe, but they keep on raising the tuition over there. And, you couldn’t get that minor. Plus, at ITT you’d be getting specialized attention.”

“Did you just say special ed?”

“No, no. Specialized attention. Things like Facebook updates and Twitter feeds.”

“Hmnn, I still don’t know. Forty-two k for two years. That seems like a lot. I don’t have that kind of cash.”

“Hey, who does these days? But we can get you a federal loan, no problem.”

“Yeah, but I gotta pay that bitch off, eventually.”

“Hey, no problem, you’ll make it back your first year on the job. Guaranteed.”

“Seriously?”

“Yup.”

“So, do you guys have any placement data? Ya’ know, like the names of your graduates and the jobs they’ve landed?”

“Well, we *did*, but then a nasty virus wiped it out. Took down our whole system for a week. Deleted the names of a *lot* of very highly paid people, too many to remember off-hand. But no worries, you’ll be joining them soon. You’ll be rolling in cash in no time.”

“You know, I’m still not sure about this.”

“Well, it’s this or Taco Bell, your call. How do you like hair-nets?”

“Well crap, okay then. Let’s get it *on*.”

Three Poems by David Mac

Kite or Cunt

High as a kite
or
low as a cunt,

it’s the in-between that makes life so hard to live.

Morning Horny

You wake up so horny
You want to hump
Something
Anything
And you want the hump to go on forever
To never stop
To blow fast
To last
This great effort, this
Sexy hump

But your bed’s empty
And you’re all alone
And your hand looks at you
You swear it’s giving you the eye

So you smile back

Love Story

We drink
we fuck
we try
to get it
right
and sometimes
I say
something
good and
you listen
like you
care
but then again
talk is cheap
so we open
another
bottle and
fall into
bed
where we
die and
die
again!

A Poem by Mike Berger

Slipped Away

The clot was massive.
Fortunately, I was in my
hospital room recovering
from surgery. Monitors
sounded the alarm.

I was back in the operating
room in minutes. I died on
the operating table

There were brilliant lights and
a sweet gentle breeze. The air
was perfumed. It smelled like
flowers; mile upon mile of wild
flowers came into view. Soft
music played. I lay and absorbed
the tranquility.

The light suddenly disappeared.
A violent pain seized my chest.
My stomach revolted.

It wasn't hard to die but coming
back was hell.

The Sweet Smell of Revenge

by

Christy Rose Cecil

He had it coming. All year, my roommate David had been building up his bad karma with his floor mates. Singing at the top of his lungs in the halls, flirting with everyone's girlfriends, blasting music at all hours. He was the guy that everyone hated, but no one would admit that to his face. Not until the night of the egging.

When Martez and Noah knocked on my door that night, I thought they might be looking for David. David spent a lot of time with Martez and his flat screen TV.

“David's not here right now, dude.” I told them.

“Perfect. Can I come in?” Martez asked.

I waved them in, and they brought with them two overstuffed grocery bags.

“What's that?” I asked them.

“That's what we need to talk to you about, Matt,” Noah replied.

Noah and Martez had been plotting revenge on David, and they needed my help with the prank I was more than willing to help because David had locked us both out of the room three times since the start of the semester. Noah wanted to get back at David for constantly hitting on his girlfriend and trying to kiss her when he wasn't around. Martez was the evil genius behind the whole idea. He wanted to prank David because he was bored and just plain hated the guy's guts.

We started by taking David's bed off the top bunk. We stripped his bed of his perfectly made sheets and began wrapping the entire mattress with plastic wrap. We put a nice thick layer down so that we wouldn't damage any school property. We didn't care if David's stuff got messed up, but we weren't

about to give the school any reason to get more money out of us.

Next, we brought out the food. Martez had bought enough smelly, slimy food to stock a small bomb shelter. He dumped a pound of raw chicken giblets onto the freshly wrapped mattress. I grabbed a can of sardines soaked in hot sauce and spread them over the giblets with my bare hands. The smell was already horrible, but we were just getting started. Noah started cracking eggs onto the bed while I got the condiments ready. Martez sprayed ketchup like paint onto a canvas and then squirted out half a bottle of mustard on top of that. Noah poured nacho cheese over top of everything. I dropped globs of peanut butter all around. Martez took over, splattering taco sauce like Jackson Pollack.

I crumbled dry ramen noodles and sprinkled them on the mattress. The other two grabbed a handful of cooked ramen and threw it at the bed. Martez thought we should have plenty of ramen, since it was David's favorite. The bed was a complete mess, and it was exactly what we wanted. Martez was ready to wrap it up, but I had one last thing to add.

“This is for locking the keys in the room, you idiot,” I said as I spat on his bed.

“Yeah, you need to just leave my girl alone, asshole,” spit Noah.

“This is for sucking at singing!” said Martez as he hocked a loogie.

“And stop bringing disgusting girls back to our room!” I nearly shouted as I spit.

“No one likes your music, dude,” said Noah with another mouthful.

“And no one like you, either,” said Martez with one final spit.

We quickly wrapped the bed once more in plastic wrap. We were glad to cover the smell up a little bit, but the bed still smelled like roadkill. We flattened out the stinky mattress sundae hoping that the food could not be felt when David slept on it.

“Let's hope this guy ain't the Princess and the Pea,” smirked Martez.

We made his bed back exactly the way it was. We disposed of all the evidence, except for a single chicken giblet that Martez left on his desk as a kind of calling card. We turned off the air

conditioning so his bed would really start smelling. By the time he got back from his parties, he would be too drunk to notice anything until morning. I, on the other hand, was completely sober and didn't want to be anywhere near that room once it started heating up. So I gathered up a few of my things and headed over to Martez and Noah's room for a good old fashioned dorm room sleep over.

David got back to the room sometime during the night. When he awoke the next day, the whole hall heard him yell in disgust. The three of us came out in the hall to watch the fun unfold. David flung the door open, gagging for breath. David saw me and started asking questions.

“What the hell is wrong with our room?” he asked.

“Oh, the smell?” I asked innocently.

“Yes, the smell, dumb ass. What else would I mean?”

“Oh, that's my bad. I brought a girl back last night...she was pretty drunk. She threw up while she was in there. I couldn't really get the smell out.”

“Oh my god. What the hell did she eat?”

David spent the next hour and a half mopping and cleaning, hoping to rid the room of that horrid smell, but it wouldn't go away. He overdosed the room on Febreeze, but the putrid smell of the mattress penetrated the smell of Spring Rain. Our plan was working out perfectly. Not only was the smell worse than we imagined, but it was driving David absolutely insane not being able to find it.

We retreated back to Martez and Noah's room to laugh at David's freak out. As we were nearly rolling on the floor laughing at our beautiful prank, our floor mate Alan came into the room.

“Matt, what is up with that smell? Did someone kill an opossum in your room or something?”

Martez couldn't resist the urge to brag about the prank.

“You wouldn't believe what we did! We put all kinds of crap on David's bed last night, and now it's stinkin' up a storm! I'm lovin' this!” he stopped to laugh some more.

The door cracked open.

“You put what in my bed?”

The laughing stopped. We all turned slowly towards the door, but we didn't have to look to know who it was.

Alan started inching towards the door “I...gotta go guys. Good luck,” he muttered as he made his escape.

Noah and I shot a look at Martez. If he didn't have such a big mouth, we wouldn't have gotten caught. At least not for awhile, anyway. But it was too late to take it back now. David knew.

Needless to say, David was furious. Strangely, he didn't even want us to clean up the mess. He dragged his mattress out into the hall where everyone could see it. He flung off his sheets and saw our masterpiece. He stared for a moment, then started to rip the plastic wrap off. He took the mess down to the trash room. Most of the floor watched him, but no one offered to help. Everyone knew he deserved what he got.

David was much quieter after that day. He wasn't any nicer to anyone, but he kept to himself more. He stopped blasting his music, and the hallway concerts ended. We were pretty sure he had gotten our message. But if we ever get wind of him starting up his old habits again, we'll know just how to handle it.

Bios



Cath Barton lives in Abergavenny, Wales, where she writes, takes photographs, sings, gardens, walks and generally enjoys life. She is published here and there and has a photographic exhibition of Wales at The Camel Saloon.



Mike Berger is an author of two books of short stories. Three humor pieces have won awards. He's been writing poetry for two years. Work has or will appear in forty-five journals. These include AIM, Still Crazy, First Edition, Stray Branch, and Mid West Quarterly, Evergreen and Westward Quarterly, Stray Branch.. Published two chapbook, Raw and Lighten Up His work is published by CC&D Press. He's a member of The Academy of American Poets



Alexandra Campbell is a creative writing student from Southeast Missouri State University. She won an "Outstanding Writer" Award in second grade and has been writing ever since.



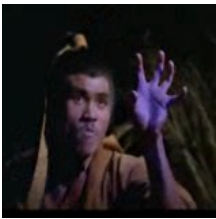
Christy Rose Cecil is a sophomore at Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. She is originally from St. Louis, and has been writing fiction since third grade when her teacher told her she would make a great writer. Christy Rose writes short stories, but focuses mainly on screenplays, hoping someday to be a film director.



Richard Cody, a native Californian, has been known to write poetry, fiction and shopping lists. His work, mainly the poetry and fiction, has appeared in many and varied print and virtual journals, most recently the premiere issue of *Howls and Pushycats* and *a handful of stones*. He still has work forthcoming in *Kaleidatope* and who knows where else!? His books can be found at Amazon.com and Lulu.com.



Shane Jesse Christmass is a Perth-born, Melbourne-based writer. In 2006 he was runner-up in The Age Short Story Competition with his entry *Remaking the Image of the World* which the newspaper's literary editor, Jason Steger, called a "highly inventive story, chocked with surrealistic allusion, nightmare imagery and psychological menace" ... In 2008 Paroxysm Press published an anthology of his short stories called *Croak & Grist* ... He's also published a number of stories including "Shut Down the Pick Up" (Waste, 2004, Paroxysm Press), "5", (Shotgun, 2006, Paroxysm Press), "The Arvo & Early Evening of the Axe", (10 Years that Didn't Kill Us, 2008, Paroxysm Press), "The Charnel Stink Within", (Mini Shots, 2008, Vignette Press) and "Cold to the Point Past Death", (Red Cent Publishing, 2010) ... Other fiction work has featured in the journals *New Wave Vomit*, *LIES/ISLE*, amphibi.us, *Cordite*, *one-eight vulture*, *dotdoddash* and *The Diamond & the Thief*, as well as sound poetry in the Atlanta journal, *As Long As It Takes*. He's just completed his first public reading of his screenplay, *Orderly*, at the inaugural Lion Pie Laboratory in Sydney. He edits the journal *Queen Vic Knives*. He is also a member of the band *Mattress Grave*



Michael Frissore's delicious little poetry collection *Poetry is Dead* caused *Tucson Weekly* to dub him a "Tucson anti-bard" and "a very funny weirdo." He is drawn to all things dead, be it poets and poetry, professional wrestlers, breakdancing or Rebecca Schaeffer. Mike has a blog that he calls michaelfrissore.blogspot.com. He wishes he were Don Ho or former L.A. Dodger great Ron Cey so the URL would be easier. Alas, he is not. Writer boy grew up in Massachusetts and lives in Oro Valley, Arizona with his wife, his son, and many, many, many scorpions and cactus.



Timothy Gager is the author of eight books of short fiction and poetry. His latest [Treating a Sick Animal: Flash and Micro Fictions](#) (*Cervena Barva Press*) features over forty stories, many previously published in various literary magazines. He has hosted the successful [Dire Literary Series](#) in Cambridge, Massachusetts every month for the past ten years and is the co-founder of [Somerville News Writers Festival](#)

[His work has appeared](#) in *Night Train*, *McSweeney's*, *Hobart*, *Twelve Stories*, *Word Riot*, *Skive*, *Dogzplot*, *Six Sentences*, *55 Word*, *Monkeybicycle*, *The Binnacle*, *Thieve's Jargon*, *Long Short Story*, *Zygote in My Coffee*, *Fried Chicken and Coffee*, *Slurve*, *Poor Mojo's Almanac*, *Tuesday Shorts*, *The Legendary*, *VerbSap*, *The Smoking Poet*, *Write This Magazine*, *Further Fenway Fiction*, *The Blood Orange Review*, *Poems for All*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *GUD*, *Boston Poetry Journal (Bad Ass Edition)*, *Edifice Wrecked*, *Blue Print Review*, *Barnstorm*, *Lit Up Magazine*, *Spare Change*, *Delmarva Review*, *Third Lung Review*, *Poesy* and

Ibbetson Street. He has had over 200 works of fiction and poetry published since 2007 and of which eight have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize



John Grey is an Australian born poet, US resident since late seventies. Works as financial systems analyst. Recently published in *Connecticut Review*, *Alimentum* and *Writer's Bloc* with work upcoming in *Pennsylvania English*, *Prism International* and the *Great American Poetry Show*.



A.J. Huffman is a poet and freelance writer in Daytona Beach, Florida, USA. She has previously published her work in literary journals, in the U.K. as well as America, such as *Avon Literary Intelligencer*, *Eastern Rainbow*, *Medicinal Purposes Literary Review*, *The Intercultural Writer's Review*, *Icon*, *Writer's Gazette*, and *The Penwood Review*.



Michael Lee Johnson is a poet and freelance writer from Itasca, Illinois. He is heavily influenced by: Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, and Allen Ginsberg. His new poetry chapbook with pictures, titled *From Which Place the Morning Rises*, and his new photo version of *The Lost American: from Exile to Freedom* are available at: <http://stores.lulu.com/promomanusa>. The original version of *The Lost American: from Exile to Freedom*, can be found at: http://www.iuniverse.com/bookstore/book_detail.asp?isbn=0-595-46091-7. New Chapbook: *Challenge of Night and Day, and Chicago Poems*, by Michael Lee Johnson: <http://www.lulu.com/product/paperback/challenge-of-night-and-day-and-chicago-poems-%28night+%29/12443733>. He also has 2 previous chapbooks available at: <http://stores.lulu.com/poetryboy>. Michael has been published in over 23 countries. He is also editor/publisher of four poetry sites, all open for submission, which can be found at his Web site: <http://poetryman.mysite.com>. All of his books are now available on Amazon.com.



David Mac is a 32-year-old unemployed forklift driver from the UK whose work has been accepted by *Ambit*, *Weyfarers*, *Mud Luscious*, *This Zine Will Change Your Life*, *Monkey Kettle*, *Clockwise Cat*, *Urban District Writer*, *erbacce*, *Purple Patch*, *Urban Landscapes*, *Neon Highway*, *KRAX*, *Moodswing*, *Decanto*, *Antique Children*, *Danse Macabre*, *Word Riot*, *Global Tapestry Journal*, *Obsessed With Pipework*, *Poetry Over Coffee*, *United Press*, as well as being a featured poet on *The Poetry Kit's 'Caught On The Net'*. he was also voted *Monkey Kettle's Poet of the Year 2009*. He has several self-published chapbooks available, plus 'These Dirty Nothings' from *erbacce-press*. He is

currently working on the follow-up 'Room is Brutal', also with *erbacce*. You can find more of my poems on *Write Out Loud*.



Bob Petras is a West Liberty State College graduate of journalism, He has filled much of his mundane time as a midnight security officer by penning short stories and humor essays. He has, however, accepted the chief of security position for a bomb shelter owned by a wealthy cult convinced that Latvians are going to take over the world. He acquired this prestigious position while competing against three candidates in a game of Clue, successfully guessing Colonel Mustard with the lead pipe in the conservatory.



Shannon Schuren lives and writes in Sheboygan Falls, WI. Her work has appeared in various locations such as Toasted Cheese Literary Journal, Concisely Magazine, The Flash Fiction Offensive, Big Pulp, the 2011 Daily Flash Anthology from Pill Hill Press, and her wastebasket. Her work is only semi-autobiographical. She has had two surgical procedures and has no idea if they have affected her ability to write. You be the judge.



Thomas Sullivan's writing has appeared in *Word Riot* and *3AM Magazine*, among others. He is the author of *Life In The Slow Lane*, a comic memoir about teaching drivers education for a cut-rate company in Oregon. For information on this title, please visit his author website at <http://thomassullivanhumor.com>.