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# Milk Money

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## Foreword

Hello friends and welcome back! Let us first say thank you for the overwhelming response to our little literary magazine's first issue. You like us, you really like us! After *Volume One* was birthed, we were tired, we were broke, we were hungry and we just couldn't wait to do it again. The selection process for *Volume Two: Percent* was 100% more difficult than last time due to the activity of your fertile minds and the abundance of your milky sweet offerings. We never set out to draw a single theme in the issues we're working on, however, there's always one lurking in the background. Maybe it's subconscious, but we like to leave it up to you to do the decoding. That's all the fun! A little mental aerobics. So here it is, that promise of a 2% after taste to *Volume One: Milk and Honey*. As soon as you turn this page, your ocular receptors will be bombarded with the textual glory that is *Milk Money, Volume Two: Percent*, and you'll like it, you'll really like it. We promise...or a prompt refund will be provided.



## The Second Serving of Apophis

John Beard

When he sees her he remembers the last item on her list: *Join a cult*. Many tribes of men from the North have passed through the campus, but Benjamin never expected her to be with one. It's not that he loves her-- they are incompatible. Still, he'd thought they'd be together forever, be together against all odds. Benjamin isn't naïve nor is he romantic. Before the radio signals stopped, before the power went out, weathermen and pundits all said Earth had only a couple of years left. Their numbers vague, but by the time they were delivered, most didn't care. By Benjamin's own calculations, humanity will not survive the coming ash winter.

The tribe calls itself the Scions of Science. They are pleased with the name. They don't tell him much about who they are, or their rituals. Everything's a mystery, they say, to be figured out on the way to Apophis, once known as asteroid 99942. Many have come to believe that its impact a year ago opened up the outside world to fantastic crystal cities beneath the ground.

They do tell him the membership requirements, though. They ask for his credentials.

"Why?" he says, "It's a moot point." He has uttered this sentence many times. This time it just slips out.

They go on anyway: "No, you're wrong. They matter now more than ever." There is a temporal disconnect- clichés of such power should only be said when the fate of the world is on the line, not when all has been said and done.

"I have a BA in Religious Studies."

They cut in, "We are sorry. We are all

scientists and only scientists may travel with us."

They loiter around Benjamin's stead for a week. They rifle through the offices, classrooms and closets of the community college. They collect cleaning supplies, rosters and term papers left behind due to the 30th Amendment. Established soon after Apophis struck, the amendment called for all responsible citizens to leave the world in working order so that future scholars and antiquarians would have something to rifle through. The votes were unanimous for this swan song of the constitution. Around the country, people packed up nothing that they did not need. Some clung to the idea of their future incarnations coming upon their past lives' ruins. The most devoted even left their bodies to the archaeological record. In homes with no mortgages the patriarchs overdosed on sleeping pills or let gaseous carbon fill the house so they might die beautiful deaths. The CEOs of economic powerhouses died in their offices; stories come around that some were walled in by their own employees. All manner of buildings were left to apparitions. At Babylon Community College, Benjamin is the curator and steward of these dead. It is a thankless job, but he will not let a cult have their way, especially if his ex-wife is with them.

On this matter, he approaches her: "Your friends are looting my home, more or less."

"So this is home?"

"Where do you call home, Sarah?"

"Oh Benjamin," she says. "You still don't know what any of this means. You should know I changed my name."

"I remember it was on your list. What is it now? Castile, isn't it?"

She nods.

## The Second Serving of Apophis

“Castile, your list is complete.”

“Yes. I finally joined a cult.”

Benjamin is hurt. “But you aren’t a scientist.”

“True. But one of them has taken me on as an apprentice of sorts. Much more of a personal experience. I’ve learned a lot.” She knows what he’s thinking. “Don’t take it too harshly. You aren’t cut out for the lifestyle.”

“When you leave them, don’t leave them in a lurch.”

“Grow up, Benjamin. Nothing here suggests a lurch.”

Castile makes a good point. Benjamin lives in relative comfort. On a diet of bugs and preserves, he is King Roach. His domain is campus-wide. He sleeps in the bowels of the steam tunnels where no winds reach. A hand cranked radio spits out the cracklings of Jupiter’s radiation.

Cultists drift by, some carrying armfuls of supplies, others pushing file cabinets into pagan formations detailed in crude pamphlets.

Castile explains, “Some of the members are a little disturbed by the state of things here. This,” she says, looking over both shoulders, “is not conducive.”

“And this is what?”

“This? Everything.”

“Please be more specific”

“You never give up,” she says.

“I’m having a hard time with all of this.”

“Aren’t we all?”

“I suppose. But me more so,” Benjamin says.

That night, going between the fires and cabinets, Benjamin speaks with the cult’s elders. He has reservations about their monuments.

“We need them for our calculations,” they protest.

“I have calculators. Paper and pencil, too.”

“Although it is not our obligation to explain, we will do so. You see, there is in our retinue two astronomers who must look to the heavens in order to think. The shadows of our monuments determine when it is fortuitous to move on.”

“I can’t let you take anything you want. The food, of course, you can take. It’s the books, the articles and the unneeded you can’t have.”

“But what will entertain us? Just give us what you’re done with.”

Benjamin says, “Truth be told, I’ve never finished a book. I’ve always left something out. I skim quotes. Sometimes I stop at the forward.”

It’s true. Even fantasy, his favorite genre, cannot inspire him to finish. The paragraphs of Tolkien produce anxiety in him. He can’t stand sentence following sentence describing rolling hills that shoulder jagged mountains that merely stand in the way of the end. Benjamin has not even finished *The Secret Garden*. For him, there is no extrapolation, no artful design of the author, no unlocking of some strange and wonderful place. Benjamin only sees the placement of words that try to spare the reader from another end. Now he’s all alone and surrounded by half-read books.

“You must be so ignorant,” they mutter, more amazed than appalled.

“I’ve picked up a lot. For instance, the Earth is a ball of slowly cooling rock.”

Silence creeps from camp to camp. The outliers are confused, those inside terrified, and the inner-most nonplussed.

They say, “We’re sure you are aware

## The Second Serving of Apophis

that we seek the entrance to the Hollow Earth. Yet you imply there can be no such thing. Regrettably, you seem to remain ignorant.”

Benjamin goads them on. “But what of shifting plates sliding on lava, and volcanoes spitting up?”

Geologists are summoned. They speak in cooing voices, “We can’t afford to buy into such novel ideas. The answer is crystals. You see, don’t you? Times the way they are, we go forward with a premiss, with a robust history. Of course, once we reach our destination, values and variables shall be readjusted.” Others murmur in agreement.

“Your logic doesn’t seem to work.” Benjamin clasps his hands together in a show of conviction in trying to understand.

“That too is subject to change. Overwhelming determination and not sustainability is our prerogative.”

“On the chance you make it into the Hollow Earth and you survive whatever obstacles nature sets before you, what then?”

Some of the less patient cultists break in: “Yes, there is obviously much you don’t know and much you want to learn, but please, enough questions.”

“One last one.”

“Shoot.”

“Who will be in charge come winter?”

“Scientists obviously.”

“Well, which ones?”

“Leave us be,” they say. Benjamin obliges.

In the tunnels running beneath the grassy encampment, Benjamin beds for the evening. Voices filter down from the cultists. They rise and fall in harangues and panting over the static from the radio.

Benjamin wakes the next morning

to bells and their lumbering bell sounds. He climbs from the tunnels underneath the commons to be handed a schedule. Castile and other apprentices scurry about in their faux furs, returning what was taken from the classrooms and offices just days before. Blinds are opened, letting slats of sunlight in. The man who handed Benjamin the schedule introduces himself as Barry, apprentice, and now Benjamin’s personal assistant.

The bells still ringing, Barry says with a smile, “We mustn’t waste the day.”

Barry leads him from building to building, room to room. In each class, a different cultist leads him and other scientists in discussion and knowledge accumulation. Although, in every class he attends, his words are heard and played off of, he whose education is paramount. Benjamin is aware that others are meeting right now, here at Babylon Community College, demonstrating and explaining their specialty to each other. Alongside the attention lavished on Benjamin by the cultists, there is the sense that they are all trying to sell him *something*, as if *he* might decide the status granted to each member of knowledge’s taxonomy. Hard scientists recognize and isolate the problems of the Hollow Earth and crack them over equations; Barry meticulously writes down the answers given to Benjamin’s questions. Soft scientists overlay circle upon circle, delineating areas of shared traits, double-crossing sections with qualifications and quantifications; Barry copies the diagrams faithfully. Even with all the showboating and grandstanding for Benjamin, the elder cultists also tie their disciplines to one another just in case the Hollow Earth flat out has no use for them. Bodies of knowledge gather in ruts and roil. Benjamin finds it all endearing, but it’s only a side effect. Although summer winds blow in dirty notes

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of disintegration, Babylon Community College lives and the ghosts have come alive.

At lunchtime, Benjamin waits in the student lounge. Barry is at his side, doodling on his legal pad.

He says, "Did you understand Dr. Jackson today?"

"Yes. Plastic is magnificent. It comes in small pellets. When coaxed, it can take a shape. It is clean for the most part."

"Is that all? You sound very elementary. There was more than that."

"Did you understand him?"

"No, but I'm discerning. I know what counts even if I don't know what it is. The doctor will not be pleased with your lack of progress."

"How many doctors will that make?"

"Three out of four."

"Not bad for a first day."

Barry says, "I'm sure you're aware we don't have many days."

"Many things demand my awareness."

"I will have to tell Dr. Jackson you were flippant today."

Benjamin says, "Do you think so? Tell him it's the man not the subject. Plastic is magnificent and inviolate."

"He'll take flippant better."

"Please don't get me wrong," is all Benjamin says. Barry goes on scribbling.

Castile comes in and stands across from the two men. Benjamin sees in her the Sarah who wore a wedding gown. Her scowl cancels the thought.

"You are ridiculous," she says, "ridiculous, ridiculous, ridiculous. You can stay ignorant. We will not stay here."

"I never asked you to stay," Benjamin says. Barry checks his notes.

"But you like it," she says. "You like that it fits your ridiculous list."

Benjamin is a big proponent of the official lists. In 2035, one year before Apophis hit, all bodies of the government agreed to implement a law that implored all citizens to legibly print or preferably type out their hopes, goals, et al. These lists were to then be taken to authorized personnel who notarized them. With official backing, the country sought a sense of fulfillment in this miserable age.

But, soon after, hierarchies formed. People judged each other on the length of their lists. Hastily collected statistics showed which notaries produced the most timid lists and which the most audacious. Success rates were published by county. Completed lists were framed and hung on the wall. The truly brave, those whose lists were long, outrageous and complete, were treated as if they had reached bureaucratic transcendence. Their sense of procedure and daring was hard to fake. Secret groups whispered of a twisted, dark list with the only goal of pretending to be a glorious list. Mothers told horrible tales of the unaccomplished and lazy.

Benjamin says, "At least I honored mine."

"Grow up," Castile says.

"Not my prerogative," he says.

"What?"

"It isn't my prerogative."

"Face it: your list is lame," she says. "Marrying me? Also lame. You had one item. *One* item: Marriage."

Benjamin flusters out, "But it was sustainable."

Barry catches every word in immaculate strokes; light swoops of the pen grow heavier, indicating gravitas and lack of food.

"No, it wasn't. So you go and find

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something that will outlast you,” Castile says. She whispers to the painted wall, “Watch out, Babylon, someday he will leave you.”

Barry writes in the margin, “=death(?)”

Not if Benjamin can help it. He took a vow, in a way. After him and Castile got divorced, he drifted listlessly through life. One proviso of the 30th Amendment set up the Preservation of Future History Association, arguably the least exclusive of the government’s branches. The PFHA sent out an open call for curators to oversee sites of varying importance. Benjamin and others like him made their way to the courthouses of the great cities to get their lists amended and receive the addresses of their charges. The government officially disbanded and tribes and cults of Apophis carved out territory. Though empowered by the previous democracy, the curators are considered apolitical and in the great cities, tribes form and fight around them. In the suburbs, curators find relative peace.

“I’ll see you later, Barry,” Castile says and leaves. For the rest of the lunch hour, the two men go over their notes. Benjamin concentrates hard on elasticity, proto-Akkadian symbology and non-Euclidean geometry. Barry notes signs of improvement.

It’s late and Benjamin flushes out the cockroaches. He kicks a box and they tumble out of holes in wet cardboard that smells of urine. This area of the tunnels lies somewhere beneath the outer camps and Benjamin figures some of the cultists have broken into his domain. The harried cockroaches don’t run fast nor far. Refugees from all the surface activity, they’ve been on the move for awhile now and are tired. Benjamin collects first from the strong and then from the weak. They fumble around in the darkness of the video cassette

case Benjamin carries at his side. They grow accustomed to the big man’s gait but jitter still. They eat the soggy cardboard bogging down each other’s legs and race in figure eights around the case’s inner plastic pillars, training for the great escape. Minutes later, the walls creak and candlelight enters.

Underneath the center of the commons Benjamin eats the roaches as they come out through the opening. Above, the cultists eat bags of expired potato and corn chips. Benjamin listens to them talk about him.

“Barry says he’s more learned than he was yesterday.” “Exact words?” “No, but figures show his improvement.” “The stars verify this.” “But Barry’s no statistician.” “No, no. Illustrations. He does have a knack for abstraction.”

“Back to Benjamin please. He could become an apprentice.” “His background is incompatible. Besides, he’s a curator.” “But his determination is remarkable.” “Yes, Barry charts it. The curve exponentially rises.” “And let’s not forget his wonderful ward here. The college is a perfect place. The bells have such beautiful cadence.”

The elders pause their discussion to continue eating. Benjamin imagines their crumbs feeding the next generation of his dinner. If he were an apprentice, his diet would change. He’d wear the markings of his peers: a faux mink coat, or perhaps a lab jacket. Eventually he’d know everything worth knowing and he’d never have to leave the Babylon Community College. It would be like Castile had never divorced him. How pathetic, he thinks, as the last of his roaches gets away. If the cult stayed, what would it be like between him and Castile?

The conversation begins again after Castile greets the elders. “Distinguished el-

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ders,” she says, “I propose we leave tomorrow. Everyday grows cooler and cooler. We must hurry on to the Hollow Earth and leave this place behind.”

“Are you worried about Benjamin?”

“I worry about what he might do to us.”

“Or for us.”

“He’s a curator. His place is here. He doesn’t need us and we don’t need him. We should leave before he gets clingy.”

“A good quality in a cultist, we think. We’d have to ask Benjamin to be sure though, it is his field,” they say.

“Remember the Hollow Earth and its crystal cities. We must leave tomorrow,” Castile says.

“It’s fair to say an apprentice must not press her elders too strongly.”

“I have the support of the others. The outer rings grow restless.”

“Conniving.” “Or sensible.” “Strong.” “She has their backing.” “For the time being we will give her ours.” “Is that a good idea?” “According to the charts, the stars are in agreement.” “The stars seem to follow popular opinion.” “Yes, the universe is quite an enigma.”

“Tomorrow we leave,” Castile says. “Everything we have taken will be returned to the curator. He’s got a job to do.”

“There should be jockeying for power. There are conventions that must be followed.” “However, statistics show that more often than not, prophesy circumvents the traditional routes to power. Perhaps she is spoken of reverently in some ancient text.” “We can’t be sure though.” “End times do see a higher number of active prophecies.” “We can’t honestly know. We need a sign.” “It would be helpful.”

Castile says, “The moon is full.”

“Anything else?” they ask.

Castile suspends her answer when she and the elders hear metal grate scraping on concrete. Benjamin ascends from the tunnels. Barry rushes to his side.

“I can’t let you leave,” Benjamin says. He dusts himself off. The elders wonder aloud if he’s talking about them. Soft congratulations go around.

“Such improvement,” they say.

Castile rolls her eyes. “Of all the places we could have gone, we end up at the Babylon Community College, overseen by my ex-husband.”

Everyone else is thinking what Barry is noting: “Sign?”

All Benjamin can do is repeat himself, “I can’t let you leave.”

The elders say, “What does it mean when the sign runs contrary?”

Benjamin says, “Especially one that shows such improvement.” Wise nods of agreement.

Castile presses Benjamin, “And why can’t we leave?”

“I need you,” he says reverently. Barry puts down a long line of exclamation marks. Murmurs from the other cultists reach the intensity of a cicada swarm.

“What has given you that impression?” asks Castile.

Benjamin looks up to the sky, then to Barry, Barry to notes. He flips through them with robotic determination. Finally Barry says, “Nothing.”

Benjamin responds, “It was nothing that was said.”

“Don’t look at me,” Barry says. Castile looks to the elders.

“He’s shown improvement.”

“Still he’s an ignorant sign.”

“He wants us to stay.”

## The Second Serving of Apophis

“At least he wants Castile to.”

“Is it responsible to trust an ignorant sign?”

“No” Castile says. “Tomorrow we leave.”

Benjamin descends into the tunnels. For the next few hours he sits in darkness watching imaginary shapes float by. Those can't exist, he thinks. He expects to hear rebuttals and critiques, but up above nothing seems to be happening. Conversation turns to the next leg of the cult's journey. His ungainly rise and fall is an afterthought, and Benjamin, at first angry, soon feels relieved. He becomes aware of a new logic at work, the logic of end times. Despite the value of time in these last days, time's not short enough to affect its own weight. A one-week courtship plus a one-week marriage is still only two weeks. And it wasn't like there were fireworks. More of a loud hiss like laughter laughed, secretly so. It's all easy pickings for an experienced logician, but Benjamin's a beginner.

The next day Benjamin stays in the tunnels until the cultists march on. Only Barry seeks him out. Benjamin's former assistant gives him the notes and Benjamin wraps them in inviolate plastic. Benjamin thanks him for his attentive eye to academic and personal details. Their conversation is cordial, both thinking it may be the last time Benjamin ever speaks to another person. When Benjamin finally emerges, the only signs that the cult was ever there are cooling campfires and matted down grass. The chilly winds cannot hide the smell of sweat and earth. For the rest of the day, he reads a few books. He doesn't finish anything, but the idea of doing so doesn't bother him. He wonders if he's been the butt of one big joke between Castile, the PFHA and

the stars. It almost gets to him.

He speaks slowly to no one, pausing to breathe every possible breath a sentence can reasonably contain. “I know I shouldn't think it, but I wonder if the asteroid made it through past the crust, past the crystal cities and the peoples of the Hollow Earth, past China, on through into outer space, still glowing, violet hot.”

He jokes, “I'd like to be on that asteroid, holding hands with something truly cosmic, embracing the heat haze, separating all things with qualifications ad infinitum, until I'm forced to meet the void head on and not in some roundabout way.” When you get down to it, it's one of those inside jokes. It's a joke on time, but time's winking too. Benjamin knows death trumps all, but no matter when it comes, it has had to wait its turn.

## To Amanda 'O'

Jeffrey Blocksidge

I remember distinctly a day in the first grade when at the beginning of class we would recite the date out loud together and I distinctly remember saying, "1987," and watching this other girl say, "1987," and watching her lips move up and down. I remember facing toward the window too and it was bright out.

Whenever there would be a storm outside we would all freak out when it was getting dark and get really nervous and say they were gonna close the school and that we're gonna get struck by lightning, that we're gonna die. There's some pictures of me in elementary school if you're interested. There's this one where my eyes were seriously bursting out of my face they were so huge. I had huge eyes and these weird lips that looked like Betty Boop lips. Weird.

My bus number in the first grade was 28, and all the cool kids rode bus 387, I think, because bus numbers were messed up since it was Parma and they never had any money to even put fake numbers on the bus. I always wanted to ride bus 387 with Brad and Sean and Beau and Amanda. Amanda had a weird last name that began with an 'O' and I loved her for it. I remember Brad lived on Roycroft and was in Tiger Cubs with me and his parents let him watch *Predator*. He was blonde and so were Sean and Beau and I wished I was blonde. They had cool last names too like Carrol and Chippy and Powers.

I remember swinging on the swings and thinking about Lionel Richie. I think for a whole year, either 2nd or 3rd grade, I swung on the

swings during recess and didn't do anything else. I had my own swing and everyone knew. I played soccer for a whole year too and I kept thinking they would erect a statue of me playing goalie because I always played goalie. I was so good the cool kids would pick me to be on their team and play goalie for them and I would kick the ball super far. That was either 3rd or 4th grade. I remember thinking about different poses my statue would be in during the game and I would act out poses while going for a ball so people would remember them while they were making the statue of me.

My mom took me to see *Willow* and I was floored. I drew and traced and doodled General Kael a million times. I loved his skull helmet with the metal things and his eight or something swords.

## Untitled *Kevin Bruce*



## Still-Life

*Brian Cross*

Luminescent, radiant and iridescent  
Her skin is a color no one has ever seen  
An ingenious milky goldish-pink like neither.

And the golden hair on her arm,  
like nothing thinner could exist  
a fine delicate stroke of the master artist's  
brush.

Her eyes look perfectly sculpted, and refuse to  
follow the viewer  
Her felt-tip red lips not symbolic just supple  
and real.

And I swear there's some faint twinkle in three-  
dimensional space  
when you look at her eyes or smile.

Through them she speaks volumes of poetry  
Imagism, then Transcendentalism,  
which I could read and read and never finish.

Sweet cream skin,  
Who is she?

She smells of rose and citrus and a hint of pine-  
As I focus in she fades away.  
It's just me-  
and flowers and fruit  
Just subtle and real.

## Haikus

*Matthew Furniss*

A forgotten taste  
can only be remembered  
with an empty mind

To speak of ancients,  
of times past, times forgotten  
are the words of fools

To my old hometown -  
and all that i once had there -  
it's dead to me now

## The Siege Of Magalouf

*Matthew Furniss*

Armies in white arrive from the West  
They leave blood-stained red  
but happy

The victors left with the spoils  
Are somehow the losers  
Bitter, forgotten -  
but faces in the crowd

Alone once more  
The Siege Of Magalouf  
is over

## Collected at Kahoots Gentlemen's Club, Columbus, Ohio

*J.M. Green*

I'll have the turkey club & a Coke, I said.

Can I get you anything else? the waitress said.

Lynae. It's my middle name. My first name is actually Tiffany,

Tiffany said.

Choosing a name is hard. I wanted it kinky but family oriented,

Barbie said.

Lisa's my real name. I used to go by Olivia but then I kept  
getting confused, Lisa said.

I'm not going to attack you, or the other girls, until you've  
had a drink, Tawny said.

But they're too normal here: tans, fake tits, & long blonde  
hair extensions, Tawny said.

Uh, being a dancer looks really hard. I would be nervous,  
I said.

I just concentrate on getting the thong out of my crack without  
picking at it, Olivia said.

Enjoy your meal, the waitress said.

I'm more than just a dancer. I'm a sex therapist if you will,  
Barbie said.

I'm a stripper. There's no reason to be politically correct.  
It is what it is, Tiffany said.

I'm also a great cook. Mom & I like to cook large meals  
on Sundays, Tiffany said.

I hate Paris with her small dogs. Fuck no; I like to keep my  
Rot on a leash, Tawny said.

I like my boobs. You could bite my nipples & I wouldn't  
feel a thing, Barbie said.

The turkey club here tastes great. Nothing like a good meal,  
I said.

Let me know if you would like anything else, the waitress said.

I'd like more tattoos with stars & moons & fairies, Lisa said.

That's why I read Harry Potter, but she'll have to kill him  
because he died in real life, Lisa said.

I read poetry. My English teacher showed everyone my poems.  
I loved her, Tiffany said.

Make sure you read the dessert menu, the waitress said.  
I need to start wearing pads. The granite stage is so hard  
on my knees, Tawny said.  
I read poetry too; I love it. And I'm an English teacher, I said.  
I read *The Da Vinci Code* but I hate reading, Barbie said.

I should've sat with the guys over there but their hats  
are on backwards, she said.  
I should get a tongue ring. My friends say I'll talk with a lisp  
but I love Southern accents, she said.  
I wonder if *you* should be here – if you were the all-American  
student, I said.  
I remember logos, ethos, & pathos. I was the archery team captain.  
I got lazy, Tiff said.  
I just tried out for a roller derby team. I have two kids, so I can't  
do this forever, she said.  
I'll bring you the check, she said.

Do you need a box?  
Do you wanna two for one VIP dance?  
Do you think I'm wild because of my look?  
Do you like the name Zala?  
Rich – do you want *me*?  
Yes, I said.

## Beard Farmer

*Drew Lampe*

It comes.  
Oh boy, it comes sneaking out like your lawn after winter thaws.  
Here and there, specks of black, white, brown and red.  
I can never tell exactly where it wants to go.  
There are so many possibilities, but the symmetry is ALL WRONG.  
Once it reaches a perfect length it becomes increasingly harder for me to say, "No."  
I want to tug at it until everything comes falling out.  
My face is seasonal.

## To Explain My Crusade

*J.M. Green*

it's mowing fields  
of dripping blades

and I must pause  
with every step  
I take and tilt  
the mower back  
before it stalls

but soon it stalls  
because I'm not quick

I want to pull  
the start cord once  
and try to keep  
a steady pace  
complete the job

## Cloudscript

*Michael Henson*

Sunset,  
above the river:  
enormous banks of red and black  
shapeshifter cloud.  
Now we see the breast of the Great Bird.  
Now, a rumped quilt.  
a battalion of Napoleonic soldiers,  
a great wound,  
a dancer with a limp.  
And now,  
a message,  
black script  
against a peach-colored parchment  
in a language I do not know.

## Neighbors

*Drew Lampe*

Joe lived on the third story of an apartment building in the East side of town. He lived there quite happily despite not owning a garage. He lived there quite happily until the neighbors came scratching at his door.

The neighbors all had a look to them; like starved lions come to dinner. He saw the blood on their hands and locked the door up tight. He saw the blood on their hands and turned up the volume on his brand new television.

Some of the closest neighbors stayed pushed against the door, coaxing Joe to "Be a good man" and undo the lock. He scratched the back of his head and listened more intently to what the neighbors had to say. He scratched the back of his head and took a step forward.

You could cut through steel with their sharp smiles. The neighbors crossed their fingers as Joe undid the lock. The neighbors crossed their fingers as Joe welcomed them into his third story apartment.

## Oliver Prose and His Giant Head

*Mandy Levy*

On June 3, 1983, at 12 o'clock sharp, Oliver Prose and his giant head ripped his mother clean from thigh to thigh. "I knew I should have had a C-section," she yelled to the bloody doctors.

"We're so very sorry," the bloody doctors said with their heads down. "But at least your son, Oliver, is born and healthy." A

## Oliver Prose and His Giant Head

bloody nurse handed the giant-headed baby to his mother, who had already forgotten that she was bleeding an ocean under her blue smock.

“Oliver,” she whispered to the tiny baby with the giant head, unfazed by the team of bloody doctors canopied between her legs sewing frantic stitches, “you have a very big brain. You will make your Mommy proud.” She kissed his giant head.

As Oliver grew, so did his head, and so did his brain, presumably. And as time passed, he and his mother discovered that there were many pros and many cons involved with having a giant head and an equally giant brain. Pro: winning spelling bees. Con: losing balance at higher altitudes, i.e. diving boards. Pro: skipping first grade. Con: running into walls and doorways for under-compensation of head diameter. Pro: remembering mommy’s appointments and phone numbers. Con: always having bruises. But things could have been worse. “How would you like to have a giant head and a tiny brain?” Oliver’s mother would wonder with her son. “With all that space, I suppose a tiny brain would just rattle around in there, rattling and echoing, and be good for nothing.”

Oliver agreed. He wouldn’t want a giant head with a tiny brain. That would have been a shame. “Oh and to have a tiny head with a giant brain!” his mother would scoff. “Or even a regular-sized head with a brain as huge as yours! Can you imagine the headaches? Oh, Oliver, you’ve got it easy.” She kissed his giant head.

But Oliver Prose wasn’t so sure. The boys at school with normal heads teased him and beat him up at recess. Oliver was smart, so he often tried to retaliate with sensible conversation and mature negotiation, but his words

weren’t armor enough, and likely added fuel to the fire. He ended up on his back in the woodchips underneath the monkey bars almost every single day, and would come sulking home to his mother, full of splinters and tears.

“Oliver,” his mother would say, holding her sewing needle to a flame, “it’s about time you stopped getting beaten up.” And Oliver would nod sadly, wincing as Mommy’s needle poked through the skin on his shoulder. “If only your father were around...” “But this was as far as the conversation ever allowed itself to go: Always walking barefoot on the shores of the problem, never volunteering to wade into the salty water solution.

Until one day...

“Mommy,” Oliver said as a sizeable splinter surfaced from the depths of his back. “I’ve been thinking.”

“Oh?” his mother responded. “Well, you’re quite good at that, Oliver, with that big brain of yours. What is it you’ve been thinking about?”

“Well,” he began. He cleared his throat. “I think I should practice telekinesis.”

“Telekinesis,” she repeated. She stopped digging. “Like moving things...”

“With my mind!” inserted Oliver excitedly.

“Ah...” nodded his mother. “That certainly sounds like a lot of hard work.”

“It will be, I’m sure,” said Oliver. “But I have a natural instrument. If I study hard and practice every day, I could be amazing!”

Oliver’s mother smiled. “I can’t think of a more suitable pastime for this beautiful giant head of yours,” she said, combing her fingers through his sandy hair. “But Oliver,” she continued, “will you use your telekinetic

powers for good or for evil?”

Oliver pondered this question a moment, and then, softly, “It could never count as evil if it saves me and you.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Oliver’s mother said. She kissed his giant head.

Days and weeks and months went by, and Oliver studied steadfastly. He visited every library he saw, and cleared every shelf of its telekinetic selections. (And though he did accumulate some hefty overdue fines, he didn’t worry much—the library card was in his ex-father’s name, after all.)

Oliver researched underneath his X-Men bedsheets by flashlight, even in the day, because he thought it more elusive. And when he slept, if in fact he slept at all, he placed his books underneath his pillow, so that he might learn by osmosis. (This was a joke he heard his teacher make once, when she found Billy Arnold asleep on his math book, but Oliver thought it could be a very real situation for someone with the kind of mind powers that he was honing.)

Oliver read and learned and learned and read, and he stored most of his information directly in his giant brain. But when something seemed particularly vital, he would also scribble it down on a Post-It Note and affix it to his bedroom wall—just to be safe:

*\*Best time for telekinesis = quiet hours in the night.*

*\*Good messages for sending telepathically = Write to me; Telephone me; Buy your child the toy he wants.*

*\*Go about all of this as discreetly as you can, lest you arouse skeptics who may lower your self-confidence.*

Eventually, Oliver Prose had finished

all his books. His brain was heavy with knowledge and his bedroom was wallpapered in Post-Its. There was nothing else to do except practice what he had learned.

“Mommy,” Oliver said one night after supper, “you’re not a skeptic, are you?”

“What do you mean, Oliver?” his mother asked as she took his plate back to the kitchen.

“I mean, do you believe in my telekinetic powers?” he said, following her to the dishwasher.

“I believe in anything you set *your* mind to, Oliver,” his mother replied. She kissed his giant head.

“Good,” said Oliver. “Do the dishes. And then I’ll need your help.”

For the next four hours, in the quiet of the night, Oliver’s mother sat perfectly still in a velveteen armchair, legs crossed like a lady, swallowing her yawns as she balanced a yellow handkerchief atop her open palms. Her son, meanwhile, marched around the room with arms outstretched like Frankenstein; stood on chairs; balanced on his hands (which impressed Oliver’s mother very much); wiggled his fingers; chanted non-words; and sat Indian-style in meditative trances, all in a fervent attempt to budge that yellow hankie with the power of his mind. So far, no luck.

“One...two...THREE!” Oliver screeched, sure that this time he had made a *telekinection*. (He made this word up, which was also very impressive to his mother). He lowered himself from his newest position on the fireplace mantle. “Anything?”

“You’re definitely getting closer,” said his loving mother, whose eyes were swollen in the fight to combat an invasive army of sleep.

“Oh, I know what it is!” Oliver said,

scrambling belly-first to the ground. “I should lay like this. *Be the handkerchief.*” A moment of silence passed as Oliver gazed intently onto—into—the handkerchief in his mother’s hands. And then: “Anything?”

“Hmmm...” said his conflicted mother. “I think there might have been a little something, but I think I blinked...I can’t be sure.”

“Okay, okay, okay, I’ve got it now,” Oliver laughed. “It’s so obvious! This...*this*... is what I have to do.” And Oliver approached his patient mother, slowly, carefully, never letting his stare stray from the handkerchief. He reached his hands out and felt for her forehead, found it, and let his own giant head fall gently against it. He whispered. “One...two...three.”

And Oliver’s mother never forgave herself for what happened next. She didn’t know if it was sleepiness, or a longing for Oliver not to get hurt, or even if it was completely involuntary—an accident. But she did know this: It was at that very moment that Oliver’s mother exhaled—silently—out her nose. The yellow handkerchief below hesitated; then fluttered. The quiver was so slight, so negligible, that when Oliver’s mother played it over and over again in her head, it was easy to miss. To ignore. To forget. But Oliver Prose didn’t miss a thing.

“MOMMY! Mommy did you see that?” Oliver jumped up and down. “It moved! I made it move! With my mind! I did it!”

Oliver’s mother didn’t know what to say or what to do. She just sat in the velveteen armchair, legs crossed like a lady, holding the yellow handkerchief, smiling uncomfortably up at her beaming little boy and his giant head.

“Thank you Mommy!” he squealed. And Oliver stood there a moment in his G.I. Joe pajamas, looking to her, loving her, believ-

ing her, believing in their secret. He kissed her normal-sized head. And then Oliver and his giant head raced up the stairs to dream a wondrous dream of all the wood chips and baseballs and backpacks that would soon be rocketing at the puny heads of all his bullies.

Suppertimes came and suppertimes went and Oliver’s worried mother stopped asking for updates on the telekinesis. After all, splinters still wove like wicker through her son’s backside day after day, so she assumed there had been no miracles yet. But Oliver seemed far from discouraged, and every night there was some kind of noisy clamor in his bedroom. “So who knows?” Oliver’s mother let herself think. “Maybe he’s flying his bed around up there.”

And though his lazy bed hadn’t moved its feet since Mommy rearranged his room three years ago, Oliver Prose was still convinced that telekinetic progress was being made. He kept a nightly journal to monitor his successes:

*march 2*

*stood on desk and held history book at belly button; dropped it.*

*.046 seconds to the ground.*

*repeated exercise, this time using telekinesis to hold book back.*

*.053 seconds to the ground!*

*march 3*

*demanded book page to turn and it did!*

*\*to be responsible, i must mention that my window was open, and it was a particularly breezy night.*

*march 4*

*had to study for english test.*

*march 5*

*used my eyes to direct 3 of 4 spelling  
bee trophies to fall off shelf.*

*\*broke 2 of them; must find super-glue  
in mommy's utility drawer.*

*\*\*again, to be responsible, the trophies  
fell at approximately the*

*same time i slammed my body against  
my bedroom door when  
mommy tried to enter.*

*\*\*\*next time, let her in; she is not a  
skeptic.*

One foggy night in late March, as Oliver and his mother were eating supper and not discussing telekinesis, there was a knock at the door. *Rap, tap, tap.*

"I wonder who that could be?" said Oliver's mother, furrowing her brow as she slowly rose from the table.

*Rap, tap, tap.*

"It's a bit late," she continued, looking to her kitchen clock. She walked in slow-motion towards the door. "Were you expecting someone, Oliver?" she asked her son without looking at him.

"No," answered Oliver. *Rap, tap, tap.* Who was it? Oliver and his mother hardly had visitors during normal visiting hours, let alone 10 at night. Oliver was getting scared. Sort of. But he had stopped getting really scared, lately, because of his incredible mind powers. But he was still pretty scared. "Don't answer it!" he whispered to his mother as she neared the foyer.

"But the door's unlocked," she replied nervously, and instantly wished she hadn't said it out loud.

And before she could reach the dead

bolt, Oliver's mother watched with horror as the doorknob before her joggled, then eagerly twisted to the right. The door pulled back and she jumped to stop it, but the strength of a man on the other side was apparent. The heavy door ripped itself from her desperate grip, and swung out into the quiet night. And there, behind the smudgy air, reeking of irony as his steel-toed boots suffocated the welcome mat, she saw him: Nathaniel Prose, once called Daddy, twice called Dear, home at last.

"I forgot this was such a trusting neighborhood," Nathaniel announced as he shoved his ex-wife out of the way and let himself into the house. His voice was like pots and pans avalanching to a linoleum floor. Oliver covered his ears and watched from the dining room as his ex-father stood in the entryway. The warm, gentle light of the candelabra above didn't suit him. The halo got lost in his scraggly brown hair; the glow evaporated in his thirsty skin. He was drunk and he was dirty, and his eyes were dripping to his dimples. They were filling in now. He hadn't been smiling as much. Oliver's mother used to kiss those dimples—both of them—every morning. Nathaniel was a dream once. Well-to-do and gentlemanly, handsome and kind, yellow tulips every Friday (and roses in the winter), promises and plans...and other plans...

"Nathan, what are you doing here?" Oliver's mother breathed her words. She was shaking. "You have to leave."

But Nathaniel wasn't listening. "Is that Ollie?" Pots and Pans. He pushed past her and headed for the dining room.

"Stay away from him!" Oliver's mother shouted.

"What?" he laughed back at her. "He doesn't know? Haven't you told him?"

"What are you talking about?" she ran

after her ex-husband.

“Haven’t you told him what you do while he’s at school?” He was marching straight for Oliver now, who was crying all over his periodic table placemat.

“Nathan! Please!”

“Haven’t you told him you’ve been needing a man’s touch again?” He stood over Oliver, laughing diabolically. Pots and pans crashed all over him. “Haven’t you told him what a whore you are?”

“Please...no...stop...”

“What’s wrong, Sarah? Haven’t you told little Ollie you’re fucking his Daddy’s brother?”

“Nathan! No!” Oliver’s mother cried as she ran up behind him, reaching for her son. But Nathaniel Prose was a man. He threw out his left arm and whipped the back of his calloused hand across her powdered face. Oliver’s mother fell to the floor.

“Mommy!” Oliver screamed, pushing himself out from the table.

“Oh, don’t you worry about her,” Nathaniel said, swiping him up into his python arms.

“Let me go!” Oliver squirmed, but his father’s arms constricted, tighter and tighter with every kick and every wiggle.

“Well, Ollie,” Nathaniel smiled a yellow smile and pots and pans seeped through his teeth. “Looks like your mommy doesn’t need us anymore. She’s got your Uncle Charlie now. But you and me, boy, we can make the big time! We can get out of here and put you in the circus with that big ol’ freak head of yours! See the world! Make us a fortune!”

Nathaniel laughed and laughed and laughed. He hooted and he hollered, he slapped his knee and he stomped his foot. His eyes watered, his lungs wheezed, his nose ran. And all the while, Oliver was concentrat-

ing like he had never concentrated before. He remembered the steak knife that was sitting on the table behind him. He closed his eyes tight, and pictured it. With every brain wave he could muster, he pictured the knife rising slowly, levitating above his periodic table placemat. He pictured it rotating in the air, finding its fighting position, parallel to the horizon, so that its razor-sharp point would lead the way. He pictured it flying up, hovering above his evil ex-father as he sniffed and snorted. And then, as Nathaniel threw his head back in a roaring cackle, Oliver pictured the knife tearing through the air. He pictured it soaring with all the speed he could summon. He pictured it gleaming as it darted towards its target. And he pictured the knife thrusting, hard and pure, directly into Nathaniel Prose’s laughing throat...

*...Oliver’s mother released the blade and stumbled away from her ex-husband’s pulsing jugular. She looked to her son, his eyes still sealed in ardent concentration. She breathed, and wiped her bloody hands on her apron...*

...Oliver Prose opened his eyes when he felt his father’s vice grip go limp. The steak knife had secured itself exactly as he had ordered it. Oliver fell out of his father’s arms and ran to his trembling mother. He held her bloody hand as they watched Nathaniel Prose buckle his knees and collapse to the periwinkle carpet. She kissed his giant head.

To Be Continued...

## Cities

*Davo London*

Chicken bones lie flicked un-bonded,  
carcasses sprawl laissez-faire.  
Here by strip light human feasted  
leaving signs of primal lairs.

What means he this by show of power;  
whence was chicken, now asunder.  
Spread beneath this chair; no wonder  
folks despair of all this plunder.

Close eyes, quiet voice, for there's no teaching  
them who done skipped the manners class.  
Suck it up and keep believing,  
your time will come to 'scape this mass.

Some question that we're made for cities,  
our feeble flesh and brittle skulls.  
Why then build oblong obsidians;  
If not for robots made of steel?

We lay the groundwork for our children,  
make binary our words and thoughts.  
Come closer future, we're being upgraded,  
nee Sapiens; vont devenir Mécanique.

But bad for good we've sought our dwelling,  
The best of it we all must make.  
Fie on you to question progress,  
When you know too well it's for all your sakes.

## I Am A Cat

*Justin Patrick Moore*

I am a Cat  
fierce Feline  
throat roaring, reverberating  
in solar echoes, Ra Ra Ra

out through space/time  
across the aethyr

broadcasting interplanetary  
interconnections  
linking up to your telepathic radio receiver  
weaving wisdoms word  
seeping up the sun drenched strength  
food for the soul  
emanating profuse warmth  
growling and purring

I am a Lion  
walking with a wild  
pack of Dogs  
trotting down the secret cobblestone  
alleyways of the hidden city  
hooting and howling,  
carousing the carnival for a carousel  
spinning lik a circus clown around the helios  
wheel:  
the central heated heart of fire hearth and home

our untamed spirits steer  
we have traveled up the spokes,  
backwards and forwards  
speaking with spirits, a sybilant whisper in the  
ear  
conversing with angels, consciousness at al-  
tered angles  
spreading the message  
peering through a passage

of text  
uttered by the same mouth  
tongue talking lightning language  
fast as liquid mercury  
to glossolalia compelled

the Dog Star rises  
heating up the dialogue

between the Hounds of Heaven  
and celestial hep Cats

together we bake unleavened bread  
to feed the hungry brethren  
we are gathered  
in the bosom of stars  
forged in burning cores  
spreading like hallucinogenic seed crystal  
spores  
setting fire to your imagination  
stoking it with wood gently cut and lovingly  
cured  
from ancient wisdoms oak, a Qabalistic Tree  
entering the ethereal  
enveloped in myth and mystery

this is a call to arms  
and Lucky Charms  
as the droning buzz of N'Aton swarms.

## **Return of the Highway Clown**

*Justin Patrick Moore*

Return of the Highway Clown  
he's lifted me up and let me down.  
Return of the Highway Walker  
face harlequin painted  
with the smile of a stalker,  
smooth telepathic talker.  
He can mime his way through anything.  
He returned from the stars and what did he  
bring?  
A Holy Grail whose glory we sing.  
And it's filled with Robitussin.  
Yes, it's filled with Robitussin.

Return of the Highway Clown  
a vagrant from some other town.

He looks haggard with the Riddler's Sin  
with a face painted grin  
to hide thin lines

wavering across his face.  
The hourglass ticks, offbeat  
displaced.

The world closes in on him every which way  
as he sits and drinks at the Rusty Spoon Café.  
He is lost in the desert of an endless night  
with dementions encroaching,  
his last draw fast approaching.

He's a wild card wizard with no place to call  
home  
but the nothingy zero, the empty all-one.  
He's a cowboy renegade who makes the quick  
draw  
who has shattered reality, snapping the straw  
that broke the camels back over the abyss,  
he's in the presence of snakes who eternally  
hiss.  
The spark of his existence is blinded out in a  
flash  
as he runs to steal the crown in one last mad  
dash  
he wears the dunce's cap and he's got a gleam  
in his eye  
as he sits on heavens roots, gazing at the  
branches  
hanging down from the sky.

## **Untitled**

*F. Brian Niesz*

reaching god, their arms covered with white  
life,  
and I below, at their will, in the shadow of  
nature.

even mountains die

## A Reason for Winter

*Tim Reeder*

The skeleton moon bares  
A hollow stare. She does  
Not speak.

Boney trees frame her sky.  
Her frozen wind rips tears  
From my eyes, and sends them

Across the sea.

Tears that brought my clouded  
Thoughts rain down on the wild  
Green fields

Dark, sweet, blackberries grin  
And sharpen their thorns to  
Puncture my skin, under the

Warm summer sun.

Winter whiskey ice cold,  
Buries the day like snow,  
And warms my soul.

## Blessings for Hunter, Jack & Alan

*Maria Seda-Reeder*

May all the days of your lives be fruitful and up to the potential of say, a potentially hazardous and really groovy substance which we all know by the biodegradable synonym of good kind bud. But—actually, now that I mention it, not quite so clearly, as to say, make a point, or a goddamn useful thing as such—this truly isn't the case. Point taken, point in case, case in point. Let's move on. Time and time again I feel the old woman reaching out from

inside of me where she was buried long ago. I've found you! What a revelation, perhaps a contradiction! My, how redundundundundundundant. Fundamentally a capitalist pig, such as yourself, should fight for your own damn country if ya'll take your commie pinko freedom for granted. Such is the word of the scriptures to that blue-eyed thief, and sometime inhabitant of the space time zone continuum. Phone home with your Spelling Ace and a can of mace, baybay. And if you look real close you might hear the angel next door dreaming. Wearing one of those god-awful drapery things like in some classic roman marble sculpture. Ugh. Take me far from your misogynist small-minded idea of art and beauty, beasts. Cymbal of a Redman. Fighting for the cause like Chuck D, without a pause. Just spitting out the facts like a computer, which you all know very well is just another way for us to distract ourselves from hysteria. His story about glory is not always what your chickens are cracked up to be—before they're hatched, at least. My left little toe that looks like a finger has the power to initiate the plug in the socket that's connected to the wall and all the wires within. What, perhaps, is the deal when it all goes down? I used to be a superhero, once upon a time. Back in the backest of back waters of backdomville. Tal vez, mi amor, nadie me entiende. When it's time for the flavor, I am the one you want to savor. Upon whose head, befitting of a pea pod, we must see some vengeance! Liberation! Satisfaction... oh, yeah...mmmm. Something like that. Bestow upon us your blessings with much favor towards higher levels of consciousness. Or in other words, "let the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, over I."

### A Pleasant Day's Drive

*Hayes Shanesy*

Once while I was driving West from Cincinnati I drove through the tail end of what must have been one helluva storm.

Every tree branch living or dead, every rock, every blade of grass everywhere was coated in three eighths inch crystalline ice. Driving through after the clouds had gone with nothing but blue skies and drooping trees almost takes your breath.

The four of us got out of my parked van, Mr. Tattoo, and delicately tip-toed as the stubby fingers of frozen grass crunched broken under our feet. Their was a line of brush wild and barren all iced at the edge of the field. We snapped off icicle branches and stared through them like kaleidoscopes in the sun.

### The King's Rhineland

*Thomas Temelis*

At the amusement park still known on many back country maps as *Rhineland Island Amusement Park*, they don't sing karaoke anymore. I can't even find a broken guitar hiding in those boarded-up buildings. Falling apart from disuse, they hold vacant expressions, mouthless smiles of Bottle Neck Toss, eyeless eyes of High Noon Shoot Out and Wet the Duck. Summer weeds are growing in the back alleyways and reaching slowly toward the old punch-in time clocks where employees no longer report to work.

I can't help feeling this place is only in a deep slumber, aching to wake from a bad dream and shake away the thickening leaves.

There's the cobblestone street that now holds tufts of wild grasses here, a mysterious sapling there. It's an amazing growth sprung from cracks between stones, and it makes me hope and believe that perhaps all will be well. Life might return here again to grow and love- if only it can be given a chance to sing again.

And there, running the length of the main boulevard, are the dead, lifeless spigots of the empty fountains. The concrete is pale and blue-bottomed like a dead corpse where once there were rainbows that colored mists toward the Karaoke Stage. Above that bruised and empty spot, where the stage is no more, rises the rusting three-fourths size replica of the Eiffel Tower, forlorn. Hiding under vines that cover half its architecture, it appears as the midlife of disease or the brown skirts on an aged skeleton lady. Along the sides of the fountain, deceased shops and empty kiosks that once held candy and clothing, toys and memories are now blind and searching as pieces of eves fall like hands from the tripped knees of their boarded up signs. There aren't even blinds on the windows- vacant, blank and forgotten.

I imagine there are ghosts as I look upon it all. I only just miss the turn-and-hide of a remembered worker's face, someone I used to know a long time ago, but the face still looks young and I know it cannot be. I know all those people are long gone from this place. I'm getting old, too. Do I look as old as this place?

I've only just returned after a long hiatus. It's my first day back and I join the few security officers that haunt this empty place, crumbling beneath their patrols. I've already noticed during that peculiar hour where the sun sets and the security shift changes, that some uniforms are missing bits and pieces of their pomp and circumstance —a lanyard here, a badge there. Are these gone and not replaced

now?

The officers seem distant yet good-natured, but gosh they're quiet. They must have gotten used to not speaking while patrolling on their own. I guess there just aren't any people to speak with anymore, not like how I remember it more than a decade and a half ago.

I had to soothe lost parents, frantic for their calm children who were found complacently choosing in the candy shops. I had to help the drinkers reunite with beer at the Festhousa. I had to help teens find and invent love in the long line to the roller coaster: Das Beast. And I remember so many flirtatious girls. They were everywhere.

At the Guess Your Weight they would call to you on a megaphone, "Officer! Yes, you sir, come here. Let me guess how heavy you are." And they wouldn't take a red-faced no for an answer. They'd persist and you'd go over and they'd guess and smile and giggle, but that would be about it, and your mind would be way too far along and already embarrassed about it. And I remember with a grin the older girls who worked in Das Beer Garten, who wore lederhosen and bonnets and low-cut outfits, and could back up their hot words without fear of parental control. There you would be, embarrassed over how your fantasies weren't far enough along, you almost had to fight your way out of the back kitchen. Hunger lulled you in and love tried to keep you from leaving. But leave you must, otherwise you'd be found out and quickly fired.

But they are all gone now. Probably they're married with many children, but gone none the less, away to places where people work and seldom visit, very rarely celebrating as families once used to do here. Those places are where people are forced to work through their holidays. They find themselves postpon-

ing and only seeing their relatives in bits and pieces, here and there, mere shadows of the generational gathering glories of childhood. Most likely they will be reminded of how short lives are when they are forced to adieu their fathers and mothers at funerals. That's what has become of this amusement park. I'm almost sure of it, and I don't want it to be.

Behind the scenes, past a barren employee lot, crumbling in places to dust and dirt, stand three nondescript buildings, in the middle of which is the station house, the last slow beat of a dying heart. Outside the back of the station I find Officer Malaby. He is an aging officer who wears a fishing hat with lures and hooks and he's there grilling a burger on a grill brought in from home. He's using the lid to shield himself from the heat. He holds a poker like an old Spartan while flipping over his flaming burger. Sparks rise and disappear as he pokes and then replaces the lid.

"What! Karaoke! Son, there just ain't no reason to sing anymore. Those young girls are all gone. The people aren't here anymore. The electrified pond, the killer rides, it scared them all away." If you try him any further and mention the joy the singing of the King brought, he will get angry with you, perhaps you have ruined his burger and he will curse... "I told you they're gone! Quiet your mouth. They aren't coming back. They won't come back. The King is gone and you're ten years too late, been ten years gone too long."

Do you want to know what happened ten years ago? Well, before the Rhineland of the Kings fell asleep, the place was always packed. It was full of animated, bright-eyed gangs of children and teens, awake with the smell of apple strudel and funnel cakes and the ever-constant click-clack and rush of the roller coasters. In the beginning they built

## The King's Rhineland

good coasters, strong coasters, good enough for Kings, great hulks that rose up and rounded sky-high as mountains, bridging over paved footpaths where old ladies and kids would duck from the thunder and swoop of the trains.

From the beginning, the park was family owned. The descendents of a visionary named Herbert Rhineland lived right there on the park property, over here and over there, always just hidden from the public when off of work. Over and down the road from the Losantaville train station, whose tracks circle the park, there is an apartment hidden above Rivertown Pizza Parlor. That's where the great grandson Richard lived in a small abode. He was a sound technician and electrician at the time for all the music stages of the park and was seen on more than one occasion escorting beautiful dancers from the Festhousa to his abode. Now its carpets are going threadbare and becoming stained from rain, and the toilet, for whatever reason, occasionally flushes on its own. And down the tracks over yonder is a fort where Indians used to fire fake arrows at passengers passing in the train. Behind those wooden fort walls, an entire house sits hidden where the three sisters lived. The famous triplets were known as The Rhineland Three for their tightrope act. Yes, they even practiced on a rope there hidden between the fort parapets of the north and south walls. For many hours they practiced the special dance that imitated the Karaoke King and drew many people to listen to his music in the Festhousa. There they danced on a thin rope line above a wooden stage, which was a hundred feet down, and with no net. They covered the roof of that hidden home with a sort of soft rubber to break their many practice falls, and they fell very often, but they never fell in front of an audience in the Festhousa with nothing but a wood floor

a hundred feet below them.

I know the rumors, that they took the King in after what befell him and the park, but they are just rumors and they should be ignored because now they are fifth and sixth hand. Who can say if the King will ever really return? I know. I feel it. Some watched for him out toward the gigantic parking lot and the highway beyond.

There were many specialists back before what happened to the park. A Rhinelander named James ran a leather crafting operation. Hissing metal heated designs onto custom cut leather, white hats and jackets and white chaps and when he left for war he was replaced by his stout daughter named Jesse. Her most popular design was the one of the King himself, the one where his hallowed figure is pointing with one hand skyward and the other Earth-ward and he is bowing his head. He said he did so because he was a servant, a conduit for God. Yes! Go ahead! Try it! And you might think you know now, early in this story, why the Park is no more, but you are wrong. I tell you it didn't happen, the rumors were all lies. For those of you who don't know yet, or can't remember, it's all right, it's better that you don't have suppositions early on.

And there was a glass maker named Dorman who taught his daughter Anne to blow the most gorgeous glass figures. She could make glass within glass, crystal carriages carrying the King and his bride with four tiny white horses, and another with the King on a motorcycle and a tiny white cape, another of him on stage that could be wound up to chime "Love Me Tender."

In those times, during the Asian wars, many noticed that there was a distinct lack of men in the park. Even the coaster repair crews scaling those monstrous cliff facades were

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oddy all women. They had husbands and sons, brothers and fathers all gone to war, at first to the mighty ocean Pacific, then Korea and Vietnam. There was a stretch of time where conflicts raged again and again far away in foreign lands (and this was before the time when women were allowed to fight alongside the men in the numbers they are today), so they stayed, as did the King, at first, because he thought his music was needed, desired, necessary to keep hearts yearning on the mainland for those far away. And I think it was needed and still could be if it could only be given the chance to again rise from the depths of this pitiful silence.

So it was because of wars the working women of King's Rhineland were often in want for a man. And for a man such as the Karaoke King, the women who wanted him were many. Not only could his voice pour forth violin gentle, but he was handsome with dark hair and youth, and it was during his stage performances the woman screamed and sometimes swooned as he gyrated his hips and legs, twisting, sinking, almost kneeling in musical rhapsody. The magic of the stage with any performance is such that often individuals in the seething audience believe it is only them being looked upon by the performer. The fact is the lights of the stage combine with the amount of people to create the effect of an ocean din upon the singer's eyes, undulating like the sea upon windy weather. It's a fact the King was actually reasonably shy.

But during one particular performance a flower was placed into his raven hair by a back stagehand and it later fell to the stage right at the moment during a song called "Lost Love Returns:"

*And so I sing this song to you  
My love I've yet to recover  
And so I want and yearn for you*

*To find you in my life forever*

And just so gently he went to a knee and picked up this rose and then presented it to the nearest enraptured fan at the base of the stage, and she happened to be Anne Smith, daughter of the glass maker.

No one saw them together, but at the end of that month she was late to be visited by her time and soon discovered herself to be pregnant. Sewing circles of talk spread quicker than visitors could walk from one end of the park to the other.

"Who else could it be but the King?" They whispered. "And we saw who he gave the flower to."

But Anne stayed silent. She wasn't one to kiss and point on the matter. She took the lumps without protest, and eventually she disappeared from the park to bear her child. About then her father Dorman came back battle weary, shell-shocked from a horrible jungle hell on the other side of the world.

He returned to his glass shop and hung an enlarged framed photo of his daughter in a wedding dress in a convertible car kissing a groom with raven hair, his face turned away from the camera. It looked to be at a drive-through chapel in the yawning multicolored lights along a boulevard deep in the city of Las Vegas.

This had the effect of stopping the rumors in the park.

"Just look at how raven is his hair," they said. "Surely this man was the King," and though he was gone to Germany on an army tour, he had left in a bus only nine months prior to the birth of Anne's healthy child.

When Anne returned, she did so with her child in a front pack carrier and they were seen together everywhere. They repositioned her in the Lost Parents play yard to help her

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care for her child and the other found children calmly playing with toys and awaiting the arrival of their lost parents.

Part-time, Anne entered pageants for extra money. She was beautiful- her hair golden, her button nose and smooth accent, her ruby round lips. Much to no one's surprise she won regional and then state competitions. And could she sing! She would take the stage, often searching the large smoky sea of faces in front of the karaoke stage for her long-gone lover and father of her child. A talent agent found her instead. She moved to Hollywood and started to make movies. No one thought it was unusual when she and the child held her actor's last name instead of taking the father's last name, but everyone still believed the child was the King's. Movie stars almost always keep their actor's name, even when they publicly take famous actor men for a husband, so no one thought it unusual at all, or even thought to question it.

That is until that fateful day when it was announced just a few months prior to his release from the army, that the King had found a beautiful princess named Priscilla in Germany. But by then Anne was long gone for Hollywood and had in fact changed her first name as well, and Dorman refused to speak any of it, claiming he had fatigue from the war whenever he was asked, and so no one asked more than once. Eventually he moved to California as well, disappeared there and was never heard from again.

But every day at King's Rhineland they continued to run the Karaoke at nine, twelve, and seven, every morning but Sunday out of respect for God. They came from near and far in those days and one never knew if at nine on say a Wednesday, if the one who started singing softly:

*I find in times of trouble Mother Mary comes to me, speaking words of wisdom... Let it be,*

was or was not *the* Paul McCartney. And there were oh so many imitations of the King. Men showed who portrayed him young as a soldier, eventually others portrayed him more portly and wearing bell bottomed sequined white patent leathers, and there were all ages in between too.

In fact, when the ownership of the park transferred to the son in the customary way of deaths, Richard Rhineland renamed it from Rhineland Island Amusement Park to King's Rhineland out of respect and to woo more imitation King's back to the park to sing.

And it was often that he did show, unannounced, arriving in an old beat up pickup truck with a hat on and sunglasses, an effective disguise, even when it was nearly nightfall. His face was tan, his white shirt with a ruffled front and high collar only hinted, and his pants were almost always bell bottomed jeans. That was how the King often returned to the park, like a visitor, like a father looking for his lost child. Nobody paid much attention as he made his way through the shuffling crowds, or even when he would rise to the center of the stage, especially because he would often pick other musician's music to sing as the first song of his set. But his voice was distinctive, his fluctuation and tone, his demeanor could not be denied, and he would sing:

*Hello darkness my old friend, I've come to talk with you again,*

And at the sound of that voice singing that sad song, the crowds would instantly gather, some woman in the crowd would invariably faint. It was as if they knew this was no imitator, the King had returned once more.

As we all know, the man became more

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famous, leaving more and more often, returning less and less regularly. It was rumored he was known to frequent Hollywood in search of Anne, but it was nearly impossible without a name. It was speculated that the King kept steady employment in acting gigs in hopes of eventually running into her.

It was during a late autumn show at the King's Rhineland, when the nights were coming earlier and lights were needed to illuminate the stage, that tragedy befell the King.

The park owner, Richard Rhineland, still demanding to do the little electrical things to improve the park, had only recently installed a few lights and a giant disco ball that descended from an odd, crane-like contraption. It was unexpected, and when it came circling down, the King skipped a beat and stepped backwards into a new stage light, which fell beneath his back and burst into sparks and sulfuric smells. The fire was quickly put out, and although the King rose and finished his song, although the incident was quickly forgotten, his back pain persisted. Perhaps that song he often sang held a deeper meaning to the man's life:

*And the people bowed and prayed  
To the neon god they made  
And the sign flashed out its warning  
In the words that it was forming  
And the signs said "The words of the  
prophets are written on the subway  
walls  
And tenement halls.  
And whispered in the sound of si-  
lence."*

It was only a matter of a few years later that the King was reported dead. It was a heart attack that had done him in, although many blamed pharmaceuticals. I say it was a so-called "broken heart" that caused his permanent disappearance. Close people he thought

were friends had published a book describing his drug abuse and weight gain rather than his search for his youth and Anne and his love for music. Invariably everyone looks into the mirror and wonders what happened.

Just before his reported death he had grown larger -perhaps he considered it slovenly. He was embarrassed. His face was fuzzy with whiskers between tours, his hair disheveled with bed-head, and his mind dizzy with prescription drugs. He'd found a new woman who held the spitting image of Anne Smith, but younger. He often was heard telling her not to speak or sing. The man had more money than he could ever spend, even if he tried, but was unhappy. I ask you, what would a man like that do to change his life?

The effect the King's death had upon the park was devastating.

"For one thing, Richard blamed himself for the King's reported demise. In a drunken fit he bet and lost the entire amusement park in a back-room card game," said Malaby. "From there the park went nowhere but downhill. Rides became dangerous. There just weren't no money coming in for the upkeep. That ride there," and he pointed to the skeleton of a green rusting heap, "that was the Cobra. Roller coaster ran standing patrons in that tight tail swirl before sending them standing up to the top of the hill like a cobra preparing to strike. Well, it was in that tight tail curve that the train lost too much speed, there wasn't enough grease for the wheels, and in a shuddering fit it fell off the track. No one was hurt, but it was the first cut into the park's reputation, and many scars were to follow."

"One devastation after another, it was like the roll of waves coming in from a storm brewing off shore. The next ride that failed was the brand new Das Königssohn uber Das

Beast, also known as the Prince of the Beast. This famous roller coaster was made of wood and built in and around it's father Das Beast. Supposed to be the largest wood coaster ever made! What patrons didn't know was that it was made of wood to save money. The steel was just too expensive. Well, this made the tracks too tight in the autumn months. Wood shrinks and widens with the weather; it buckles with time. A lump formed and five years after it's introduction, a train skipped off the track and fifteen people were hurt terribly. The emergency brakes locked her into stopping right there at the very top of that hill, the first three cars hanging, all dangling sideways." It was clearly at least five stories high.

"Took the fire department hours to run a cherry picker way up there to fetch them all down."

"But that wasn't the end, oh no, far from it! A cable on a ride called Das Ejection Seat broke and sliced off a young woman's foot. Though she survived, she came out of it maimed for life. The Animal Kingdom, have you heard of it?"

"Sure," I reluctantly told him. "Eighty acres on the northern boarder, crocodiles, hippos, some lions, a tram."

"Well, they lost money to upkeep the caregiver's john in the middle of it. As a result, the poor fool stepped out his vehicle to take a leak in some bushes, probably thought it only take thirty seconds, not a lion in sight. Well don't you know it? One came up behind him." Malaby growled and put his hands in front of him like paws. "He made it back to the truck, but he couldn't get the door open before that lion tore him to shreds, ate him whole. They got out there hours after he'd gone missing only to find his boots. Food had been rationed for the animals, rationed to one feeding a day.

Who can blame the cat? Animal was starving to death."

It seemed to me Malaby was drifting off track. I asked, "But what's this got to do with the King?"

"My God man! Don't you see? The people stopped coming to the park to hear him sing. Oh sure, Kings showed up all the time, even other rock and roll singers, but none matched the glory of the one true man. Those people who came to see him sing were money to this park. Even if only thirty extra showed up a day to see him, well that meant thirty per day... That's ten thousand eight hundred a year! Man, I don't have to tell you what that meant for money, what that meant for the park. Ah! I don't want to talk about it anymore. Why are you making me talk about it?"

"Well, why don't we turn it around."

"What?" Malaby stopped and looked at me incredulous, his eyes squinting.

"Sure," I said, "fix it up, clean the place up and get that stage back in business."

"Fix it up with what?" He started to massage his index finger with his thumb, "No money."

"What about the Eiffel tower? People like heights. They'll pay for that. We could at least fix that."

"It's a death trap man. High school senior student fell off it on Graduation night eight years ago. He got drunk cause there weren't enough security working to catch everyone bringing in alcohol. He got drunk and stuck up there on the second floor balcony. Poor kid thought he could catch the elevator roof to go down. Sat with his legs over the edge of the top of the elevator and the counter weight, that's the part that comes down when the elevator goes up, that thing caught his legs, tossed that poor kid down to the roof of the other elevator.

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Smart girl was running that elevator, she hit the emergency brake and thirty people sat stuck up there for two hours. When they found the body at the bottom of the shaft, it couldn't be identified. One-by-one lost parents found their children to go home for the night, all except for two who looked around more and more terrified until there was just one left."

Malaby stopped for a moment, his hands on his hips, "Don't talk to me about this no more." His eye's were wet, "When that King died, this park died right along with him." And he wandered from me back toward the station house, leaving me out in the section called Coney Island to listen to the wood eve's catch the wind and knock.

I decided right then and there while watching his hunched over figure grow smaller, that I wouldn't give up on this idea, that I would speak of nothing else to the man about that stage, even if it meant getting fired or physically harmed.

Seven years ago, and nearly nightfall, a bearded man looking like a younger version of Santa Clause, drove his beat up Chevy pickup truck into the sparsely populated visitor's parking lot. Vehicles were parked here and there like broken teeth because many had already left the park. He wore a checkered shirt, blue jeans and brown jackboots- an outfit one could find on any Seattle woodcutter.

After paying the entry fee he walked over to the Karaoke stage that was rather empty with disuse. A pimple-faced youth sat reclining in a fold-out chair with his feet up on the turntable equipment, half awake, his mouth almost open in a snore.

The bearded man gently pushed his feet down and requested the youth play the music being handed to him. It was a nameless

vinyl record and the youth screwed up his face in wonder at the sight of it. Then he obediently started to unplug this and plug in that, and he pulled an old record player from beneath the stage and plugged it into an amplifier.

The bearded man proceeded to the stage, the crowds passed without notice as gentle guitar music began to play. Soon he was singing.

*We're caught in a trap,  
I can't walk out,  
Because I love you too much baby.*

A man passing in a motorcycle jacket yelled, "Hey!"

The young boy with him yelled, "Disco is dead, dude!"

Soon booing intensified and French fries began to descend from the sky like rain upon the singer.

A 32-ounce Coke burst onto the microphone, knocking the music from his hand, and the liquid rolled unchecked toward the old record player at the end of the stage. The bearded man fled as more drinks upended.

On the other side of the fountain's swirl, the bearded fleeing man turned and could see sparks and flames of an unchecked stage fire. He started to head back to help put out the fire, but the flames grew exponentially before he could even take a step. This had the opposing effect of frightening him out of the park with other screaming people.

Entering the highway, he could see the glow of the fire in his rear-view mirror, but somehow he felt a disturbing sense of relief over the guilt.

Seven weeks ago flyers began to appear in the nearby town of Mason, Tennessee. It read:

*Richard Malaby Rhineland invites you*

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*July 7 at 5 p.m. to The King is Live 5k Race for the Cure. Starting at the main gate and ending at the new Karaoke stage at the end of the fountains. Drinks will be free and a performance will start at 7pm by the Karaoke King himself.*

A strange thing happened with those flyers. As they waited, stapled to wooden telephone poles, stationed sideways at grocery store entrances and exits, taped to gas station pumps, the entrance to Subway, the Moose Lodge Tenement Hall, they began to be bastardized into reading "The King is 'a'live" and "The King is lives."

The race was a great success. It should be mentioned that there were no less than five dozen Elvis runners of all various shapes and sizes who participated. A very young Elvis took off like a bottle rocket and led the race for the first quarter mile out of sheer excitement. Because there was no prize money for the winner, a local runner named Jim Braziel, who was a very tall Elvis, won the race in a regionally respectable time. I'd convinced my mother to make the trip out from Los Angeles. Like many Californian's, she is a health nut, and she too ran gracefully in spite of her advanced age.

By complete nightfall, the Karaoke stage was set, the fountain, colored by side-lights, flowed low. The shops, although not yet open, sat amiable, upright and quiet with fixed facades. A smoke machine or two ran fog, which enveloped several older gentlemen readying to play their instruments up on the stage. The audience, feeling excitement, started to chant, "We want the King! We want the King!"

Soon enough a bright neon light pierced the fog in a large tube toward the stage,

and an orchestra strike was followed up with ominous music to herald the change. Before all strode Elvis, strong, healthy, middle aged and in white. Some woman screamed and some men gasped.

The man on the stage went down on one bended knee and pointed to the light, his other hand held the mic, and he bowed his head as if in prayer.

Just then another man, aged, perhaps a little tired looking from the bags under his eyes, came out to stand to the side of Elvis in a second spotlight. This aged man wore a pleasant tan suite and a fisherman's cap, but without any lures.

"I want to thank you all for coming here tonight. As we've all missed the man over the years, I thought I would give in to unyielding requests by my co-worker, Junior Smith," he pointed to the kneeling man at his side, "And his famous mother Anne Smith, better known as the starlet Anne Margaret, who is also here tonight," he pointed to a beautiful aged woman at the side of the stage near the crowd that another spotlight lit temporarily. Please join me in a quick welcoming applause for them and then we shall hear Junior's practiced Karaoke rendition of several of Elvis' greatest hits, remembering a dear father of rock and roll and friend to us all."

The music rose and so did Junior as he started to sing,

*Glory glory hall-le-luu-ya*

*Glory glory hall- ley-lu-ya.*

The people cheered and began to sing the prayer... all except for one. In the din, a very curious thing occurred: An old man, who looked just like a thin Santa Clause, reached out and touched my mother's shoulder as she was applauding and he spoke her real name.

## The First Romance Novel on Planet Vesuvius

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Jeff Wilson

One day Dolly Madrigal became the Wonder Bra model, beating out thousands of other women for the chance to show her breasts. Then she wanted to do movies. She tried out for some parts, but one studio after another said no. She felt frustrated. Then she met a handsome stranger who happened to be Ted Turner's older brother. He had more TV stations than Ted Turner. He turned more black and white movies into color and had a bigger stash of Christmas classics. He came closer to buying CBS to eliminate the "left-wing bias" of its news. He was married to more Barbarellas. He owned more baseball teams. During World Series play, the camera cut to him and his Barbarellas more times than it cut to Ted Turner and his Barbarellas whenever the home team got a base hit, and he looked more like Nero at the coliseum. On top of all that, he never stepped foot in Cleveland. This was no small thing. The truth is, Ted Turner's older brother, like Ted Turner himself, was so soulless he never thought about going there. Even so, Ted Turner's older brother was respected around the world, and you had to watch him for what warped and twisted idea he would cook up next.

When Dolly Madrigal met Ted Turner's older brother, he said, Maybe I can help you. The next thing you know Dolly, a dark-haired, dark-skinned woman with sultry eyes and breasts that could lift small furniture, was starring in full-length features. Along with that she became a national celebrity. *National Enquirer*, *Entertainment Tonight*, *Geraldo*, *Hard Copy*. Dolly Madrigal asked Ted Turner's big

brother, How can I repay you? He said, Are you kidding? I believed in you the minute you walked in my office. You were star material. All you lacked was confidence. She said, I love you. He said, I love you too. The next thing you know they were climbing under the sheets together. Wine bottles, picnics, flowers, valentines...it was the real thing. It was even better than what Ted Turner had with Barbarella. Their love was so powerful and so overwhelming that they had to get married. If they didn't their love would burst, splattering everywhere like a Sprite can in a freezer.

The wedding announcements were mailed, and everyone was ecstatic. The only person who wasn't ecstatic was Ted Turner. Ted got to thinking, Here I am married to Barbarella. Even so, there is this Wonder Bra woman. I like her too. Maybe I can get her. I would leave Barbarella and marry her. Then when it comes World Series time, every time one of my players gets a hit the cameras can cut to me and Dolly Madrigal rather than me and Barbarella. In that way the world will be better.

One night Ted invited Dolly Madrigal to dinner. They met at an Italian restaurant where a man with a pointed mustache played the violin. I just wanted to have the opportunity to congratulate you personally on your engagement, Ted said, his blood pressure seven hundred and ninety over a zillion. Dolly Madrigal's wine glass was never empty even though she kept drinking. Ted said, Let's go back to my place for a nightcap. (Barbarella was at some Save the Animals convention, so he didn't have to worry about a confrontation.) Amidst candlelight and Mantovani (this was back home, in case anyone was lost) Ted professed his love to Dolly Madrigal. Now in truth Ted Turner didn't really float Dolly Madrigal's

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boat, and she was beginning to wonder about his brother, who, for all his money and power was a less than satisfactory lover. Because she felt sorry for Ted she said she loved him too. On the way home she thought to herself, Why did I say that? It can only lead to trouble.

Which it damn well did. The next day Ted Turner burst into his big brother's mansion and pulled a gun on him. Ted said, I'm going to kill you. Why is that? big brother asked. Because I want to marry Dolly Madrigal, Ted Turner said. Big brother said to Ted Turner, Put that gun away, to which Ted Turner said, She loves me I know she does The only thing standing between us is you. Do you hear me? You. You. You. You converted more black and white movies to color than I did and have a bigger stash of Christmas classics. You came closer to buying CBS. You owned more baseball teams. During World series play the camera cut to you more times. You looked more like Nero at the coliseum. Therefore you get all the aerobics instructors and pro football cheerleaders. Therefore you get all the mud wrestlers and Wonder Bra models. Now I have to shoot you.

Ted Turner aimed the pistol about three inches below where an apple would have gone if they were playing William Tell. He tried to pull the trigger. As it turned out he didn't have the guts to blow somebody's brains out, even when it was someone who owned more TV stations than him, etc. Dolly Madrigal walked into the room while the gun was aimed at Ted Turner's brother. I'm leaving you, she said. Who? the men asked, sounding like a couple of owls. Before they knew it she was gone.

After that Dolly Madrigal wanted to go somewhere far away and do something completely different. She decided to live in Cincinnati, Ohio. Her life there was less jet-set. *Vogue* and *Elle* wanted her for covers, but she

made them come to her. She did not fly to any Hollywood parties. She did not go anywhere where she could meet anyone who was a cousin ninety times removed from Ted Turner. While she was living in Cincinnati, Dolly Madrigal met a man named Bill. His full name was Bill Neff. The two of them got along well. Bill, it turned out, was an okay guy. He was not related to Ted Turner in any way. He had been to Cleveland, Ohio. (In fact, the people there welcomed him with open arms.) He did not own the Atlanta Braves, nor did he pay the camera man to turn the camera his way every time some loser got a hit. Had Bill owned a team, it would have been the Cleveland Indians, a fine team deserving the greatest respect from all peoples, be they Egyptian, communist or otherwise. Bill did not try to buy CBS. He treated Dolly Madrigal nicely. He did not have a job, but on the other hand he helped out around the house. Admittedly, most of the time he drank beer and listened to blues records. While it wasn't the most exciting life, it had its moments and basically he was happy.

One day Bill decided to do something different. Maybe I'll read a book, he thought. He visited a bookstore. Sitting on the first bookshelf was a plump paperback with lots of bright colors, and he decided to buy that. When he got home he looked at the title. It said *The First Romance Novel on Planet Vesuvius*. In this novel, creatures from a planet named Vesuvius sent a rocket ship to earth. The Vesuvians studied human behavior. After all the data was compiled, the Vesuvians realized that, while their languages were different, Vesuvians and humans did all the same things, with one exception: no Vesuvian had ever written a romance novel. To make up for lost time, a Vesuvian sat down (actually Vesuvians hung upside down like bats in a cave) and wrote one. The publishers hopped on it right away, as did the reading audience. A

funny thing happened, though. This romance novel did not pass quietly through the minds of readers the way romance novels did on planet Earth. It caused great commotion all over the planet. Riots occurred, then revolutions. In this environment young Castro would have seemed like a centrist weenie. Before you knew it the planet was going ape shit, just from one little novel. Things got so extreme that maniacal media moguls (including Tktzed Kzsfturner) were demoted to part-time employees at Sx-tradio Xndshack, where if they forgot to say “Yes, sir” and “No, ma’am” they were whipped in the back room.

That was the book Bill had waiting for him. On his way into bed he picked it up off the nightstand. This is nice, he thought as he slid between the satin sheets. Now I can exercise my mind. He was three pages into the novel when Dolly Madrigal appeared. I thought you had to work late, Bill said. I couldn’t stand it, Dolly Madrigal said. I told the photographers who flew to Cincinnati even though they would rather work in New York or Hollywood that I was sorry. I know we have five more covers to do, but I miss my Billy. They said, We’re getting tired of this. Every day you leave early just to be with him. If you were not the Wonder Bra model there would be retribution.

At the time Dolly Madrigal was saying all that she was looking good. When her clothes came off she looked even better. Dropping the book on the floor, Bill thought, Why read this? Life is so much more interesting. By the next morning his plan to read the great works had ended. Rather than waste paper he decided to pass the novel along. Wrapping a grocery sack around the book, he licked a couple stamps and wrote TED TURNER OR HIS OLDER BROTHER, ATLANTA, GEORGIA and threw the package in the mail, think-

ing I’m sure it will get there, and who knows maybe it’ll lift his spirits to read about the wonders of love. At first Bill wondered why he never heard back but then he remembered he forgot to include a return address. And yes, he lived happily ever after.

## Not An Innocuous, Ctd.

*Ian Wissman*

### TAPE III

“And no one can ever truly give up their hopes and dreams and desires and those things can never be satisfied, the prostitutes still fuck, the gasoline still burns, love is so fat and bloated on TV that it’s not even the same image in reality, and people can’t accept the differences that stare at them in the face, sometimes staring so close that I can feel the spit of their laughs splash my visage and there’s noth-ing I can do because the louder I get the more they laugh at my dumb, bumbling voice, the more I say the more they laugh and the tool I thought gave me power is now my worst enemy, the only hope for this country isn’t the crooning of a man who spent the first twenty-five years of his life mute—dumb—and it isn’t the voice of someone pure either. The only medium left is fear, words and actions, bombed with thoughts, ideas, dreams, use action to convey my nightmare, make my terror their terror, demon-strate the demons in our world, this perfect place, this seventh circle, this America.

“And I descend my stairs, all my belongings in a bag, selling my valuables for some sweet cash, they don’t know what’s about to be unleashed. I turn in my keys to my landlord and he says that he doesn’t have my deposit because he needed to use it to get his fix because he’s a junkie, but a mildly respectable

junkie because he still manages an apartment building while high all the time even though he spends security deposits on smack, and I think at least he didn't double lease my room to make more money in a month for his black gold, I look at his arms and his track marks look like the London Underground sub-way train map and I laugh, I ask him which stop is Oxford Circus and he doesn't understand, even if he wasn't completely high, he wouldn't understand because he's never heard of the tube and doesn't know anything about the mass transit system in London, and I'm not too upset that he doesn't have my deposit because the entire last week I was there I shit on everything in the apartment because I wanted to tear it apart but the place was already a wreck of a hull to begin with so I saw defecation as the only way to deface such a vile place. I walk out of the building and buy a cup of coffee from the café below my old apartment, it's going to be a cold one, dead of winter and a chilly 58 degrees for the low tonight, thank you California, I pull out my blanket and setup camp in a park that night, a safe park, one that isn't violated by worthless people like my landlord swapping pieces of paper for grams of powder, people lighting spoons on fire and sticking needles in their arms, this isn't one of their parks and I wonder if some-one like me doesn't belong in one of those parks instead of these clean ones, these beautifully kept and cleaned parks, it's only a matter of time until this one goes down anyway, I think, and know that clean parks can't stay clean in the smog and heat of this stinking city, it's only time that will kill the flowers, rip down the swing sets, it's only time until the kids who spent their days here with their mothers and fathers playing on the slides and running around, laughing, are the ones giving pieces of paper they stole from those parents

who raised them up and fed them right to people they've never met who have pock-marks and scars all over their faces, maybe missing two or three of those noticeable front teeth only time until they're cooking up spit and powder in a spoon then shooting it off into the soft spot in their arms as if it was like a precious orgasm, transferring the cum to the womb, every last drop, don't miss a bit, only time until their eyes are rolling back into their heads, they convulse violently banging their skulls against the tree they're leaned up against, banging against the ground when their body falls over, scar-faced men run away and it's only time until that little baby bird, just a fledgling, who is pulling the pony tails of the girl next door then running off down the slides grows up and is found dead in the darkness of one of the more dangerous parks in the city, an event that will get the community together to clean it up, and kick start the cycle all over again. But what's the use in discussing it, everyone knows what happens and that that's just life and there's nothing you can say to change it and I'm curious why it has to be something said rather than something done and I wonder if maybe we just need a vigilante to come and crush the things that ruin this world, and I don't even know what shape that that kind of person would take or how they could really get something great done and I fall asleep on the bench with my blanket wrapped around me and my backpack as my pillow.

"Fresh and new, rise and shine, it's a new dawn and a new day, I'm having lifestyle changes left and right lately and it's actually been a pretty positive experience. Waking up among the trees and squirrels, sometimes finding a breakfast left for me by some courteous passer-by, the sun kissing my cheeks, and on the rainy days the joy of building a fort to block out the drip drops from annoying my

slumber, it's like when I was a kid again building huge castles in the living room with chairs, tables, pillows, and blankets. Eviction ain't so bad. People out here really are more caring than I once gave them credit for and I can count on two free meals a day and a solid \$10 in my change cup when the sun's shining, sure I'm not quite revered but who would ever want to be? The gloss and glass of this trash town is gone, we're not in the Hollywood of the 40s, this is gun crime, this is riot town, this is where millionaires get away with murder, this is La-La Land, and I fucking love to hate it. And those guys who have the guns and do the riots are the ones who make it to the news so maybe they haven't got it all wrong, and maybe violence is key, maybe people only listen if someone's going to die. And I start scheming, a world where protest is innocent, purely civil, a perfect example of our rights as citizens, our rights as humans, but equally disregarded and most often quelled, a million man protest didn't stop a war, what's one man going to do in the name of the faults and failures of his own culture, the one we stand completely blinded to, the one we won't, we don't, we can't criticize, how can I get it out and, how can I bring my message to the public, and a disowned piece of yesterday's paper floats by pro-claiming another terror plot is foiled, score one for the home team. Put your fear on, we're going to terrorify this country into a coma.

"Guns and ammo, bombs and explosives, voices heard throughout the world, words that last more than the oxygen they displace, power through violence, messages fueled by ages of frustration, this is the protest of the new generation. I found my outlet and I've taken aim, a hero to this society, a savior to the powerless, I will power over with my ideas and my thoughts, points accentuated by the point of

a pin-tipped bullet, letting off a piercing round to influence decision, timed explosives to accommodate the speech I've prepared to give on the buses, in parking lots, at the department stores, gas stations, wherever I can reach out with my words, I use my violence to anguish their hearts, make them not only hear the horror of their ways, but use my destruction to compare it to theirs, my destruction is theirs, they drove us to it at 40 miles per hour, 12 miles to the gallon, boom boom boom, wretch wretch wretch. When I see these people's faces contort in utter, sheer terror, I know that I'm winning, my work is work-ing, and every time I hear a bomb go off in the city, every time I read the news, hear someone crying out on the street, I know that terrorism is the key. Protest through terror, freedom through death, I'm a liberating miracle with a bounty on my head, faceless and voiceless, my images and words resound throughout the world; I'm as big as a sea change.

"And when I relinquish another shell in the skull of a man parked by the curb waiting for the next whore to come strutting on by I know that I'm being heard, I know that they won't laugh at my drooling lips and flapping tongue this time, I know that they will understand me, one hit a week and these worthless men wean themselves off the habit, a great success, the sacrifice just a few meaningless people, casualties to this societal triumph. The news reporters call me Jack the Sniper, the cops are hot on my heels but never quite fast enough, they don't care about the murders, about the sleazy soldiers lost in this battle, they want the glory I'm reaping, and what could be more grandiose than sniping the sniper? The fame and the fortune, these LA coppers want to be that glitz and glamour, to make a mark, want to bring back the allure of this wretched place,

bound for the Hollywood stars, cleansing is a slow process, staying the course is my only option. The whores can help themselves, no more money for junk they'll die on the street or find some help, what do I care, they're off the streets, no more polluting this world. I'm a street preacher with intent to kill, a spoken word artist without the words, I'll drop a bombastic blast to make my case, at last I'm that news story, to make history. And suddenly I realize the less I talk the more I change things, if people gave up the words they cling so dearly to, we could all communicate so much better, actions make the world go round, words just make this place convoluted and despairing. No one's afraid of an argument, but everyone listens to a man with a means to crush, and it's not just violence I realize as I see the guy playing a song, giving roses to his girlfriend in the park, actions mean more than the spoken word could ever dream to. It makes me think back about the parks, makes me appreciate the action of these people coming together to fix something that's been ruined, and I realize that I am the same as those people picking up trash, painting the benches, rebuilding the jungle-gym, killing the sleaze, I am making a difference, I am cleansing the dirt off the face of this soil and reclaiming it in the name of decency. There's no blood on these hands, these ends justify the means so I can sleep easy at night knowing I have a job well done to pat myself on the back with.

"Thump thumping a man with a baseball bat in a darkened alley because he owns a guzzler is a-OK, someone has to contain this contaminate and control the country's health condition, not contribute to these catastrophic men wreaking havoc on the populace. Second hand smoke of a different breed, a double killer in a veil, it's my job to eliminate this toxic

threat infecting the air, helping the fat cat oil hounds infiltrating the ground and exploiting the revenue sitting in the pockets of the people just trying to get by. We'll suck the tap dry till it belches out sand and smoke and then we'll find a way to shape that dirt into a dollar signs for another hundred years till the soil runs out. What's left? Canning plants bottling up the ocean, throw in some sugar and orange dye, we'll bleed the world, limited resources, you ask, whose limit? In the parking lot at the department store no one is actually paying attention to anyone else, heads down, watch your feet walk you in, take you to the furs department, and I block up the tail-pipes of the SUVs with potatoes, cramming them in peeling off the sides of the glorious tuber, clogging the tube as well as I can. Blowouts and stalls, sugar in a gas tank and the car is out of commission.

"I hear the news on a transistor radio in a market out on the street, bombs gone off in five car dealerships lots today and I clap my hands in joy, a beautiful sense of rapture encapsulates my entire being and I feel so good about the things I'm doing that I decide to treat myself to a night in a hotel with the money I've saved up with my weeks on the street. It's a nice hotel in the center of the city, room service, double bed, wide-screen TV set with a satellite network, five-cent bible in the drawer. My quarters are next to the presidential penthouse, top floor, dog days, hootenanny holiday honeymooners humping in the heat of the romantic passion they've stored up all day surrounded by family members and getting drunk off countless glasses dipped in the champagne fountain burbling giggling gold bubbles gushing from the hose down the designated pathway into the bellies of the ungrateful friends and family members they haven't talked to in years but invited on principle. The

sound of their gallopwhistle-hummmmmmmming, pounding in the wall with the metered beat beating of the bed's headboard, I count out hexameter iambs in their hammering rhythms as I slab some mint jelly on a couple lamb chops delivered by a boy with acne coating his face painting it a pink-red, some of the pimples popped and it's like I'm staring into a million little vaginas on his mug so I slip him an extra tip in sympathy and hope he doesn't take it out back to buy the best looking tranny in this malicious metropolis otherwise he's bought his ticket to a bullet round digging through one of those vacant pimple wounds through his skull into his brain like a cock breaking through those little vaginas blasting some little spermies off into that waiting womb, the egg ready to have these white soldiers sink their teeth in and hit the root, I've made this bell-boy's death become a birth and I've once again saved the planet, an idea sounded off as the hushed squeals of the proud groom unleashing his own baby batter and the wife with her orgasmic shrieking muffled and I imagine she's face planted in a pile of pillows, ass in the air and old hubby at the helm of her hips thrustpulling hips to ass, ramjamming his dick as hard as he can with the cushion of her toosh and a sonorous smacking of the bouncing back and forth, in and out, in and out out out, spurts all over inside for the first time straight shot, no block, paint the walls to do the job. Presto preggo. Light a cigar, it's a boy, and let's hope this means love. Eyes gazing, hold back those tears, I do, don't cry, keep it in and finally let loose with the juice in the night, making vows on to bowing heads, mouth first onto genitals, quick cum in succession, and the newborn baby, wedding bells in the air, dynasty in a days work. Part of me wonders if I've strapped their new Cadillac Escalade with a bomb set

to blow at the beepbeep of their electronic key button, and the other part keeps on with the dreams of the cat in the cradle, silver spoons, worst-comes-to-worst they had an honest romp and I got a close encounter of a new kind.

"I think that these people found the love they're looking for and hearing what I heard I know it's not like sit com TV shows that just vomit up this fat fuck love wading through a swamp, knee deep in standard treatment scripts. The next morning they're at it again before they set sail for some romantic jet scream across the sea to some distant land where they put on grass skirts and shake hips to ruffle and razzledazzle hula skirts in a song and dance. I know where they're going because while fuckblasting and cumsplashing they're having a conversation like people do over breakfast cereal, over morning cof-fee, it seems cold and detached but really I think it shows the comfort these people are together and it melts my heart. When I'm checking out I hear a rumbling thunder roar from the parking garage under-neath the hotel and I need to have a hard heart now because these people had that coming and at least they got in a few final gambols in together. They bought the car, it's not my fault, civilian loss is a part of war and their innocence is still contested, love doesn't leave you exempt, love makes you vulnerable, love kills people and these people were killing the earth in that smog-machine. No remorse, I can't af-ford it. Not when I'm finally becoming so prolific. The fruits of my labor fruitfully altering the sur-rounding climate, it's a new season. It's the spring harvest, no one's fucking the prostitutes and I can't spot an SUV for miles as I walk home from the hotel.

### TAPE IV

“I buy a cookie with a smiley face painted on it and the icing for the eyes and mouth turn my tongue purple black, I look like a giraffe, out of place and I’m like a big, hairy mole in this grocery store, a stain on the floor. They serve me, sure, but they don’t like me, no. I smell like gunpowder all the time and my face is lobster pink from the constant sun, soot and filth cover my clothes, stiffened by the rain and dirt. Walking out of the store I see Jacob walking his dog across the street, I’ve forgotten him in my manic glory, in my prophetic daze. Waving him down, he doesn’t recognize me at first and appears ashamed to be flagged down by such an undesirable looking man, the people out in the square turn to see who’s shouting and I notice Jacob cringe as if he could feel the slimy eyeballs slithering all over him as I call out his name, waving him down. We start talking and I don’t think it’s dawned on him as to who I am until five minutes in the conversation we’re holding on my park bench.

“‘What happened to you? Have you lost your mind?’

“‘No, no. I was fired, lost the apartment.’ Having kept my speaking limited to only cordialities for the past few weeks, I could now keep my ideas concise. ‘Mom hung up on me in fear. I stay here.’

“‘Why do you smell like a gun shop? Why didn’t you come to me if you were in trouble?’

“‘I’m the sniper.’

And I know he believes me when I say it, his face doesn’t drop, it just crinkles as he says, ‘Really?’

‘Yeah, I blew up the car lots,’ I say back. He doesn’t look frightened, more admirably, puts his arm around my shoulder and asks me to move in with him, an offer I have to decline. I’ve become this city; I am Los Ange-

les, an angel with a pipe bomb, a smile comes across my face when I picture myself looking like Dirty Harry wearing a pair of feathered wings and igniting sticks of dynamite with a cigar, tough shit, making the calls, everyone listens as I rise flap flap flapflying high above where the explosives flip a row of cars onto the frightened audience, and there’s no chance in hell I could betray this place, seventh circle, Long Beach is a haven for those who can’t take the heat. Jacob disagrees but isn’t disappointed, he only has one shower and doesn’t really want to spare the room in his place for me, a drifter, a faceless, voiceless, ambiguous man, unidentified by friends and family, it reassures me in my safety from harm, the things I’m doing can’t come back at me, karma works and I can thank my lucky stars that no one can figure out who I am or what I really look like. I need to do this on my own, no one can help, these are my thoughts, ideas, feelings, these blowout packages I deliver can only give a glimpse of what I want to achieve but achieve they do. As I lay on my back relaxing in the park kicking back having some good old fashioned leisure time I can hear my explosions going off all around, in the distance, on the other side of the street, across the park, it’s like an orchestra is playing for me and these are the cannon’s booming, thundering calls of a climatic, abrupt end. The last thing these people go through is this flash ka-pow boom crash thrown ten feet from the door and black, they become the rhythm of this concerto, thudboooooooooom-crashflashba-boooooomriiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiingthud it’s my 10th symphony, and as I listen to it, eyes closed, arms waving in a mock-conductor’s fashion, I wonder for the first time if I should commit these tapes to vinyl.

“This concert is what keeps the job going, killing these people and things gets

boring, and part of me wonders if they really do deserve it, is this the right way to act? It's repairing everything this city's crumbled but it's crumbling everything this city's built, even if that is degenerate, it's still this city and I realize that I'm not only fixing the mistakes, I'm redefining this place to a state no longer recognizable. It's covered in soot and blackened with the stench of sulfur and gunpowder, it's constantly red with ex-plosive fire and the smoggy sunset, abandoned blown out SUVs paint the roads, crashed into trees where the drivers lost control vrooommmmmmmBAM-thumpthumpthumpthumpsmashhhh. As I watch a Por-sche Cayenne tumbling down the road after just blowing up, rolling over and over down a great big hill it crushes a woman and her two children who were crossing the street coming into the park to spend the day. One of the little girls was trapped, half crushed under the roof of the car as it lay upside-down in the middle of the road, tears streaming from her as she could see the bodies of her older brother and mommy scorched and squished by this killing machine. Her tears tell me that I've fucked up and I know I'm responsible for this destruction, my savagery, my plastique putty explosives brought me to this moment and I can't help but wonder if this family had just come out of the behemoth vehicle parked at the meter across the street. Karma kills, I'm just helping it sort'em out, right? Maybe these kids had it coming, should have told mommy and daddy not to go for the Hummer, maybe penis envy led daddeo to buy buy buy, maybe to appease old wifey who wasn't happy with going a year without getting a new car. That little girl could have grown up to be a prostitute, right? And I know the man driving the Cay-enne had another thing coming, such a flashy piece, seeing that monster on wheels tells you how big of

a douche bag you're dealing with and think that maybe this guy is cream of the crop. So now I'm glad they're all dead and I've reassured myself in my actions and can rest easy. I want to call my mom but why bother, she's nothing more than a word sitting getting fat on the other side of the country, she doesn't want to hear from me. Loneliness settles cold on me when I realize I have no one to talk to, Ja-cob made it apparent that I made him uncomfortable and I practically spit in his face when I declined his offer to move in. I thought he would have called the cops on me but I read him wrong, he thinks I'm making the change, he thinks I'm needed in this world, needed to clean up things and fix what so easily went awry.

"I find a newspaper abandoned on a bench nearby and scan around through it, catch up with the rest of the world outside mine, but something calls my attention, a report on a new series of explosions in car dealerships outside of LA, outside of California, all over the entire west coast there's attacks on gas stations, dealerships, people being sniped, and just like that I've started a craze. I read the headlines as I pass street vendors selling papers, they've dubbed it 'Eco-Terrorism' and the articles talk about the movement's roots in Los Angeles County, talk about me, but not me specifically because they don't know who I am and they don't know who the others are and I wonder if they started the same as I did, I wonder if they're out there, sleeping in parks, self-assured prophets like me. I'm at first offended by these copycat masqueraders but then I'm grateful that my message isn't lost in the terror, that these people understand what we must do to rectify the wrongs. My eyes shine with tears of joy as I read about the death of the chief stockholders in Anthem Blue Cross, about the complete destruction of their sky-scrapers, an

achievement I could have never accomplished. These aren't copycats, they're admirers, they're a movement, a voice, and they just needed a leader to show them the way. There must be three of them helping me out in this city alone, I've heard of them in Florida and Ohio, Illinois and Nebraska, Kansas, Texas, even Iowa and now the government is trying to pull our plug, with bigger guns and ammo and explosions, they start to try make their message louder and harder and angrier but nothing's angrier than this, they can gnash their teeth at us but we will not be quelled, this resistance cannot be broken.

"And I wonder if a drive south on mega-route I-75 is like a war zone, if it's families climbing out of their own death machines, clutching on for dear life as they're charred from burns, brains seeping from their ears, everything stained red as blood gets in their eyes, and I know that I want to see that, I know that I need to get out of here and see this country, destroyed and rebuilt, redefined by a new revo-lution, my revolution. I imagine billboards on the roadside with public service announcements about reporting Eco-Terrorism in their neighborhood, any information about future plots, and I read about the president proposing bills and lobbying to try to scare us away from our attack but we won't slow down, we can't slow down, and they're perpetually confused because we keep moving, changing, morphing, transforming our methods always keeping them on their toes, never letting them catch on—you can't find us today, Billy, you couldn't shift before us—and changing isn't the reason, changing is the method, and as long as we keep changing into a new form we can keep on forever fighting against what keeps us unsatisfied in our life. The voice I wanted so dearly has made this crater in the system, and

I am sick for more, I yearn for the things to come, sick with pride for what I've started and what I now can give up. A pioneer can only do so much and it's out of my hands, the course of this revolt's history. A movement started, fresh for new visions everyday, everyway, in every light, and I just hope that these new inventors know how to use it right.

### JOURNAL I

I wake up to find that I can no longer speak, I can't bumble, I can't fumble, the words are there but the voice is missing, letters tumble in succession down from the front of my brain, trickling down the stem falling into the abyss that now stands where I once had a throat, where I hear the tiny splashes as these words and thoughts and ideas spill into my stomach where they die and I suddenly feel so dumb, like I've lost my cause, I've lost my platform to offer myself, I had gotten so brief and clear in my speaking that I had forgotten my fledgling days when I was first spreading my wings and making my idiot voice heard. Mom will take me back after all this time because I'm her son again. Love isn't fat and bloated and superficial like on TV when families come together to help each other pull through their tough times, it's selfish and rude and Mom left me at a time of need. How grateful I am for that, how wonderful the world now is because of her callous, cold behavior.

I find that I emanate an ice cold silence now that frightens even myself, the sounds from my body are solely involuntary, all I can do is sigh with great pain to my gullet, a sound not quite worth the hurt and sting it causes. I give myself another hotel visit where I shower up and wash my clothes and I find myself on the road with my thumb out waving down any-

thing to come by because I need to get out of this dreadful city, this town I destroyed in my image, this beacon of hope for the people of this coun-try. Get out and see the countryside, see the bombed out buildings, the blackened cars lying on the road-side, just the carriage left from the blazes, pass by a Mississippi license plate and tick it off the running list of plates to see. Interstates become homes to potholes and limp bodies subjected to becoming road kill after the big bang, baby, that blows them out of their boxes and onto the dark, hot pavement. The animals laugh as they watch from their tree top homes and the deer and squirrels dance with no fear in to the streets that once belonged to their ancestors and I don't blame them, I laugh too, these pathetic peo-ple wiped out by their own greed. Riding in this semi-truck I can see the Chicago skyline is gone, the radio reports that New York City has been abandoned, Pittsburgh is just a crater in the side of the state and I roll down my window looking off into the hills across the river where I can see explosions ascend the horizon, hand painting the sky tangerine doom and when I feel the shockwave of the latest blast climbing up the truck a tear streaks down my cheek, puffed up in a smile.

**This volume is 100% complete...**

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