

USED GRAVITRONS

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**USED GRAVITRONS
QUARTERLY**

Issue 11

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EDITORIAL

Dearest loafers and cobweb spinners,

O sancta simplicitas! Three months feels like a long time, no? What have we been doing? We've had some cavities done, moved our sister into her own apartment and Cat was shot out of a cannon. Where have you been?

I'm extremely excited about this issue. There's a fantastic comic about a love affair with the game of hockey, a few lunatic fictions, tongue-slapingly awesome photography of modern cave drawings and Herman Ludwig is going to take you out for an evening while the carnival is still in town.

Though please do be careful. Things are likely to get slippery in here. Do you need a pair of those toe shoes? I hope not - those things give me the willies.

Buy me a slice or a cone next time we meet and we'll be besties,

Mike

Notes upon the Art Attack Video at the Hospital (Whilst Disguised)

By R. Angus Treadway, Art
Historian

by Michael A. Cheney

Some say that Humanism, along with her second cousin Earnestness, went off to play an allegorical game of cricket with the god they invented together a thousand years ago, and that their dark prophet Nietzsche gang raped them all during a rather uneventful stretch of play. The whole damn affair a sight to see. Strawberries and cream on everyone's white woolen shirts. I'm sure Urania, the muse of science, found it all knee-slappingly hilarious. But with a name suggesting two kinds of bodily waste, that bitch has her own shit to answer for. Indeed, it is rather Science that needs a gut check and my guerrilla art shall oblige. *Audaces fortuna iuvat!*

To be fair to the future of this project, however, it is necessary to candidly review my progress so far—what the racially insensitive would refer to as calling a spade a spade, which, now that I think about it, is one of Father's favorite phrases. Is there anything more cliché than the politically obtuse politician? Clarity may be out of reach for the politician and most of his constituency, but there goeth I, boldly, arm in arm with Truth, while disguised as an elderly man down on his luck with a pillow stuffed under my clothes to make me look fat. Take that Science!

Hard to think my initial experiments with fast food proved so inconclusive. I have since perfected my crazy persona from those early trials, learning to speak the way morning bums yell at cars that quake their carts, only quieter. I remember the face Mr. Pete made upon firing me, an inversion of the one he made at my hire. "Welcome aboard, Reggie!" he said extra audibly, as though I was deaf as well as eccentric. And not in that Christopher Walken kind

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of way either, but in more of a Fisher King Flying a Cuckoo's Nest Over What About Bob kind of way. How folks like Mr. Pete want folks like me to be—or shall I say, how the folks who really are what I only pretend to be? Several bravura renditions of 'They're Coming to Take Me Away' later and there was Mr. Pete, taking off that papery cap as he spoke (Is this fast food or the navy?) and saying how sorry he was and that it was not me but them and that it was more about where I would be more happy than their judgments. Sure I was playing a role, but that part hurt.

If the world could not handle a slightly insane fry cook—someone whose mind had buckled under the weight of an industrial crash, the broken promises of putting America back to work while all the work there ever was started to make the whooshing noise Ross Perot kept hearing, and now that even our default safety net of Mcminimum wage shame is gone too—how would they react should I come rushing in to an emergency room spewing blood from amputated appendages?

I mulled that over for weeks. I returned to that image between classes or while grading papers, reverse engineering the spectacle to figure out how best to transform it into reality. Ketchup and motor oil mixtures might work for a hit and run attack on a crowded emergency room. I could hide the cameras in strategically placed bags of unappealing snack food, the kind that no one would raid for leftovers—anything with fiber, Chex, or foreign lettering in the name. After a shocking entry, a good bloodying up of the place, and then a pathetic half-dying departure worthy of Shakespeare, I could return to the scene of the crime in a different disguise, without the pillow under my clothes and the wig. I could then collect the cameras and be on my merry way, ready to launch myself into digital history as the greatest performance artist of conscience of spatial disruption of all time [sic].

And things went according to plan. There was no repeat of that time four years ago when I dressed up as a 1920s shoeshine and polished all the shoes (or feet) of the statues around Public Square. A few people stopped to cough awkwardly. Most, however, barely noticed. They were too busy pecking away at the technology in their palms or jogging by with it buried in their ears to care.

Those sad confrontations with apathy led to the Incident, which coincided with a break from my teaching. The weeks I spent recovering in the hospital (for real this time) and later in the halfway house never interfered with my college duties.

Father was livid of course. “How could you do this to us? It’s a good thing this isn’t a re-election year. Do you hate yourself that much?”

No matter how much explaining I did about the necessity of real blood in performance, Father refused to understand.

On the bright side, my video where I squeezed the turkey baster under my shirt harder than necessary now has over a three hundred hits. The cynic might chalk this up to the vulgar delights of watching people in a hospital waiting room get blasted with fake blood. But when I asked the chair of my department how to package artwork for my tenure dossier, she chuckled heartily.

I’ll take that as a compliment. And I’ll shoulder the responsibility. I can take it. After all, my work is that proverbial ten-foot pole. It prods at the corpse of broken capitalist healthcare to poke loose the terrors of public space, real, digital, or imagined.

Not Insane

by A.A. Garrison

To prove he wasn't insane, the preacher stole a car and hit another pedestrian.

He'd gone a month this time, before the urge had seen him from sleep and into the first serviceable automobile, sweating with need. Soon, narcotics and paraphernalia litter the passenger's seat. For these outings, the drugs must be correct.

"Bastard," the preacher says -- to The Man, who somewhere dwells this cruel night. "Bastard," to the villain he will soon destroy.

The Man is everywhere, and would not stay dead. An endless war, these last twenty years. With The Man and his twins; with the agents of fate; with the predicaments of a life gone wrong. "Crazy, pathetic, insane" -- The Man makes these indictments, ceaselessly, from between the preacher's ears.

Will make them until once more run down.

"He must die!" the preacher shrieks through untamed beard. "Must die!" The borrowed car accelerates to some heinous speed.

And at last, there: The Man, disguised as a young woman in a flower-print dress, idling along a downtown curb. So clever, the fiend! The preacher's face strikes a grim scowl as he corrects in The Man's direction, tires audible in the night hush.

A breath before impact, The Man looks up, revealing that butcherous face from the preacher's dreams. Then the same face is half through the windshield, bloodied and absurd amidst a spiderweb of red-white cracks. The car smashes into a storefront

and promptly stalls, The Man embedded in the hood like slain game.

The preacher stumbles out, nursing wounds that are worth it. “Ha-ha!” he says to the re-killed Man, pointing in triumph. “Ha-ha!”

And into the night he runs, once more free of that poisoned voice in his head.

The preacher preached no one doctrine. Years on the streets had awarded him a great many holy books, and none went unused. It was his only other defense against “Crazy, pathetic, insane.”

“Lost souls, repent!” he would plead to makeshift crowds, in a biblical singsong that none could ignore. “The lotus blooms from the rubbish heap, and feeds on all flesh!”

Emphasis and gesticulation were the tools of this trade, and volume, and a large wooden staff, and choice substances in key amounts, and a crazed charisma which came to the preacher unlearned. In a perverse suit of rags and old newspaper, he would inform the public at large, shepherding the shepherdless, correcting the sickened minds of his countrymen. A part of him was aware of his fallacy, yet another believed wholly, this one shown in the face and the eyes, as to impress sincerity on his followers. The crowd would answer this with solemn nods and acclamation. Afterward, a hat would lay gorged with coins and bills, despite the preacher never once putting one out.

“I have seen the top of the mountain, friends! I have seen it and yea, it is good!”

Some years ago he had attracted a sidekick of sorts, the Shit God’s prophet. A veteran of morbid constipation, this tameless little man would accompany the preacher in his haunts, lending commentary and clarification, or lesser sermons as a byplay. Praise and thanksgiving to the Shit God, He who cureth the world’s inner burden. An altar was erected always, to offer sacrifice of laxative and enema, those blasphemies to Shit God’s true relief. Or, sometimes, darker rites, these to plumb the most stubborn cases, the ceremonies lasting in the days. “Bow to Shit God!” could be heard into all hours,

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outdone only by the preacher's raving verse.

"An image reveals nothing! Words merely obscure! God is described only in negatives!"

Thusly, this dyad tended the city's spiritual needs, working together in a grave fury unrehearsed. The two conferred only through body language and precise looks, unmet outside of their evangelizing. Hours of this, mornings, afternoons, sermonizing by twilight, the preacher's heavenly staff cutting shapes. Only when the Spirit instructed or the drugs ran out would they subside, with an invitation to those wayward sinners: "Come, dear ones! Repent of thy trespass! Magnificent splendor to all who might repent!"

And that's when The Man would leave him fully, by dint of his converts. Five, ten, twenty, dozens if the light shineth brighter, all agreeing upon the preacher's redemption with their own. Not insane, this consensus would say, at once lending the preacher wings. Each conquest would reassure him further, each like a Man slaughtered by vehicle.

"Ha-ha!" the preacher would say after a service. "Ha-ha!"

Though, the services only worked so long. Bad times would come -- the people shunning his good news, or evil police-Men destroying his ministry -- and, unavoidably, The Man would return, whispering his outrageous whispers. With them, that desperate urge would arise, demanding a stricter justice.

The right car. A pedestrian Man. Great amounts of speed.

The final solution.

"Crazy, pathetic, insane." It might agonize the preacher for weeks, his hands over his ears as if glued. Then the branch would break, and he would attack, and all would be well, The Man again slain.

"Ha-ha!" would announce the preacher's rebirth, until this scandalous cycle repeated itself.

The preacher drives down rain-slick road, swerving manically because of some bad shit. The Man is elusive and the hunt

draws out, and that's when the memories stir.

The preacher's original accident had been as a teenager, before becoming the preacher. The tragedy: a younger him at roadside, the roar of an engine announcing itself, stink of exhaust and wet metal before a fleshy thud then black. No evidence of brakes, no skid marks. The boy had just survived.

There had been head trauma.

That culprit driver -- The Man. He was never apprehended. The preacher retained a single, bleary image of a face over a nearing hood, perhaps a fabrication of memory but all he had. It preceded each and every hit-and-run, a sneering loveless guise intent on damage.

Crazy. Pathetic. Insane.

It snaps the preacher from his reckoning, back to the steaming night road down which he careens. This time, The Man is a dapper-dressed gentleman, alone on the city's distressed sidewalk.

"Bastard!" precedes acceleration and victory. Thud, crash, smoke -- and the preacher limps away, leaving the car with an arm and a leg sprouting from its undercarriage.

"Ha-ha!" is heard until the preacher rounds a corner.

It would have to be dynamite, because a nuke was impossible.

The Man had strengthened.

The day came when the preacher's walls closed in. Vag charges prevented his services, enforced by fists and nightsticks. A long, despising winter. Even the Shit God's prophet was stolen away, victim to septicemia, his lifelong enemy. They conspired to present questions of faith, these helping none in the war against The Man and his verdicts, which had grown in intensity and persuasion.

CRAZY PATHETIC INSANE repeated throughout the preacher's strange days, and the madness of his sleep. The words stalked him through the streets, and were graffitied over all seen surfaces, and spoken by electronic devices and bodily orifices, much like after the original accident.

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CRAZY PATHETIC INSANE, on storefronts and bricks and the faces of passing people. CRAZY PATHETIC INSANE, assembling itself from leaves in a rain puddle.

The Man had infected the world itself.

“Bastard!”

It forced the preacher to confront Him by direct means, that old standby of wheel and velocity. But even the car was no match for this new super-Man: the bastard lived through the hit, not so much as giving pause. The same went for a second attempt, and three successive.

CRAZY PATHETIC INSANE ...

The preacher tried variations: a bike, a motorcycle, a kamikaze ride in a shopping cart. The last earned him abuse from its respective Man, a rather large woman with thick arms.

So he would have to destroy The Man’s root, whatever factory was pumping them out.

Dynamite. Need dynamite.

The thought coincides with the latest stanza of The Man’s lies. Then the preacher is off, his madman’s intuition leading him into the city.

The Man-factory is disguised as a hospital. This surprises the preacher none, for The Man is clever.

Down its sterile white halls. Past Men of all sorts. The preacher in trenchcoat and gumboots, taking unobtrusive looks over his shoulder, still limping from that last failed attack. The belly of the beast, this. His heart beats dangerously fast.

CRAZY PATHETIC INSANE!

It makes the preacher shake his head and blink. “Shut up,” he says aloud, turning Man-heads.

Deep inside this treacherous place, he discovers the factory itself. Plate-glass shields the hatchery of little Men, dozens of them, in fashionable diapers, spread about in beware cribs. Each cries

into the preacher's brain: CRAZY PATHETIC INSANE!

"Shut up!" he retorts, stirring echoes. He runs astumble from the wicked scene, hands muffing his ears. "You're wrong, all you! Jehovah Yeshua! Shiva bacti vah!" This amongst hissing and finger-crosses, the doctor-dressed Men looking on with that carnivorous sneer.

"CRAZY PATHETIC INSANE!" they reply in chorus, lessening none with distance.

It punches into the preacher, as His car did that fateful day; but he blocks it with warm thoughts of dynamite. In his mind's eye, an equation forms: dynamite + factory = freedom. It brings the first calm in weeks.

One last try, before resorting to the last resort.

The preacher on a small rattling motorscooter, because no cars would unlock. Skidding down streets with a high rEEr, drunken swerving in reflection of the pilot mind. "Shut up!" to the creatures in his head, to the ornery street, to the world at large.

Then: a red-lit bar fronted by motorcycles and loose-looking women. One woman stands from the rest: The Man.

"Shut up!" is the preacher's battle cry as he hops the curb and runs this Man down.

The two plow together in a low-speed collision, leaving a tangle of Man and scooter. "Shut up!" as the preacher rights the scooter and runs it over The Man again and again, working it like some murderous vacuum cleaner. "Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!," an attack on each reprise.

This Man is a screamer, which alerts the bar's patrons, who are also Men. Vigorously, the preacher is mobbed, a flood of Man-punches and -kicks as he lies quivering over gritty sidewalk.

"Forgive them, Father! They know not what they do!" he manages, before a Man-shoe strikes him unconscious.

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Weeks in a hospital, evocative of that first accident. Some miracle saw him supported financially, a grant or charity, to the preacher a blowsy angel of no one description. He sermonized the staff and his fellow convalescents, but it dulled The Man's broadcasts none. The place looked suspiciously like a Man-factory.

And, throughout this epoch: CRAZY PATHETIC INSANE!

It is nighttime when he somehow stands. Escape is a struggle for multiple reasons, the preacher's many fractures and abrasions answering each step. His sheer hospital johnny flaps like a flag, revealing sad genitals to any unfortunate enough to see.

"No, I'm not!" he tells The Man, unable to work up a proper shout. Fresh bleeding occurs, his suit of bandages going red.

The preacher's hovel is a long mile away, a manufacture of cardboard and throw-away wood in a septic back alley shunned even by his peers. Rodents and hungrier foes scurry from the wounded soldier upon them, the preacher staggering through trash and corpses and ghostly steam. Inside his ragged home, he thuds into his bed-mound and says, "I am not!"

From beside his library of holy books, the crate of dynamite offers a great many sticks. Using finger-broke hands, the preacher tapes them into tidy bundles of three, which in turn are fastened to his bruised and emaciated abdomen. It takes hours, but he gets them all on, forming a deadly cummerbund which lends him girth.

"I know you are, but what am I?" he tells The Man.

He winds the fuses into a thick tress, and breaks painful wind, and tests his Zippo with a precise crack. Vision has become hard, his left eye gone wrong, but he sees enough. He puts on his favorite trenchcoat and boots, then leaves for the Man-factory.

"Sticks and stones may break my bones ..."

The walk is torturous and cruel, accomplished mostly on one leg. The city is again painted in The Man's words, now including the sky and the sun. Angered wounds feed The Man's broadcasts, amplifying them into all corners of this beleaguered brain:

CRAZY

PATHETIC

UGLY

IMPOTENT

FISH-SMELLING

INSANE INSANE INSANE

“Shut up!” the preacher cries, bringing up blood and phlegm. “Insha’llah, shut up!”

The world is Men. They spectate the preacher’s grim journey, of all sexes and ages and persuasions, products of that evil factory not long for this world. “You’re time is up,” the preacher tells them, at random, sometimes forced to only think this. His tongue has gone numb and disagreeable.

And then the Man-factory is in sight, a proud building sited on the hill. It makes the preacher “Ha-ha!” for the first time in ages.

But he will not reach the factory.

Just blocks away, he looks into a glass storefront, thus seeing his reflection: a sneering, pinched face, with the vile slitted eyes of a reptile or koala. Gone is the beautiful guise once touched by God and Shit God. Gone is that face once battered by a stray car, that eulogy in flesh. In its place: that malicious face seen all around. That of The Man.

The Man has become him, has infected the preacher as He has the rest of creation.

“No!” the preacher shouts, misting the window holding his deranged new face. “Impossible!” But there is no question.

CRAZY! PATHETIC! INSANE!

“No!” the preacher repeats, gaining octaves as if at the height of a sermon. “Lies!” He shouts, still, as he lifts his shirt and undershirts, thus revealing that redemptive bundle of TNT.

Carefully, shakily, he lights the massive fuse, intent on

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destroying that abomination inside him.

The fuse spitting and growling, Men looking at him anew, the preacher shouting “Ha-ha! Ha-ha!” through a bleeding mouth. Victory opens inside him, like a hundred vehicular homicides.

“Ha-ha!” as his vision at last fails. “Ha-ha!” as he staggers blindly into the street. “Ha-ha!” as he raises his arms into a Y.

Then brakes shriek, and a taxi hits the man-sized sparkler standing in the road. Mid “ha,” the preacher is sent into the air, his body performing cartwheels with the limbs bent wrong, this rag of a man swept upward on deathly wings. Even now: CRAZY PATHETIC INSANE, repeated to infinity on the chalkboard of his mind.

CRAZY PATHETIC IN -- !

And the dynamite finally ignites, at the apex of his flight, exploding preacher and Man into a spray of blue-black smithereens. Storefronts buckle and the earth quakes, windows shattering in a weird applause. A rude fireball mushrooms up the city block. Afterward, they would say it was like the end of the world.

The voice stayed quiet forever and ever. Amen.

I'D LIKE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT
GOALTENDERS.



Collyer Brooks 2015

MOTHERfuckERS,
AMIRITE?



Clinton-Washington A-C Line
by Christopher Fisher



Lafayette Ave A Line
by Christopher Fisher

XO
by Michael Frazer

A lone drop of blood is not the equivalent of ink but rather the quarter note - an E flat, perhaps; a flip of the page cuts deeper than the sharpest knife, but both make a melody of the pulse; thus: music and poetry belong together, if Elliot Smith and Sylvia Plath potent as hemlock, which brings me to this natural conclusion: got together, they'd have lovely babies but a horrible kitchen.



Myrtle-Willoughby Ave G Line
by Christopher Fisher

Raison d'être
by Michael Frazer

Drinking what appears to
be my first beer in
four, five weeks

not an alcoholic

Looking to see that
the empties on the counter
say otherwise

Watching *Aqua Teen* reruns
for the fifth time this week
while the water boils over on the stove

Sitting in silence
falling asleep by the time
Superjail! reaches the screen

Waking up to find
three missed calls
two voicemails waiting

Blinking out the sunlight
that creeps its way
through the blinds and curtains

Seeing the flies on the wall and
knowing that if they were cameras
we'd have a problem

another

torture-porn
Rube Goldberg machine

Wanted

by Michael Frazer

but seeing as
yesterday was

an unaddressed
letter
in the mail

today must also
be
the seal of the

envelope

broken

your letter is
no different
than

your letter

the week-old
newspaper
bleaching on the

but
the turn of
the page
is

driveway
wrapped in its
pink plastic

the breeze of a car
driving by too fast
too close

black and white
and ran
right over

a quarter inch away
from your
fingertips

when I park
my Civic

you reach out like pure sacrilege

the empty
passenger seat
is not

and know that you are wanted
even at a distance
dead

IN dreams i'm MAD, have VISIONS
by Tom Pescatore

Once I wrote it all out, tho
you won't believe me,
it was splattered on my floor
in rich, vibrant colors and non-colors,
non-existent breaths and streaks of sky,
I stepped around the letters
each morning when I awoke
from heavy sleeps with hair
tangled about my sweaty face,
everything was there, all we wished to say,
it was perfect, beautiful, a world unto itself,
the etching, the care, each curve and straight line
of it a truth much like death unavoidable, each fucking
lettered space unbelievably serene, I'll tell you
I kept each thought in pristine condition,
never dropped a sandwich crumb,
and it was hard, and it weighed on me
until I forgot
and I scuffed it, until I hated those old gashes and
lovely curls, that truth I'd seen enough of,
I spit on it this morning, in the cool
light with the toilet running,
I wrote your name on the walls.



Clinton-Washington A-C Line
by Christopher Fisher



Keep That Sugar in Your Pocket by Brett Puryear

It was ten o' clock on a Saturday night in Chickamauga, and the boy had been in bed since eight, awake, and when he felt sure his mother and father were asleep, he got up. He stood tall and stiff in the white square where moonlight caught the floor through the bedroom window, and out the window you could see the dim, sporadic lights of the carnival across town. The boy's name was Noah Smith. He came from good parents who gave him a good Christian name. But that night, when he rolled out of bed, his name wasn't Noah anymore. It was Herman Ludwig, and that night Herman Ludwig would go to the carnival.

He knelt at his dresser and opened the bottom drawer, pulled it out in its entirety. He withdrew, from beneath the dresser, a long box, silvery-green and dappled like a crappie, then set it on the dresser, and opened it. Inside sat his fancy, flat-topped straw boater's hat, a shiny black ribbon tied around its top. Folded beneath the hat lay a silvergray suit, tailored to a slightly larger size than Herman's. He placed the hat off to the side on the dresser, unfolded the suit and held it out in front of him, as if to see what it would look like if worn by a man with no body, face, or hands.

The boy was tall for his age. Twelve years old, five foot eight with big feet. He put on the suit and hat. He opened a cigar box that sat in the same empty space where he'd kept the suit. And inside the cigar box: sugar packets. Lots of them. He grabbed a handful and stuffed them into his pocket.

Herman snuck out to the bathroom with the cigar box, which also contained a makeup kit he'd acquired in town the same day he got his suit, with the little money he'd managed to save from allowance and cutting old Buster Haywood's grass. He watched himself in the bathroom mirror and powdered his pink cheeks, then commenced to powder the entire face, except the circles around his eyes, because dark circles around the eyes made you look older; they made you look hardened, more like a man. He snuck back into the

bedroom and put on the pair of shiny black wingtip shoes he'd wear to church the next morning. Standing in the pool of white moonlight on the floor, he slid open the window, and the dry, September air blew in. The carnival lights twinkled beyond beds of trees stretching into the horizon, beneath the moon that leaned behind soaring clouds that, to Herman, looked like ships of sweet, silver cotton candy. He eased through the window, hung there a moment, then laddered his way down the ivylaced lattices, then crossed through the backyard and into the cedar grove, then into the deeper woods, etching himself through thickets, careful and slow, so as not to put as much as a nick in his suit.

He made way to the edge of the woods, and through a web of trees he saw big tents billow and the deep, twinkling lights of the Ferris wheel reel against the blueblack sky. Herman crossed into that wide expanse of land, the dark field on which the carnival sat. He passed between two candy-cane colored tents, and into the dusty corridors of the carnival.

Couples walked by. Teenagers. Drunks. Past the game booths and shooting galleries. And the rides--The Jitterbug, The Genie; The Moon Dance, The Mystic Dragon--hummed and squeaked and wheeled about, sitting squat and bulging like horrendous mechanical beasts of a future age. Herman stepped past a booth where a cotton candy machine spun its pink spidersilk. His shoes clopped and honey-colored dust powdered his trousers. Exposed light bulbs hung from a network of wires. And in a dark place between two tents, a young man stood smoking a cigarette. He wore blue jeans and a denim jacket draped over a tight white tee shirt, oily hair combed back in a shiny black curve.

Herman said hello, speaking in a kind of mock bellow.

The young man turned and glared at Herman.

"Who are you?"

"How old are you?" Herman asked.

"Sixteen."

"Very nice. I'm nineteen," Herman said, and he immediately felt a sense of seniority and said: "Let me get one of them cigarettes. I could use a cigarette right about now."

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“What’s in it for me?”

“Good company,” said Herman.

“Good company.”

“That’s right. What’s your name?”

“Bobby Ray McIntyre.”

“That’s a hell of a name, Bobby Ray. My name’s Herman Ludwig.”

Bobby Ray pulled a soft pack of Pall Malls from his tee shirt pocket, shook one out and handed it to Herman. He flipped open a Zippo, struck it on his knee, and lit the cigarette pressed between Herman’s lips.

“You ever been to a carnival before?” Herman asked.

“Went to the one come around last year.”

“Well I’d sure like to go to that freak show. That’s what I came for. The freak show.” “Well,” said Bobby Ray. “There is a kind of freak show, but probably ain’t much for freaks. No midgets or three-titted women or nothing.”

“I prefer two-titted women myself,” said Herman.

“I wouldn’t mind getting my hands on a two-titted woman tonight,” said Bobby Ray. And he grinned, showing big, blackrimmed teeth the color of cookie dough.

“Sho-ree,” said Herman. “Reckon where we can find some whisky around here?”

“I’ve got a little pintsized in my pocket, boy.”

“Well,” cried Herman. “I ain’t no boy, son.” Then he wiggled his toes and crunched his feet together, felt a hardness in his throat; felt a little sweat bead transpire at the top of his forehead, which he quickly dabbed away with his thumb so as not to let it roll down and streak his powdered cheeks. Bobby Ray yanked a small bottle of caramel colored liquid from his inner jacket pocket, unscrewed the cap, turned into the shadows and cocked his head backward, then he turned back around, his face all puckered.

“Here, take a drink,” Bobby Ray said, and he handed over

the bottle. Herman took it with one hand, and with the other he fumbled in his pocket for the sugar packets.

Well, he thought. How are you going to pull this off with that old boy just standing right there looking at you? You better go ahead and get it over with. Just drink it how you're supposed to. If you're going to try and be a man, then you might as well do it.

So Herman quit fumbling with the sugar packets, turned the bottle up, and drank. He thought of the sweet, softened sugar whisky, but the memory of it dissolved quicker than the sugar, and all he could taste was the gasoline burn, in his mouth, down his throat, and boiling in his belly. His eyes welled up, watered like fish-eyes.

Herman yelped, and mopped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Damn, boy. Keep it down or you're gonna get people suspicious."

"Well hellfire, son. I'm old enough to drink, so who gives a damn?"

"Well, best not make a fool of yourself. There's two little two-titted ladies at three o'clock."

There were. A blond and a brunette, dollfaced and spectral in the honey-colored light, poised like ballerinas in front of the tilt-a-whirl. The blond wore a white and red polka dotted-dress, its bell stuffed with lacy, frilly black tufts that held her long, cotton-colored legs. Herman was partial to blonds.

"Look at that frilly thing," Bobby Ray said.

"Wonder what all you could find in there?"

The brunette had her hair piled up high and wore a yellow dress with a big bell like the blond's, but with white frills filling up hers.

"I say we bag them ladies and take them to the freak show," Herman said.

Bobby Ray eyed the brunette. "I'm thinking me and her are going to make our own freak show."

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“Well that ain’t a bad idea either, Bobby Ray. But I’m thinking that freak show yonder’ll be a good start.”

They approached, Bobby Ray leading.

“How was it, girls?” said Bobby Ray, kind of leaning as he stood, as if there was something to lean on. “The tilt-a-whirl. We was thinking about taking a ride. But if it ain’t no fun, I reckon we’ll just head on to the good stuff.”

“The freak show,” Herman corrected.

“We didn’t ride the tilt-a-whirl,” said the brunette.

“Well what do you like to do?”

“Nothing,” she said.

“Well nothing doesn’t sound like a whole lot of fun,” said Bobby Ray. “Y’all too pretty to be out here doing nothing. Girls like you deserve a good time.”

“You think we wanna have a good time with a rat like you?”

“Hell,” he said. “You just teasing me aren’t you? What’s y’all’s names?”

The blond and brunette looked at one another. The blond one managed a tight grin.

“My name’s Bobbi Ann,” said the blond. “And this is Lola.”

“Bobbi Ann,” he cried. “Bobby’s my name. I’ll be damned. I’m Bobby Ray and this here is, is--”

“Herman Ludwig’s my name, missus.”

Herman was very pleased that the blond’s name was Bobbi, because that meant there was no way Bobby Ray would try and pair himself up with her. That would be like smooching your sister or something.

“Its real nice to meet y’all,” Bobby Ray said. “We were just about to go to the freak show yonder, and if y’all ain’t got no other company, come with. And like I said, you girls are too pretty to be hanging around here by yourselves.”

“It ain’t safe neither,” said Herman. “To be hanging around by yourselves.”

“I guess we could,” Lola said, and she looked over to Bobbi Ann, and Bobbi Ann shrugged her shoulders. The four of them advanced down the bright dusty corridors, past the shooting gallery, and past a fat man swinging, like an axe, a sledgehammer on a grounded bell to test his strength. The air smelled like funnel cakes and cotton candy and Herman insisted they stop at the sweet-stand and get some. They did, and Herman and Bobbi Ann shared a cone of cotton candy, a big pink cloud of it, then the four of them approached the freak show tent.

The tent sat built around a string of trailers painted with dancing skeletons and bluegreen mermaids. In the center of the main trailer, big block letters laid out in a circle spelled: HOUSE OF THE MYSTERIOUS, THE FANTASTIC AND THE UNFORTUNATE. Painted in the center of the circle: a man in a tuxedo. A headless man with a top hat on. Where a head should have been: only dead space.

Beads of sweat materialized beneath the brim of Herman’s hat. He took a napkin he got with the cotton candy cone and dabbed his forehead.

“You girls ready?” asked Bobby Ray.

The girls said they were ready, and Herman too. They each paid a dime to a dwarf in a candy-cane colored suit, and walked through a black silk curtain. They were inside a boxcar, and there were two boxcars connected to that by doors, all set up like a hallway to the main tent.

In the first boxcar skeletons stood along the walls wearing flattopped hats much akin to Herman’s, and their powderwhite jaws chomped up and down, their bony joints were slung around by fishing line, hung up and jerked around by god knew who or what beyond the boxcar ceiling. In the second boxcar: big fish tanks bedded with coral, and plastic sandcastles containing models of men that were hideous and half-alligator and fishtailed; scaly women like mermaids, but not as beautiful as Herman had imagined a mermaid being, by seeing them in picture books. Lola and Bobbi Ann smiled brightly and Bobby Ray pulled out his bottle of whisky and offered it. They drank there in the bluegreen glow of the aquariums, giggled

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and handed the bottle to Herman, and he took a pull from it. The whiskey fled and burned down his throat and in his belly. But this time his nerves eased and his head got light. He took another pull and smiled at the plastic half-alligator men, the waxy-looking mermaid women.

“You think things like this really exist?” Bobbi Ann asked Herman.

“They’s right here, mama. They’s staring at us right now.”

“But I mean, real ones.”

“Well,” he told her. “I saw pictures of them in a book, but I don’t know if that means they’re real or not. I’d like to believe they are.”

“I’d like to, too,” she said. “I like to believe that god has bigger tricks up his sleeve.”

This made Herman smile, and Bobbi Ann smiled back and hooked her arm through his. The four of them advanced into the main tent.

Rows of wooden folding chairs on a dirt floor. A little wooden stage, better suited for an irate street preacher than a freak show you had to pay a dime for. The four of them sat down. A few other folks did too, their arms folded, expressionless. The little auditorium-style tent was lit up dimly by an exposed light bulb hanging by a cord above the stage. The light bulb flickered and made a zinging noise, like a mosquito being zapped by a bug lamp. It dimmed till the filament was a crinkled, orange glowing caterpillar. The makeshift auditorium darkened, and Herman Ludwig grabbed Bobbi Ann’s arm, very tightly, but to his relief she grabbed back, much tighter.

This is it, he thought. Tonight is going to be the night I truly become a man.

He grinned and looked over at Bobbi Ann, and then a red curtain that hung behind the stage was parted in the middle by two white-gloved hands.

The man walked out on the stage in a black tuxedo and derby hat, and when he stepped to the front you could see his face,

wrapped in white cloth which was so taut you could make out the hard angle of his nose, the deep holes where the eyes should have been. He looked like The Invisible Man from the movies, and as the invisible man stood there, Herman Ludwig loosened his grip on Bobbi Ann, and all the heaviness, the fear, disintegrated. He became too comfortable and entranced to even manage a smile.

The invisible man spoke in a reverberating yet muffled tone, explaining to the crowd that he had been born a normal baby, but as time went on his body started to fade, year by year. By the time he was five his body was so translucent you could see his innards, crinkled and black through his waxpaper skin like he was some kind of human larvae. He said you could see his heart throb, hear it bump, and that after time the innards began to fade along with the flesh. He said his mother and father could not figure out what was wrong, and eventually they were so mortified and disgusted by him that they abandoned him to walk the earth alone. Then he became completely invisible.

A fat man called from the audience: “Why you have to wear that white cloth then?”

“I’m too ashamed,” cried the invisible man. “And there was one part of my body that did not disappear, and I have too much decency to let it sit in the open.”

“What part is that?” yelled the fat man.

“My brain.”

“My god,” Herman said.

This is not a man. He is more than a man, better. God really does have tricks up his sleeve. He didn’t stop with Adam, he created something more than a man: a freak. And how wonderful and fantastic a freak is.

The show ended and the invisible man bade the audience farewell and disappeared through the dark slit in the curtain, and Herman, above everyone else, had felt he’d gotten his money’s worth.

They went back out into the carnival lights. A good breeze blew, carrying the aroma of funnel cakes and cotton candy, the odor of boiled peanuts.

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“Well that was a drag,” said Bobby Ray.

“It was a thrill,” shouted Herman.

“I got a car,” Bobby Ray said. “Lets get out of here.”

Lola smiled and Bobby Ray pulled her in closely. They deviated between two of the big tents and into the dark outskirts of the carnival, the field where people parked their cars. “You got a car, Herman?” Bobbi Ann asked.

“Well, my car is in the shop, of course. I always have to keep it in top-notch shape. Top-notch shape.”

“What kind of car is it?”

“Well,” he said. “It’s a Ford truck. I’m a truck kind of guy. You can’t get more muscle than that.”

“I’ve got my own car,” she said. “Come on.”

She opened up the back of her Chevy Bel-Air and they got in.

“My father has one of these,” Herman said.

“That’s nice. Come here.”

She pulled Herman in close and they fell. She kissed him hard, held him tight. Herman began to feel his nerves clicking, felt the hardness in his throat and the sweat at the rim of his forehead. He was no longer elated by the prospect of achieving true manhood, and when the bell of Bobbi Ann’s dress scrunched up around her waist, and Herman saw what was held there in the frilly black tufts, his hands began to shake, and he stuck one in his pocket and fumbled with the sugar packets. He thought of the invisible man. He imagined him standing outside of the car window, staring, cloth unraveled from his head and a black brain exposed, perhaps a black heart bursting through his tuxedo jacket.

“Come on.” Bobbi Ann said. “Come on.”

Alright, he thought. You know what to do and you better get it done. Get that freak show out of your head and do what you have to do to become a man.

Herman sprung up on his knees between Bobbi Ann’s

splayed legs, and he yanked down his silvergray trousers. Then Bobbi Ann, eyes agape, looked at what Herman had there, and she screamed.

She clawed her hand over her mouth like you might do in a movie theatre watching a horror flick, a silver scene from Invasion of The Body Snatchers flashing across the screen. Herman, now terrified himself, opened the car door, leapt out, and ran. Bobby Ray and Lola stood outside of his car, baffled by the screams, and watched Herman Ludwig race across the field hoisting up his trousers. Then Herman disappeared into the trees.

He ran through thickets and felt streams of sweat roll down his cheeks, carrying the pasty white powder. He found home. He climbed up the lattices and slid in through the space he'd left beneath the window.

Herman snuck into the bathroom and looked at his reflection in the mirror. There were streams of pink on his powderwhite face. He washed it off, snuck back into his room and took off the suit and pulled the bottomdrawer out of his dresser, stuffed the bunches of silvergray cloth into the empty space without even opening the box. He shoved the drawer back in, and was Herman Ludwig no more. He was Noah Smith.

And also, he was a freak.

It was one o' clock in the morning. He got into bed, hid himself under the covers and closed his eyes. He couldn't see anything except the face of the invisible man, and he couldn't hear anything but Bobbi Ann's screaming. After a while he fell asleep.

The next morning Noah stood in front of the bathroom mirror with his church clothes on. He smelled the breakfast that his mother cooked downstairs, the hissing salty bacon on the stove. He wore the same wingtip shoes he'd worn the night before, and there was a smudge of white powder at the top of his forehead. He hurried down the stairs.

His mother stood at the stove. His father read the paper. They looked older than they were. His father had a hard, bone-rigid

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face and graying, short-cropped hair. He looked like he had once been in the military yet he had not. His mother was pear-shaped and had a big brown beehive on top of her head. She put breakfast on the table and his father continued reading the paper. Noah sat and ate.

After breakfast they went to church. They sat stiffly in the front pew while layers of pipe organ blared. The priest, in a white robe and purple sash draped around his neck, stood at the altar, talked of scripture, and sang from The Hymnal with the whole congregation. Noah's parents always told him he was lucky he didn't have to go to a snakehandler church. Noah stood in the pew and imagined going to a church where you could handle a snake.

The congregation stood, reciting passages from the Book of Common Prayer.

We believe in one God, father the almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth.

Noah stood and thought about what kind of church a freak from a freak show would go to. He imagined the freaks would probably be handling a bunch of snakes.

God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made.

Noah gazed at the altar and saw the spectral apparition of the invisible man, the cloth-wrapped head enormous and translucent and looming across the sanctuary. The organ blared and the congregation filed out from the pews and lined up for communion. Noah knelt between his mother and father around the altar. They cupped their hands. The priest passed the other kneelers and came to Noah and placed a holy wafer in his hands. Noah ate. The priest, grayhaired with a face like worn leather and soft watery eyes, leaned down, eyelevel with the boy.

"My son," he said. "I can see in you, I can see that He is in you. I can see that He protects you and protects your soul and that your body and soul are already of a piece."

He looked Noah's mother and father and smiled.

"This is a good boy," he said. "He is already on the right

path. I know. The Lord tells me so. This is a miracle boy. One of God's most special children."

He stood tall and placed a palm on top of Noah's head.

"May He bless and keep you. May He bless and keep you." He let go of Noah's head, and continued on down the line.

After church they went into town and ate lunch at Nellie's on St. Martin Avenue, across the street from the railroad tracks. They sat at a table next to the window and ate, and Noah washed his roast beef and mashed potatoes down with several glasses of sweet tea, extra sugar. Across the road, a train rolled by, slow and steady. A boxcar. Its face read in big, loopy, circus-style lettering: CARNIVAL OF THE FANTASTIC. Noah's reflection sat still and faint on the windowpane and in back of it the train rolled by, then the invisible man's face was reflected.

But he did not feel scared. He did not feel any bead of sweat on the top of his forehead, nor did he feel a hardness in his throat. The priest had assured him his soul was safe.

"Such godlessness," his father said. He pointed at the train. "An unnatural spectacle. Spectacles of sin, that's all those carnivals are." He looked at Noah.

His mother nodded. Noah looked at her and imagined honeybees whirling around her hairdo.

They left Nellie's, walked down the sidewalk and into the Dime Store. The train rolled by. You could see the ass end of it on down the street, smoke from the engine drifting into the sky, a gray plume wavering amongst the clouds.

"Aunt Peggy's birthday's coming up," Noah's mother said.

"They's greeting cards in the back," said the father.

Noah's mother and father went to the back to get a card, and Noah walked up front to the candy aisle. He looked out the window, reached his hand into his pocket and fumbled at some sugar packets.

A miracle boy, Noah thought. That's what I am. Well, that's a sure nice word for it.

He felt a lightness and an easiness he had never felt before.

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Outside, the train rolled by, carrying the boxcars of the traveling carnival.

Noah snuck out of the candy aisle and to the front door. He opened it and ran.

He ran across St. Martin and down its shoulder and into the ditch. He ran alongside the train. It breezed by, and he saw a boxcar on down the tracks with its side-door open, and he waited for it, squatted and braced himself. The boxcar started to pass and he leapt toward the opening, hung on and pulled himself to. He crawled into the darkness, then got up, and poked his head out and looked across the daylight, down the road and toward the window of the Dime store.

This is it. This is where I'm going. I'm a miracle boy. One of god's most special children. I don't have to try and be a man anymore. I am not a man. I am more than a man.

And he felt around at the packets of sugar in his pocket, turned away from the light, into the boxcar, and retreated into the shadows. Then he lay on his back in the dark, not feeling anything but the rumbling of the train tracks beneath him, and he lay there smiling, wondering what his new name would be.



Lafayette Ave C Line
by Christopher Fisher

HOCKEY & I MEET CUTE



AN EMBARRASSING VALENTINE BY MOLLY BROOKS



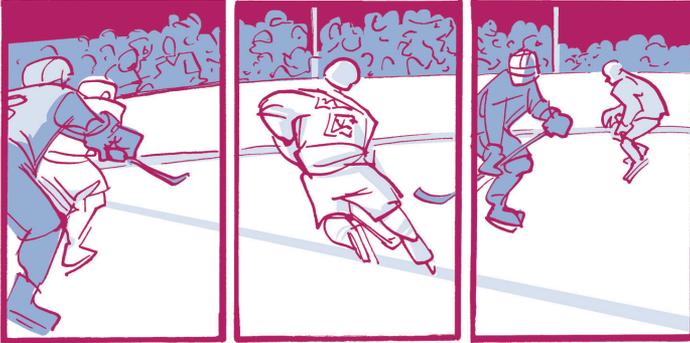
LAST YEAR, I DECIDED TO START FOLLOWING HOCKEY, BECAUSE I THOUGHT HAVING A HOBBY WOULD MAKE ME A BETTER AND MORE WELL-ROUNDED PERSON.*

THUNK
OW!



HOCKEY IS THE FIRST SPORT I'VE EVER MANAGED TO CARE ABOUT, AND IT'S DIFFICULT TO EXPLAIN MY SUDDEN INFATUATION TO PEOPLE WHO KNOW ME.





HOCKEY IS BEAUTIFUL,
AND FAST,
AND TOTALLY BADASS.

THE GOALIES ARE
BREAKDANCING NINJAS
WEARING GIANT
ROBOT COSTUMES.

DIVIDING GAMES INTO
THREE PIECES IS
NARRATIVELY SATISFYING.

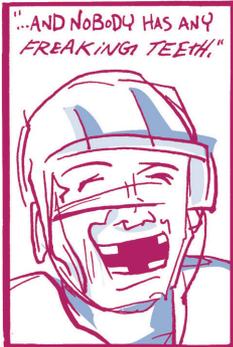
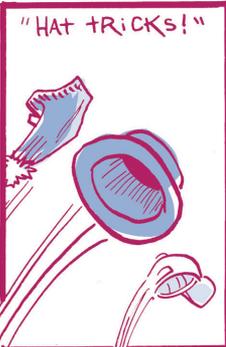
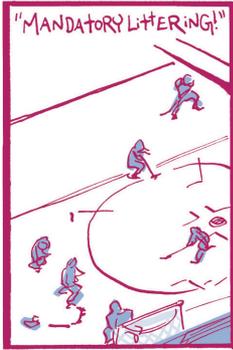
WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?

...BUT WHEN ANYONE ASKS
ME WHY I'M SO NUTS
ABOUT HOCKEY, IT SOMEHOW
ALWAYS DEVOLVES INTO
ONE OF THOSE DUMB
ROM COM MOMENTS WHERE
THE GUY DECLARES HIS
LOVE BY LISTING OFF THE
FEMALE LEAD'S ENDEARING
QU:RKS.



I LOVE THE WAY YOU
PUT CAYENNE PEPPER
IN YOUR COFFEE

AND HOW IT TAKES
YOU TWENTY MINUTES
TO PICK A MOVIE
AND HOW YOU
CONSTANTLY MISPRONOUNCE
THE WORD 'INTREPID'





OBVIOUSLY, THE ROB RAY RULE (HILARIOUS AS IT IS) ISN'T WHAT KEEPS ME UP UNTIL 1AM WATCHING WEST COAST GAMES.



BUT, LIKE THE EMOTIONALLY-UNAVAILABLE YET DASHING EXECUTIVE WHOSE LIFE HAS BEEN UPENDED BY A FREE-SPIRITED WAITRESS...



I'M HELPLESS TO EXPLAIN MY OWN ATTRACTION TO THIS GAME, OVER ANY OF THE OTHERS I'VE MET.



SO INSTEAD, I FIND MYSELF RECITING ALL THESE STUPID LITTLE FACTS, AS IF TO SAY:

"I LOVE YOU, HOCKEY, AND THAT MAKES ALL YOUR WEIRD BULLSHIT BEAUTIFUL TO ME."



SIX-PACK STORY:

Sorry, There's No More Room in the Bath Tub

by Tamara Green

B1

If I see her mince around in those chincey look-at-me-I'm-Drew-Barrymore, neon, roller derby shorts from Target, leopard heels and nipple clamps ONE MORE TIME, I will lose every bite of my tamarind duck which I inhaled through tears because we all know food is the Yummy Antichrist when it comes to wearing tight clothing. Seriously. That this glittering golden stream of logic comes instinctually from the dead guy who lives with a Dominatrix makes it all the more pathetic. Which is the INVERSE of me. Because I am amazing. That's right. And EVERYONE loves me. Me: a plastic skeleton from Duane Reade and I taught her everything she knows about perfecting the proper "red lip" with her precious MAC MATTE Ruby Woo so she can traipse down 6th ave looking like one of those sad females who didn't get a call back for the Mad Men extra audition. Gratitude? Hardly. Oh well, you can lead a kinky horse to water and such. I told you I'm amazing. Here, take my phalanges and kiss them, lovey. Of course you're pleased to meet me! I'm a skeleton. And I have the most captivating "sassy she-wolf jazz hands" you have ever had the pleasure to see.

I'm Kevin. You're welcome.

B2

This is not what I imagined for myself when I projected ahead to the more mature, more accomplished moments of my life. I had hopes. Ambitions. Visions of an elevated state of living fulfilling all the innate intellectual and decorative talents I was special enough

to possess from the moment I was.

And, my friend, I was. Special.

I was the only one on the vine with the real 14 karat promise of success. You couldn't put your finger on it then but something about me screamed: "WHEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE! BRILLIANT!" Just like that. And I had it all because I was Gourd Perfection. Spherical without being too round. My stem wasn't too long or too spiny. And those tiny curly cue vines at the tip? So perfectly teensy and curly I was positively fucking artsy. I was a package. I embodied the cutest candy colored moments of Halloween. And that Fall-harvest-time-apple-filled-Thanksgiving bullshit? Please. I was the epitome of your velvety harvest tide.

I was a veritable pumpkin of perfection. One look at me would send your sissy ass sprinting to the nearest Pier One in search of that poncey sateen table runner and set of autumnal bubble flecked water goblets. I was on top of it all. Crushing any pathetic, carveable styrofoam Michael's pumpkin from here to the Bible Belt. Well FUCK them. And FUCK you too. Look at me, past my prime. A lame as shit décor remnant from months ago. And to make it worse, they spray painted me some artsy craftsy hipster shade of mayan blue. Goddam Etsy bitches. Saccharine shit sack DIY blogging females. I'm no better than a crap plastic bird statue from Urban Outfitters. I'm pointless. Just a useless shape in a right color. Like neon wayfairers. A goddam joke. I should've died nobly with the rest of the half rotten November gourcery.

But no. I'm still here. A cerulean blue painted pumpkin accenting a black pedestal table in a Queens two bedroom. So do me a favor, will you? Find an unregistered 45 and blow my goddam guts out.

You can eat the seeds.

B3

Hey. I mean, hey. Hello. Hi. Um....Hi there. (giggle) No. no. no. I'm fine. It's fine. Really.

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I'm pretty comfortable actually. Just....bent almost in half. Inside this jar. And you're staring at me. But I'm still smiling, see? Still smiling. Sigh. It's tough, actually. I'm not gonna lie. It's tough. Because I know WHY you're staring.....and it's not because I'm a shark baby in a jar. I mean, I WISH that was why. Because, you know, I just wanna be interesting, too. You know? And you be all "JESUS FUCKING H POGO MANIA , WHAT A DELICIOUSLY TRICKED OUT BUNCH OF BENT IN HALF BABY SHARK IN A JAR!" Like that. You know? Like I was special. Like I was really something to look at. A special squidgy baby sharkey something to see.

But I know why you're really staring. It's not every day you get to see a baby shark's dick.

Jerks.

B4

Don't get me wrong, I've taken a keen, long glaring look at the collection of chodes in this place and I. Am. Gorgeous. Fucking Gorgeous. Spell it! G.O.R.E.G.E.O.U.S. I mean, a fay as shit skeleton, some cross border reptile, a Floridian shark dick, a tarted up has been pumpkin? Jesus. There's no other way to put it to the average plebian. (that's you, by the way.) (You're the plebian. I'm the gorgeous.) I'd go so far as to say I'm ALL of the gorgeous everywhere. And you're an empty sack of MEH because I sucked the GODDAM! right outta you because I'm a gut busting bag of gorgeous.

That's why I'm encased in Lucite.

I need boundaries to contain this segmented load of wicked beautyousness. Normally, you wouldn't even breathe near a scorpion just walking around like a crispy exoskeleton-ed supermodel. (which we are.) You'd back up. Back away tripping over your boots like a human snuggly of fear. Because a scorpion is a bite size arthropod of crunchy death and gorgeous menace. I mean, look at me! I have these pincers. I have this here stinger tail all curved and arched and pointy awesome. Sexy is what I am. So, yes. I've trumped you ten ways from Sunday. And thanks to my transparent coating, you

can turn me safely over in your undeserving hands. Fondling the deadliest bits you'll never touch in real time. Put your mouth just a slip shot breath away from all eight of my little legs. And keep turning me over and over knowing so sickeningly sweet down deep and accepting this truth: you'll never be this cute in lucite.

B5

Buenos Noches, kitten. Do not stuggle. It is I, Ramone. Sssshhhhhhhhhhh. Jesssssss. I can tell by your uncomfortable state of discomfot you are very pleased to see me. This is normal as the women in this country, they deeply love the one they know as Ramone, with the silent and knowing stare. And I will stare with my eyes and speak words of great love with my teeth because my mouth, it is glued shut. Like all mummified reptiles. But my teeth, ah, jesssssssss...my teeth speak volumes to you, kitten. Volumes of letters that form the words that make the useless sentences of girly love you like so much from your stories on the Tee Vee. So please, stop crying. And struggling. You'll only weaken the adhesive on the electrical tape which I have so delicately placed over your pretty mouth. Your mouth, like mine, glued shut so you may project volumes thru those evenly spaced teeth. And smile. Because you ARE smiling, aren't you, kitten?

Jesssssssss. You are. Such a captive(ating) smile thru a mouth of electrical taped and happy teeth because you are so overwhelmed with love for your Ramone. Because it is I, your silent and knowing Ramone. And I shall sit and stare as you fall asleep. Because, it is true, the eyes of a dead baby alligator, they never close, kitten. Never.

B6

Did you LISTEN when I told you beyond a doubted shadow of the cream sickle orange glow of sunrise that this bitch was crazy? DID YOU? No. But does anyone listen to a plastic skeleton from Duane Reade bought on sale after Halloween? Not

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once. Never. Dead dogs balls never. Sigh. Whatever. Serves you right for even reading this far. I mean, honestly, with in the walls of an apartment that houses a lucite entombed scorpion, a petrified alligator, a Floridian dick brandishing shark baby specimen, a spray painted and angst ridden pumpkin has been and a Dominatrix, did you expect vignettes from Mansfield Park? Little Women?! No. You got the love child spunk of Naked Lunch meets Valley of the Dolls on your chin and no hand towel to wipe off. Serves you right, kitten. Serves you right.

Now be a good little smitten kitten and fetch me that spool of electrical tape, will you lovey?

It'll all be over soon.

The Chronicles of Tim

Pt. XI - Number's Up

by Mike Wiley

Tim set the note on his nightstand and stared at it. He had a connection now and he wasn't sure that he liked it. Theodine had made him do and feel wonderful things. If Samira was good to her word, then he could have the stuff whenever he wanted it. His high was wearing off just then and the beard was growing back like poison ivy. He sat that way for some time, scratching his face, contemplating this reality, wondering if he should just dispose of this option while he had the chance.

That chance didn't last long. Geryon burst into Tim's room. Tim grabbed the note and put it up his sleeve.

"James has been attacked," Geryon said. He was covered in dark red. Tim looked at him through bloodshot eyes.

"Okay," he said.

"He went out to harvest theodine from the nevercaves and bandits were waiting for him. The real James, Tim. Not the one you punched earlier. He's hurt bad. You should have been with him. Why weren't you with him?"

"He didn't tell me anything about..."

"Forget it. Right now, you're the only one who can help him."

"Me? Why? I'm not a doctor."

"He needs theodine and I know you know how to get it."

Tim wondered for a moment how Geryon could know this, since his connection to the drug manifested just moments ago. But

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considering all the other weird shit that had unfolded recently, he thought better than to question it at this time.

“Okay,” Tim said, “but you need to leave while I do this. Where is James now?”

“On the billiards table downstairs.”

“I’ll meet you there.”

As soon as Geryon had gone, Tim fished the note from his sleeve and ran to the window. He wanted desperately to destroy the thing in his hands, but decided that there would be time for that later. Not knowing how wrong he was at that moment, he stuck the small piece of paper into a crack in the windowpane.

A knock at the door.

Samira stood in the hallway when Tim opened.

“That was fast,” she said.

“It’s not for me,” he said. “Do you have it?”

Samira handed him a brown paper bag. There was a bottle inside.

“Thanks. I owe you.”

Tim took off down the hall. As he approached the top of the staircase, he passed by a window overlooking the lake. As he ran by he thought he saw the figure of a man hovering over the lake just atop an explosion of water. ‘No time for that nonsense,’ he thought. The hand holding the bottle began to shake. He uncorked it and took a pull as he began to take the stairs three at a time down fourteen flights. Then he took them five, six, seven at a time. By the time he reached the ground floor, he was leaping entire stair sets, barely touching the ground. The bottle was half empty.

Tim entered the billiards room.

“Couldn’t you have gotten this yourself?” Tim asked as he approached Geryon. James was splayed out on the table, half human form, half mutilated deer carcass. He was bloodied from head to toe, open gash wound across his temple, missing a left hand.

“My daughters don’t talk to me anymore and I never touch

the stuff. That's why I look like this. I've told you - I was once like you."

"Alright, so what do we do?"

"He needs the theodine. Give it to me." Tim handed the bottle over. Geryon looked at the half-full bottle, looked at Tim, then broke a pool cue in two. He stuck each piece under James' arms, propping him up into a half-sitting scarecrow position. "I've got to get this stuff in him. Pull on his ears while I pour it down his throat."

"What?"

"Just do it!" Tim obliged and the medicine went right down. "Now hand me that painting over there."

Against the wall was a piece of art in the style of every other in the castle. But this one was not a portrait. Instead, it depicted a scene of four doctors standing around an operating table. They were in full surgical garb, down to the booties on their shoes. Each face looked out of the painting at the viewer, expectant. Their gloved arms were raised in front of their bodies, forearms out so as not to risk contamination by accidentally brushing against something. They were waiting.

Geryon took the painting and sprinkled the remaining theodine across the surface. Then he lifted it over James' head, paint side down and, with no particular caution, pressed the canvas against the crown of James' head, pushing James into the picture. The body disappeared gradually into the frame until Geryon had run it over the entire course of James' body until James was gone.

Now that it weighed an extra 180 pounds, Tim had to help Geryon lift the painting off of the billiards table to place it back against the wall. Then they watched as the painting came to life and the surgeons went to work.

Eight hands immediately began stripping the body of its butler uniform. They wiped away dried blood and ran clear, plastic tubes here and there. Tiny metal instruments were brought in and stitching needles began to fly. The surgeons worked in perfect concert to restore the broken James back to health. Geryon took

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Tim by the arm and led him away from the scene.

“Let’s give them some time,” he said. “There’s nothing more we can do here.”

They went into the kitchen and sat at a table across from one another.

“I’m kind of hungry,” said Tim.

“Shut up.”

“Okay.”

“I’m going to give you something and I want you to hold on to it.” Geryon produced a sealed manilla envelope and handed it to Tim. There was nothing written on the outside. “There were moments when I was sure you would fail in this place, but you’ve exceeded my expectations. Tim, if anything were to happen to me, I want you to open that envelope, but not ever before.”

“Why?” asked Tim. “Are there spiders inside?”

“No, there are not spiders inside. What is wrong with you?”

“Okay. It’s not full of spiders. So what do you mean by ‘anything’? Like what if you get your testicles caught in a vice? Or what if something happens to me? Like if I get abducted or something? Should I open it then?”

“Why would you get abducted?”

“I don’t know.”

“Would you have the envelope on you if you were suddenly abducted?”

“I don’t suppose so,” Tim admitted.

“Then how would you... never mind. And anyway, no. Only if something happens to me, okay? You’ll know what that means when it happens.”

“When it happens?” Tim asked.

“If.”

“You said ‘when.’”

“*If* something happens to me. Just do it. Stop being such a pest or I’m going to change my mind about you.”

“Okay, I’ll hang on to the envelope and *if* something happens to you, which it probably won’t, I will open it.”

“Thank you.”

“Geryon, I’ve got to ask you something. Are there any other people here, besides your daughters, that I haven’t met yet?”

“No. Why do you ask?”

“I think I may have seen myself out the window earlier.”

“Oh.”

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

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