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**CAT CULTURE**



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# EDITORIAL

Come in, come in from the cold! I've got a soup on the stove just for you. Pull up a chair next to the fire and relax. It's warm in here, isn't it? No, no, that stuffed baby hippo won't bother you; not if you don't bother it. Sure, you can take off your shoes if you want. The socks too? Why not? You can even dip your toes in the hot chocolate like you've always wanted. Nobody here but us birds.

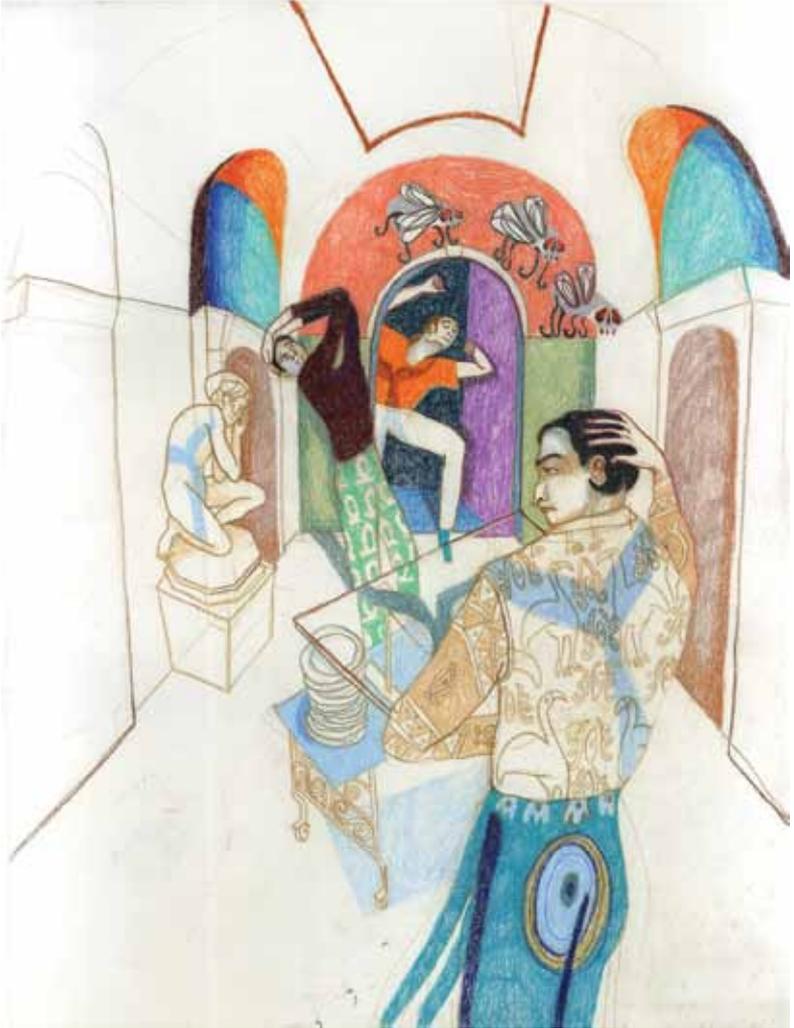
You see, it's nearly Christmas and, like Santa, we know the things you've always wanted to do, even if you don't. So take it from us, you'd look pretty good doing nude gymnastics to your favorite Rihanna song, no matter what your friends say.

Please don't be fooled, this isn't just some run-o-the-mill holiday tale. It's the time of year for giving and we come bearing gifts! Albeit in the time-honored traditions of art, literature and psychedelic wrist-tickles. But if it is the time of year for giving it's also the time of year for receiving, replacing, refunding, exchanging and plain old dumping-in-the-trash.

Like I said, nobody here but us birds.

Enjoy,

*Mike*



# Triple Penis, Going to Hollywood

by Carly Berg

Shelly vacuumed in rows, singing along with the repeating song. Triple penis, triple penis, triple penis--- going to Hollywood! After only an hour, her new apartment sparkled. She could go to Hollywood or anywhere, why would she care. Shelly sprayed the glass doors and dropped the bottle. Mockingbirds mobbed the live oaks outside.

Cats clawed the tree trunks and yowled. The birds yowled back. Lots of birds. A marmalade cat screeched when a bird dove down and pecked its head. The birds screeched back. Shelly covered her ears.

The damn things would squawk all night and keep her awake. They'd mess on her car. She sipped a rum and punch at the table and tried to calm down. If only she had a hose to turn on them. If only she could vacuum them up.

Her date would be here soon, her first in years. She shouldn't have said yes. Shelly snatched up two pots and charged out to the trees, banging them, shouting the first thing she thought of. Triple penis, going to Hollywood!

Birds rose out of the trees in a twitchy cloud. They seemed to reach a decision, gathered into "V" formation, and sailed off.

She got into the shower, covered in white splats, and was still mad when the doorbell rang.

"Hello." Clark held out a single red rose.

"Hello." A single rose. Only one. No vase. Now she had to find a vase. Showing up with something she had to bother about, annoying. She marched the rose straight to the kitchen trash can and flung it in. Plop.

"Hey! What did you do that for?" the date said.

"Hey! What did you do that for?" Shelly made her dum-dum face at him.

His ears pinkened "Is something wrong?"

"Is something wrong?"

“Yeah, uh, should I leave or what?” he said.

Shelly popped her eyes at him. God, men were stupid. “Yeah, uh, should I leave or what?”

The date turned to go. “Bitch,” he muttered on his way out.

“Bitch.” Shelly slammed the door and cried. It had been a rough year.

The mockingbirds were back, circling the trees. The date hopped toward his car, dodging splats.

A bird cloud outside darkened her kitchen. In unison, the birds shrieked, Triple penis, going to Hollywood!

The date peeled out, leaving black stripes on the parking lot.

He reported on Facebook that a dating site witch had mocked him and made mockingbirds pick on him. Everyone laughed at him, so he posted that he was only kidding.

Sometimes a pink-eared man made a cameo appearance in her mind. She couldn't quite place him.

#

Shelly vacuumed in rows, singing along with the repeating song. Triple penis, triple penis, triple penis--- going to Hollywood! After only an hour, her new apartment sparkled. Now that she was free, she could go to Hollywood or anywhere, but she didn't really feel like it. She sprayed the glass doors, and the bottle wavered in her hand. The live oaks outside were heavy with little birds, like brown fruits. Maybe it was easy to find bugs out there since the maintenance men just mowed.

Her date would be here soon, the first since her divorce.

The doorbell rang, and her date, Clark, gave her a rose. She put it in a vase with water.

Thanks,” she said.

“You're welcome.”

“Would you like a drink? I have rum and punch.”

“Do you have Coke?”

“Sure.” She fixed two Cokes on ice.

She sat on the sofa and he sat on the sofa.

His skin was milky blue in the dusk. She switched the lamp on. “So, how was the traffic?”

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## Used Gravitrans

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“Fine.”

He drank his Coke. She swirled hers around.

“Nice place.” He glanced at his watch.

“Thanks. I haven’t had a chance to do much with it yet.”

The wall clock ticked from the kitchen. The little brown birds chattered outside. His phone rang.

“Hello?” He turned away from her. “Yeah, yep. Okay, be right there.”

He hung up. “I have to go. It’s my work. I’m sorry.”

“Oh. That’s too bad.”

“Yeah, they’re like that sometimes. Well. It’s been nice meeting you. Thanks for the Coke.”

He put his cup in the sink and left.

He didn’t like her. It stung, even though she didn’t like him, either. Shelly got the blanket and pillow from her bed and the big bag of cheese puffs from on top of the fridge. She nestled into the sofa and flipped on her new flat screen TV.

#

Shelly vacuumed in rows, singing along with the repeating song. Triple penis, triple penis, triple penis--- going to Hollywood! After only an hour, her new apartment sparkled. Now that she was free, she just might flit off to Hollywood or anywhere. She sprayed the glass doors and dropped the bottle. The live oaks outside popped with parakeets, green, yellow, and blue, as if a hurricane blew in a flock from the tropics. Candy-colored birds hopped and chirped against the setting peach sun. She broke away from the magical scene, she had a date.

She sipped a glass of fruit punch and coconut rum and soaked in a fluffy bubble bath. It would be her first date in years.

The doorbell rang.

Clark didn’t speak, neither did she. He offered her a single red rose.

She felt the need to bite the stem sideways, like in an old Hollywood movie.

He nodded, and took her into his arms. They lingered in embrace, then moved to a tango dip. The rose was tossed, his mouth covered hers.

She was quite aware that her legs were sun-pretty dancers. He dipped her lower. She put one high-kick leg around his waist.

He twirled her to the wall, Clark Kent, Clark Gable. Pushed her up against it, pinned her wrists above her head. Triple penis, triple penis. Her feet went on the outsides of his, pli . He led her to the bed.

She was thin-shelled expensive and he was a brute. Tender touch from a beast is poppies. His scent entered her, cilantro, gun and moonlit river.

He unwrapped the gift. The blacks of his eyes spread the brown part to rims.

End

# The Ins and Outs of a Death-Defying Trick

by Sean Pessin

Outside of the man is a box. Rather, the man is inside the box. Inside of the box is a man, and inside the man is a key. The man is outside the key, but inside the box. Outside the man and outside the box is a lock that keeps the man in. Outside the key, outside the man, outside the box, and outside the lock is the stage. Outside the stage is the audience and outside the audience is the theater. The theater is composed of bars and wood. The audience is composed of humans made up of organic compounds. The stage is composed of bars and wood. The box is made up of bars and wood. The man is made up of organic compounds. The key is made of brass, which is an alloy of copper and zinc and lead; the key is made of copper and zinc and lead. The man is a magician.

To complete the trick and release the confetti inside the cannons that are on either side of the stage (the stage is in between the cannons), the magician must evacuate the key so that he can evacuate the box. Then the confetti can be outside the cannons and the people and the cannons can be inside the confetti inside the theater. The audience must remain outside the cannons; Fire hazard -- it is in the rulebook. The key works its way inside of him. The key is inside of him. The key is only partially inside of him, and partially outside of him. The key exits his mouth. The box remains totally outside the key and the magician. The cannons remain outside the confetti and the confetti remains inside the cannons. The stage remains in between the two cannons. The audience remains outside the cannons and the confetti. The magician is a tax-evader.

Inside the stage is the second stagehand. Outside the second stagehand is the stage. He is working on the switch for the finale of the current trick. Outside the title "second stagehand" are quotations. Inside the quotations is the word stage. Outside the word stage and inside the quotations is the word second-hand; his tools are borrowed from the theater union. The secondhand on his watch strikes 12, and inside the watch, cogs turn; an alarm is tripped to trigger a memory inside him that the stage must be ready. The sound is in the air and outside the second stagehand until he hears it. The second stagehand is outside the alarm. The stage is almost ready.

The key is now no longer inside the tax-evader, but it is still in the box. The key is in the tax-evader's palm. The audience inside the theater must not see that the key was inside the tax-evader inside the box. The box, the tax-evader, and the key are placed inside a sheet; the sheet is placed on top of the box. The key inside the palm of the tax-evader inside the box inside the sheet moves toward the lock. The tax-evader is still a magician.

Inside the audience is a transvestite. The transvestite is a man in drag. Inside the lady's clothes is a man, and inside that man are tucked genitals. Inside the word transvestite is "-vest-". Outside "-vest-" is "trans-" and "-ite." "-Vest-" is clothing, while "trans-" is beyond, and "-ite" means to make or do. Beyond the clothing to make or do. Beyond the clothing, she makes do. Outside the penis and testicles is a drag queen. She reaches inside her purse to find her cell phone, and her hand brushes against a condom. She desires to be outside a penis besides her own, and in her mind, she knows she must be ready. Outside the hand is a condom and a badge and a purse is outside the two of these things. Outside the purse is the rest of her, and outside the rest of her is her date, who is in her gaze. Her and her date are inside the audience.

The confetti is still inside the cannons. The audience is still outside the confetti. The audience remains outside the cannons. The magician remains inside the box. The transvestite remains in the audience. The key and the palm are outside the box. The key is outside the lock. The key is inside the lock and outside the lock and outside the box. The palm is outside the lock, but the key and lock are still inside the sheet with the palm. The tumblers in the lock click while the key is in the lock, and the key evacuates the lock and retreats back into the palm. The palm is now in the cage and the key returns back inside the magician. The lock evacuates the box and the box evacuates the sheet and the magician evacuates the box. The key evacuates the box. The magician is in the spotlight.

The switch is tripped by the stagehand. The confetti evacuates the cannons. The audience is inside the confetti. The stage is inside the confetti. The magician is inside the confetti. The confetti is inside the theater. The magician is still a man.

The admiration is a celebration. The celebration is composed of the audience. The celebration is a riot. The audience is a riot. The confetti is outside the riot. The man is in a panic. The audience is outside the cannons. The audience is inside the cannons. The cannons are still outside the audience. The cannons are tripped by the second stagehand, he is in the stage and the sounds of the riot are not in him. The audience is in flames. The theater is engulfed in flames. The woman outside her penis is in the

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fire department. The woman puts the audience in evacuation formation. The audience is inside the theater. The audience is inside the theater and the theater is outside the audience. The audience is outside the theater.

Outside the theater is the audience. Outside the second stagehand and the man is still the theater. The man is trapped; outside the man is a pile of rubble. Inside the audience is the theater. Within the gaze of the audience is the fiery spectacle. Outside the man are flames encroaching. Inside a ring of flames is the man.

The man and the flames are one.

The next day in a coffeeshop, the second-stagehand, now out of work, reads the newspaper. In the headlines, the unemployed man notices in the paper outside of him the story of the magic act. Outside the paper, the unemployed man waits for coffee. Outside his hands is coffee in a cup in the hands of a barista. The coffee is outside the hands of the barista and the unemployed man. Outside the coffee is the unemployed man and inside his hands is the cup. Partially outside the cup is the man and partially inside the coffee is the man. The coffee is outside and inside the man. The coffee is inside the man; the cup is outside the man's mouth but inside his hands; the cup is outside his hands. The unemployed man's hands are outside the paper. As the coffee goes deeper, it makes way for him to take in the cover story of the newspaper. The eyes in the unemployed man receive the light. His eyes are reading; the unemployed man becomes a reader. Outside the eyes of the reader is the story. Between the paper and the reader is the reflected light. Outside of a picture is the story. Inside the picture is the lady (the man in drag) leading the audience out of the riot and out of the theater. In the story, she is the heroic fireman in that sequence of events.

In the story is also the man (the magician sex-offender). Outside the article are his tax-evader parts. Not in the article at all, aside from the picture in the article of them being herded, is the audience. The reader wonders about the thoughts of the people in the audience. The man is in the memories of the audience. The memories of the audience are outside the magician.

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# The Black Hole From Ohio

By Daniel Holloway

Whenever Rich arrived home from work, the first thing he saw was his roommate's cousin, Fred, sprawled out on the couch. But today was different. Today, where Fred tended to be, Rich found instead a black hole. It was obvious to Rich that the black hole was Fred, because it appeared to be watching a movie on Rich's laptop. Since arriving four weeks ago from Ohio for a "quick visit," Fred had spent a lot of time watching movies on Rich's laptop. Also, like Fred, the black hole smelled of hot dogs and Dr. Brown's Cel-Ray soda.

"Fred, is that you?" Rich asked. Fred made no response. Whether this was because no sound could escape the gravity of his new super-dense structure or because he was merely a dick was unclear. Fred was never much for talking, anyway, unless it was to say something stupid or shitty.

"Alright, I'm going to the kitchen," Rich said, creeping kitchenward, his back to the wall. "Just right in there. Yep. In the kitchen."

Rich finally made it to the kitchen door, then dove through it, landing flat on his belly. The belly, however, landed flat on Rich's cat, Noah Baumbach.

"Gahh!" Rich said as Noah Baumbach, certain that death was upon him, sank tooth and claw into his master's flesh. Rich picked the cat up by the hind legs and flung it into the cupboard under the sink. The way Rich figured it, both he and Noah Baumbach were better off in the kitchen than they were in the living room with Fred the black hole. Rich's roommate Phillip—who had moved out here with Rich a couple years ago after the two of them had graduated college together, and who since then insisted on never being called Phil—would be home soon, anyway. The black hole was his cousin. Let him deal with it.

"I'm home," Phillip cried from the front door. Then, "Holy Christ, Fred, is that you?"

Once again, Fred made no sound, at least none that Rich could hear. A moment later, Phillip dove into the kitchen and onto Rich, who was still lying where he had landed on Noah Baumbach. The roommates disentangled themselves from each other, then peered out the kitchen door at Fred, who was quietly being a black hole on the couch.

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“What are we going to do?” Phillip whispered.

“Well, I was meaning to speak to you about that,” Rich whispered back. “See, he’s your cousin, so I think you should take the lead here and inform him, you know, politely, that he needs to either find another place to stay or head back to his mom’s in Dayton.”

“But he’s my cousin,” Phillip said.

“Yes, that’s kind of my point,” Rich replied. “He’s also a black hole.” Then, as an afterthought, “And he’s been here four weeks already.”

Phillip pondered this, or at least projected the illusion of ponderousness in a way that Rich found convincing. Then he reached a conclusion.

“Great. I’ll let him know tomorrow, when I get back from Esther’s.”

“Esther’s?” Rich echoed. The concept of Esther’s as a place where Phillip would spend an evening troubled him.

“Yeah, Esther’s. We’ve been hanging out a little. I’m probably going to stay over there tonight, you know.”

Rich did not know. Esther tended bar at a place near the apartment that Rich, Phillip, and, most recently, the black hole shared. She performed burlesque and had hair the color of a Maraschino cherry. She was one of those girls. Both Rich and Phillip were fond of those girls, so Rich now had two reasons to be annoyed with his roommate. He kept his mouth shut for a moment while trying to devise a good way to say, “I think that maybe you should stick around and sort out that situation on the couch in there, instead of, you know, going and having intercourse, or whatever, with a girl who I liked way before you even knew she existed. That’s just how I feel. Of course, I totally respect your feelings, different though they may be from mine, but I just thought that now would be a good time for some real honesty.”

Phillip, however, mistook this silence for acquiescence, and gave Rich’s shoulder a brotherhood-of-man sort of slap. “Hey, yes. Okay. Great. So I’m just going to get some stuff and head over to Esther’s, and I’ll totally talk to Fred when I get back. So you just have a great night, man. Okay? Awesome.”

Rich spent the next few hours locked in his room, trying to masturbate to Esther’s Facebook page. He was unsuccessful in this venture for two reasons. The first was that Fred was watching yet another movie on

Rich's laptop, forcing Rich to access the necessary visual aids through his phone, which was not ideal for the task. The second was that Rich's mind kept wandering back to the fact that there was a goddamn black hole in the living room. Frustration led to despair, which in turn led to a thirst for alcohol. Rich knew that the remains of a six-pack recently purchased by Phillip resided in the refrigerator. The notion of drinking Phillip's beer made Rich even thirstier, so he pulled up his pants and ventured out.

Rich slipped into the kitchen undetected—Fred appeared to be occupied with the Tom Hanks vehicle “Turner & Hooch” —and grabbed a beer from the fridge. Then a terrible sound like a thousand worlds dying came from beneath the cupboard. “Noah Baumbach,” Rich said—and when he said it, there was regret, but also deep terror in his voice. Rich opened the cupboard door and the cat sprang from it like one of those fake snakes in a can, if those fake snakes had claws on their hands and hate in their hearts. Noah Baumbach paused briefly to tear a chunk of flesh from his master's ankle before departing the room with haste.

“Gahh!” Rich said as he leaned over to inspect the red badge of courage on his ankle. Then he said it again. The second “Gahh!” came when he looked up and saw that Fred had entered the room. Rich decided to play it cool. Then he peed his pants a little.

“Hey, uh, how goes it, Fred?” Rich asked. Was it just him, or had Fred's event horizon expanded? “Your gravitational singularity is looking quite, err, singular. Beer?”

Fred did not nod or say thank you—again, probably because he was a black hole, but also possibly because he was a dick. We can't be certain, really. You know how he is. He did, however, drift just close enough to suck the beer bottle from Rich's grasp and into his own superdense core.

“Gahh!” Rich said as he ran out of the apartment. A nice walk, he thought, might do him some good.

Rich roamed the streets of his rapidly gentrifying neighborhood in a mood. Occasionally, he stopped to gaze in a store window and consider the loom-woven baby onesies, unpasteurized sheep's milk cheeses, and books by local authors named Jonathan. But the window shopping left him cold; his heart was not in it. How could Phillip be with Esther? He knew how into her Rich was. It was so obvious. Rich had practically come right out and said, “I like Esther. You know, Esther. The bartender at La Joya. We were just there on Wednesday. Yes, of course you were there. No, that was not Van Winkle's, that was La Joya. Nevermind. Anyway, I like her,

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so hands off.” He hadn’t actually said that, but he may as well have. He reached down to tug at his sock, which was sticky with blood where Noah Baumbach had expressed his frustration.

Noah Baumbach.

Fred turned and began power walking back to the apartment. (Though he moved with urgency, he couldn’t bring himself to break into a full sprint. These were skinny jeans, after all.) He entered the building, took the stairs two at a time, and flung the apartment door open just in time to see Noah Baumbach, freed from his protective cupboard prison, perched atop the bookshelf, and poised to pounce on Fred.

A brief note here about Noah Baumbach. He was retrieved on a whim from the Humane Society in Columbus, Ohio, at the request of one of the clingy, weepy, suicide-threatening girls Rich dated in college. (He had a type.) The girlfriend—who now lives in the Cincinnati suburb that she grew up in and is happy enough giving clarinet lessons out of her mother’s family room—picked a scrawny, tiger-striped kitten equipped with \$200 worth of worms and ear mites. Rich knew from the start that the cat was the scion of a great, murderous line. It loved nothing more than to stay concealed—for hours, if need be—atop the highest possible vantage point in a room and wait for anyone to walk within striking distance, at which point Noah Baumbach, filled with savage bloodlust, would attack. He liked to go for the eyes. The girlfriend left after four weeks of this, but Noah Baumbach stuck around.

Despite the cat’s criminal qualities, Rich did have an irrational fondness for it, as so many pet owners do for animals who have no such reciprocal feeling for them. So when Rich opened that door and spotted Noah Baumbach poised to strike, a knot formed in his heart, and he choked as he shouted, “Bomber, no!”

But it was too late. Noah Baumbach launched himself from the bookshelf, arms wide like an eagle’s wings, claws gleaming in the lamplight. His expression was one of homicidal glee. But then his trajectory shifted, and a cry, like a baby’s, escaped from Noah Baumbach as gravity snared him and sucked him into the black hole that was Rich’s roommate’s cousin Fred. The cat was gone.

Rich stepped over the threshold and into the apartment. He mustered what he felt was an air of purposefulness around him. Others might not have recognized it as such, but the point is that Rich felt purposeful, and when he spoke, he spoke from a purposeful place.

“Get out of my apartment,” he said. It seemed the best way to sum

up what Rich felt at that moment.

It became clear, however, that Fred had no intention of getting out of Rich's apartment. He made no acknowledgment of Rich. He made no acknowledgment of having just swallowed Rich's cat. He didn't even say "excuse me." Rich moved toward Fred, stopping short when he felt the slight tug of gravity at his chest. He puffed his chest out, and a button popped off his shirt and flew into the black hole.

Rage began to overtake Rich. The back of his neck felt prickly with heat, and a couple more buttons popped off his shirt. He hadn't been this angry since he discovered that his shoes were made by Indonesian children, and not, as he had been led to believe, by attractive, college-age women paid a fair wage in downtown Los Angeles. He picked up a magazine and threw it at Fred, who gobbled it up. Then he threw a book. Then he threw Noah Baumbach's food dish. No sense in keeping it around now, anyway.

With hot tears threatening to run down his face and shouts of primal annoyance pouring from between his teeth, Rich kept throwing stuff at Fred, who kept absorbing said stuff. Rich did not seem to notice that with every object sucked into Fred's core, Fred's event horizon expanded just a bit, and his gravitational pull grew stronger. If Rich had noticed this, or if he had cared, things probably would have turned out a lot different.

At exactly that moment, lending support to Rich's long-held hypothesis that what he perceived as the universe was, in fact, a giant cosmic joke made at his expense, Phillip emerged from his room wearing only boxer shorts. He was followed by Esther, who was super naked. "Hey, buddy," Phillip said. "Esther's roommate's mom is visiting, so we came here. You want a beer?"

Rich did not want a beer. What Rich wanted was to tear a hole in the fabric of space and time and crawl inside it. Conveniently, there happened to be a hole in the fabric of space and time right over there on the couch—and it was getting bigger.

"Hey, what's all this?" Esther said as if just now noticing the black hole. She looked sleepy-eyed or a little stoned. She also looked like she had the nicest pair of breasts Rich had ever seen, and the second nicest pair that Phillip had ever put his mouth on, so nobody noticed her eyes.

Rich looked at Esther and Phillip, though mostly at Esther. Then he looked around his crapbag apartment. Then he looked at the ceiling and thought about his life. Then he looked at Esther again. Then he shrugged, took a step toward Fred, and was sucked into the black hole. His final word

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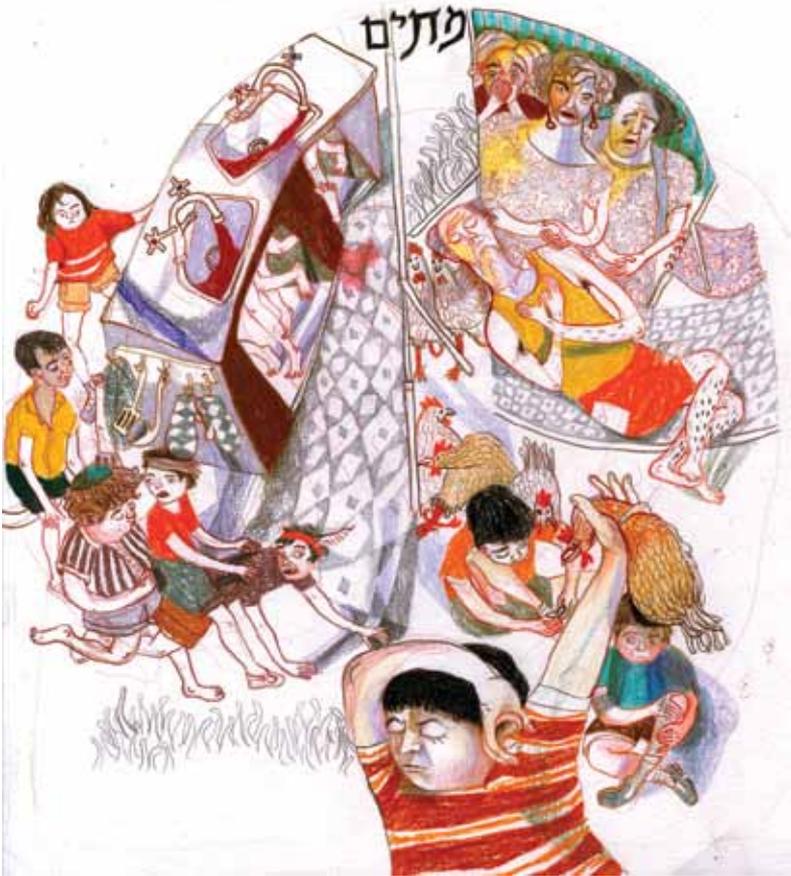
was “Gahh!”

Rich’s roommate’s cousin Fred consumed half a block before a crack team of astrophysicists, firefighters, and sousaphonists—something to do with harmonic vibrations and there not being any concert tubas around—were able to contain him. He was then hurled into space, toward the Sagittarius arm of the Milky Way, where the astrophysicists hoped he might collide with an already existing black hole and create something really cool for them to look at (or cause a catastrophic event that would implode the universe). The firefighters and the sousaphonists went out for beers afterward, but “forgot” to tell the astrophysicists where they were going. Typical.

Phillip and Esther got the heck out of there before things got too real. Phillip was pretty upset at first about his roommate, his cousin, and all of his stuff being gone. But then Esther offered to let him stay at her place for a while. Phillip pretended to be sad for the next few weeks, but he was secretly pretty pleased. He and Esther got married and moved upstate to join a farming commune. Sometimes there’s group sex, and everyone involved is really attractive, especially Phillip and Esther.

Rich, as we knew him, is dead. You don’t survive getting sucked into a black hole even long enough to think, “Well, I didn’t see this coming.” I mean, if you slowed time down to a standstill, you’d see some pretty wild stuff happening. But to human perceptions, it’s instantaneous. That’s good, because that also means it painless. Probably.

Anyway, dead though Rich is in human terms—which, let’s be frank, aren’t the best terms around—the matter that used to be him is now part of a black hole that is, right this moment, hurtling through space at an imprudent speed. We know that the black hole used to be Rich’s roommate’s cousin Fred, but now, who’s to say? Maybe it’s become some combination of Rich and Fred. Maybe they sleep in shifts to stay out of each other’s way. Or maybe Rich fought Fred for control and won, and now the black hole is Rich, and only Rich. Except Noah Baumbach is there, too, and he’s much more chill now—a nice kitty. Yeah, that sounds good. In 26,127.4 years, Rich will collide with another black hole on the other side of the Milky Way. Rich doesn’t know this yet, but she’s actually a very nice girl. They’re going to get along great.



# For Rent

by Gloria Garrunkel

A writer was looking for characters for a new story and decided to rent out a room in his brain, thinking it might attract someone interesting. Given the poor real estate market, there were no takers, and he decided to offer the room for free as a “pleasant place to stop for tea and company.” The entry fee would be simply to tell their tale. The first person to stop by was a disheveled man, clearly homeless.

“And how did this come to be?” asked the writer.

“I had a good job, health insurance. Then my wife got sick, I had to keep taking her to the hospital, I got fired, I lost my insurance, my medical bills piled up, I lost the house, my kids and my wife live with her sister but there’s no room for me and I try to pick up odd jobs and beg when I can’t and sleep in a shelter. That’s my story.”

“How mundane,” said the writer. “What about your earliest memories?”

“I remember my father holding a gun to my mother’s head. I’m not sure if I really saw it or if it was a dream. And finding my baby sister blue in her crib.”

“Any happy memories?”

“My grandfather had a friend with stables. He’d take me out there to ride horses. Those were the happiest times of my life.”

“Listen, I can’t do anything with your material. You can sleep here tonight, but be gone at sunrise.”

The next morning, the writer was at his desk feeling dark and surly when there was a knock at the door. Standing there was a tall, heavy-set woman with an eye-patch in a red cape flanked by two black Great Danes.

“Are you the private investigator?” she asked.

“I am indeed,” he said.

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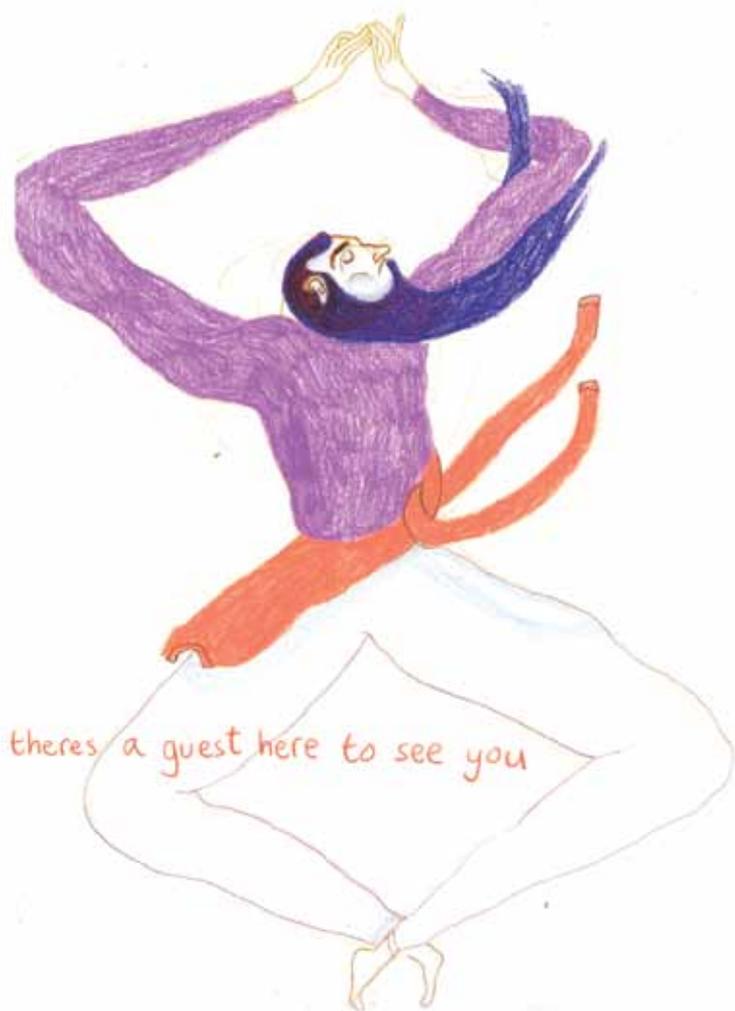
# Boringer's Theory

by Gloria Garfunkel

At the age of twenty-two, Harry Simpkin was proclaimed a literary genius based on his first and last novel that was followed by the longest writer's block in history as he lived until the age of ninety-two. He knew he could never achieve the magnificence of his first fictional masterpiece, so he never attempted to write fiction again, and instead went to graduate school in philosophy writing a dissertation on the obscure nineteenth century German philosopher Fritz Boringer whose paradigm-shattering theory *The Non-Existence of Being* was completely repudiated by his contemporaries Krumholtz, Niedelmann, and Platzger.

Simpkin spent the rest of his life in the universe of academia, teaching and studying a subject he liked. Not loved. There was no passion. All of Simpkin's passion had been spent on his novel. His life after that was dry, ossified. He lost his sense of wonder. It was as if he walked through the rest of his life a ghost of whom he might have been, or was supposed to be, the great novelist who began a career at twenty-two and then, for unknown reasons, derailed. It's as if Boringer were speaking directly to him, Simpkin, through the years and that though Boringer was misunderstood by his contemporaries, Simpkin understood him perfectly.

If Simpkin believed in reincarnation, which he did not, as he was a philosopher, not a religious fanatic, he might have thought he was Boringer reincarnated. His life perfectly bore out Boringer's theory. The papers he presented at conferences became less and less theoretical and more and more autobiographical, puzzling his colleagues. But instead of the usual one or two people coming to hear him talk, he started to draw crowds of fifty, a hundred, two hundred people. His lectures drew not only the philosophers at the conference but the servers at the buffet, the cleaning crew, the book sellers. He suspended time and space for a whole room of silent people through the idea of the non-existence of being and then, at the end, he would stop speaking and they would all tumble to the floor and the clocks would start ticking, and everyone, everyone would feel grateful to be.













# The Better Death Bureau

by Sarah Overland

We found the body behind our compost bin. It was a woman's body, but much more than that was difficult to tell. The woman had clothes on - the expensive, hiking kind. They were holding up to the weather way better than the woman. Her sandals looked new, but her feet were blackened and swollen.

Molly fetched the gasoline tank and Roger piled up the dead leaves.

Molly said, "Got any matches?"

Roger said, "You know we quit smoking."

We had quit three weeks before. About the time this woman kicked the bucket behind our compost heap, by the looks of her. We made some tasteless jokes about that. Like we killed her in a nicotine-deprived rage. But we only chuckled with half our faces. Because that didn't happen - we didn't kill this woman. But we weren't rushing to telephone the police, either. Not after what they found in our basement last time.

"Personal use. Medicinal purposes," we had claimed. We weren't believed. Molly got only 2 months on a suspended sentence but Roger did a year. That was hard. We knew what the police would see here: suspicious death behind the drug dealers' house. We'd be locked away for sure. And since we started growing herbs instead of marijuana, we didn't have the money for a good, sleazy lawyer. Now we only had money for an honest, decent one who would make us a crappy plea bargain.

So we burned the body of that woman.

The sandals were a problem. "Those thick rubber bottoms are never going to burn," Molly said.

They did burn, though. All too well - as soon as they caught, the smoke billowed up thick and black. We worried about the neighbors.

"Oh hell, they'll just think the druggies next door are burning tires," Roger said.

"Burning tires is illegal. What if they call the cops?" Molly said.

We looked at each other, panicky for a moment. We decided to pile real tires around the lady. Just in case the police showed up, we'd have a cover story. (Paranoid? Maybe. Jail will do that.)

We rolled four worn-out pickup tires from the garage. We pushed them along fast, running behind. If tipped over, they were heavy and awkward and dirty to prop up; we worried about Roger's bad back and Molly's new khakis.

The smell from the burning tires was awful. We went inside and fixed ourselves martinis, just in case this was our last evening of freedom. We wondered where the dead woman came from.

"She seemed young."

"Yeah. Hard to tell with her face mostly gone, but her body looked like she was 30 at the most."

"Think she was from around here?"

"Na. Only city people wear clothes like that. Trying too hard to look outdoorsy. Besides, we haven't heard of anyone going missing, have we?"

"Her poor family."

"Yeah. Poor family." We looked out the window at the enormous black cloud hanging over our yard. We sipped our martinis.

The fire died down a while later and we went out to check on the body. We were a little tipsy. Most of her was gone, but there were still bits of bone. The skull was pretty obvious, even under all that dirty black ash.

"Shit. This is why murderers get caught all the time. Faulty body disposal."

We put what was left of her into the compost bin - luckily we had a huge one, shaped like a concrete mixer. If we added manure in with the fall leaves, she'd be turned to rich soil in no time. Especially if we rotated the drum enough - it worked like a charm on everything else.

"The compost won't be organic after all those awful tire chemicals."

"No. But we'll dump her out behind the back pasture afterwards. We don't have to use her on the herbs." That was our new (low-profit) business: organic herbs. The oregano and rosemary were in the greenhouse. The hardier stuff was outside. All our hydroponic equipment from the basement had been seized.

Later that evening, the sheriff visited. We scurried to put away the martini glasses and the gin. No need to make a bad impression.

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## Used Gravitrans

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“You folks burnin’ tires out here?”

We had decided beforehand to come clean right away. That’s the key to a good cover story.

“Yeah, sorry Sheriff. We did indeed. You know they cost forty dollars to take to the dump?” Molly said.

“Forty dollars EACH. We had four to get rid of.” Roger added.

The sheriff nodded in sympathy. “I hear you. Those tree huggers are crazy about them tires. Don’t like it much myself, but I’m going to have to fine you. Tell you what, I’ll only fine you for one tire.”

“That’s kind of you.”

“That way you save some money. The fine’s a hundred dollars.”

The second body was a man. A rather overweight, greying man. He lay in the same place, behind the compost bin.

“What the hell?” Roger said.

“This is getting weird,” Molly said.

We stood over the body awhile. Going through scenarios.

“We have to call the police,” Molly said.

“Molly, are you on drugs?”

“You know very well I’m not on drugs, Roger! But this is crazy - two dead bodies?”

“Exactly. How are we going to explain dead body number one?”

“We don’t have to - she’s gone.”

“Gone? You’ve seen CSI! One q-tip sweep of that pile of newly disturbed earth and they’ll find some teeny bone fragment we missed. They find everything.”

“They find everything? Who’s they? I’m pretty sure Sheriff Thomas doesn’t know how to do a DNA swab.”

In the end, we decided to burn the man, too. This time with no tires. We took off his shoes, just in case. It was cold by then, and frosty. We piled firewood around him and pretended it was a brush fire. We went in for martinis, like last time. We got quite drunk, and discussed which of our neighbors was the serial killer.

Afterwards, a lot of the man was left, but we put on dishwashing

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gloves and stuffed him in the compost bin. "At least this time he'll be organic," Roger said.

"His clothes aren't," Molly said.

"Don't be such a stickler."

"I am holding a man's femur in my hands, Roger, and not complaining. Still want to call me a stickler?"

After that, we kept a suspicious eye on our neighbors. Roger was sure it was the man living on the other side of the back field. "He's always been weird. Shifty little piggy eyes."

We scoured the newspapers for mention of missing persons. We continued to dump our eggshells and coffee grounds in the compost bin and rotate it once a week, and tried not to look inside.

"Do you think they could just be dying here? I don't see any signs of violence." Roger gestured at dead body number three, a middle-aged woman. She was still warm.

"Again with the CSI. Maybe it's a death pilgrimage?"

"To our compost heap?"

"They want to return to the earth. Ashes to ashes and all that."

"We better build a fence."

Molly untied the woman's shoes. Roger went to fetch the firewood. By then we carried matches in our pockets, having taken up smoking again. (Stress.)

Besides all the dead people, it was unusual for us to get visitors. We were mostly shunned by our country neighbors, being ex-cons and suppliers of weed and all. We knew they called us "herb" farmers, drawing out the word and making finger quotes in the air. It was understandable.

So when a shiny out-of-state sedan pulled up in our driveway, we figured: law enforcement. Or maybe a lost tourist looking for the wind cave near here that no one seems to be able to find.

We have a small opening to the cave near the flowerbed. It sighs when the weather is right, a stream of cool breath blowing in a steady flow. Other times we walk by and feel the intake of air from around our legs. Like the ground is gasping in shock. It's to do with barometric pressure. Or dew point. Or something.

## Used Gravitrans

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The signage to the wind cave main entrance is unclear, and sometimes tourists stop by to ask for directions.

When we opened the door to the girl standing on our porch, though, we figured she must be on the lookout for drugs. This was no police officer or tourist. She had dark, dull hair of the kind that came from a bottle - and metal sticking out of her nose, her eyebrows, and to our slight shock when she opened her mouth to speak, her tongue. Ouch.

"Listen, dear, we don't sell drugs anymore. You've come to the wrong place," Molly said.

She raised her eyebrows and checked her clipboard, flipping one page, then another. We glanced at each other - the clipboard didn't quite jive if she were here to score some weed.

She tried to make a note on one of the forms, but her purse strap fell down her arm. She hefted it back up and said, "No, no. I'm here from the Better Death Bureau. It's about the bodies. I'm so sorry to be late."

We took a step back from the door.

She stuck her head in with a big smile, "Sorry, didn't mean to scare you. I'm here in peace! Can I come in?" She walked towards us, but tripped over the threshold and her clipboard clattered to the floor. "Whoops!"

We motioned towards the living room sofas. We sat down around our big coffee table and lit up cigarettes immediately.

She said her name was Marguerite. She worked for an agency helping people towards better deaths.

"By our compost bin?"

Marguerite nodded, "Among other places. Many people like the thought of their bodies going to help new life grow. On farms, in gardens."

Molly looked at Roger and raised her eyebrows. "SEE? Ashes to ashes, just like I said."

"So the people coming to us want to die?"

Marguerite nodded, "Our clients are terminally ill. They want to die peacefully, that's all. Not make a fuss. Disappear."

"But don't people want to die at home? Surrounded by family? On pain killers?"

Marguerite said, "Certainly. That's considered a Pretty Good Death." She bent over her giant purse, and pulled out breath mints, a janitor-size set of keys, a lone sock, a hatchet (at this point we looked at each

other with what-the-hell eyebrows) and finally a handful of pamphlets. She pushed a colorful brochure towards us and continued with her rankings of various types of death.

“Perfect Death is sudden and painless. Unexpected heart attack in your sleep, for example. We can’t do that. But as I mentioned, we are the Better Death Bureau. Many people have no family, or no medical insurance, or a really awful disease that is going to have them choking to death on their own saliva while their minds still work. That’s considered the Worst Death. Those people come to us. We offer a Better Death.”

“You are crazy.”

“I’m so sorry I wasn’t here earlier. This is not supposed to happen, obviously, but we have a huge backlog. Your paperwork was lost.”

“Yeah, probably in that purse,” Roger said.

“But you’ve obviously been doing a great job on your own!” She smiled big at us.

We sat staring into her cheery face, at a complete loss.

Marguerite rose from her seat and said, “Well, I’ll leave you some literature. Please get in touch. We are willing to offer compensation. You are doing these people a great service.” She tried to hand her card to us, but we wouldn’t touch it. She placed it on the table.

Roger seemed to pull himself out of shock, pointed to the door and said, “Please leave. We do not give our permission for these people to die here!”

“They have to die somewhere. Death is the last great taboo in our society, but there’s no reason to be afraid!” She turned to wave as she walked out the door, bumping her hip into the frame and catching her purse strap on the knob. “Ouch! Sorry, bye!”

One day out of the blue, the sheriff visited. He said. “So how are you doing?”

“Fine,” we said at the same time, and glanced at each other. Suspicious. We could see on the sheriff’s face that we came off sounding suspicious.

“How’s the business? Spices, was it?”

“Herbs - like oregano and dill,” Molly said, gesturing towards the fields, brown after the frost.

## Used Gravitrans

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“You sure have a high fence.”

We nodded. We built it higher and higher, but the dead people kept showing up.

“I hear you have stuff growing in the basement again?”

“Only basil and some of the other tender herbs now in the offseason. Come down and take a look.” Roger said. We knew that’s what the sheriff wanted to see.

On walking into the hallway, the sheriff said, “Wow, you folks have a lot of shoes!” they lined the hallway on shelves. It felt disrespectful to throw them out.

Molly said, “Yes, I’ve got a thing for shoes - like that crazy lady from the Philippines...” Molly paused, then remembered the name, “Imelda Marcos!” and laughed. It was an act - we’d been cracking Imelda Marcos jokes for months. (Cover story). We hoped the sheriff wasn’t so observant to notice the shoes were all different sizes.

Downstairs, the lights kept the basil huge. The sheriff walked down each aisle, asking about the different varieties, smelling the leaves. “They look healthy,” he said. And they did - it did not escape us that our herbs had never looked or tasted better.

The sheriff asked, “What kind of soil do you use? My wife would love some. She tries to garden, but her thumbs aren’t very green.” He reached into one of the planters and grabbed a handful of dirt.

We froze as he brought it to his nose and sniffed.

“Interesting. It almost smells ashy. Like it’s burnt.”

Molly said, “It’s our secret ingredient. I’ll bag some up for your wife if you like.”

The next week was the opening of hunting season and we sat in the deer stand, our rifles at the ready, watching the clearing in the woods. We couldn’t smoke because the smell would alert the deer, so abstinence had us feeling fidgety.

Molly whispered, “When it’s my time, I want to go out and collapse by the compost bin, too.”

“What?”

“It’s nice out there. It would be a peaceful death. That way I can come back as a flower. Or a bay leaf. Flavor some soup.”

“That reminds me, let’s make stew from the venison this year. That’s my favori-“ Roger narrowed his eyes, then pointed slowly.

Molly turned her head to see the buck limping into the clearing. Blood was dried in black streaks over his hindquarters where he had been shot. His tongue hung out of his mouth and his flanks heaved. He made strange, grunting noises we had never heard a deer make. His legs shook as if he had been running all day.

We scanned the edge of the forest, looking for the orange of a hunter, but the brush was still and quiet.

Roger raised his rifle and took aim.

Afterwards, when we could light up cigarettes and speak without spooking the buck, Molly’s voice shook with anger. “That poor animal. Why can’t people wait until they have a decent shot? He’s been suffering all day.”

“I’d guess he was shot yesterday, maybe even the day before,” Roger said.

Molly said what we were both thinking. “I’m starting to wonder if we should help these dying people. Maybe it isn’t wrong.”

We dug Marguerite’s card out from the back of the junk drawer, and a few days later she was back sitting on our couch.

“So you are an assisted suicide company? You give them pills?” Roger asked.

“No, no. Definitely not. Our methods are confidential, but have to do with inner peace.” She began digging around in her purse - a different one, purple leather this time, but just as large. She pulled out a roll of toilet paper and a wrench.

“The cops would arrest you in a second.”

Finally she found the paper she was looking for, held it up in triumph.

“That would not be possible as we do absolutely nothing illegal. However, we do not like the negative publicity. People are so uppity when it comes to dying. Which is why we are prepared to pay you.”

“And how do they end up here?”

“A map. They come through the cave.” She handed us the crumpled paper from her purse. The words Sacred Wind Cave were printed across the top.

## Used Gravitrans

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We nodded. We had figured as much. There was no way sick people could climb over our fence now that it was so tall. And yet they kept coming. The opening to the wind cave was just big enough for a person.

Marguerite continued, “The wind cave has very special properties and branches that run under this whole area. The cave has been considered holy by the local native people since ancient times. Plus our clients love how beautiful your farm is. They want to be a part of it. And of course it has handy body disposal.”

“Our compost bin.”

“Exactly.”

We took down the fence and planted a circular flowerbed next to the compost, with a stone path curving towards a wooden bench. We ordered a brass plaque printed with the words, REST HERE, and screwed it to the back of the bench. The bodies began to show up there instead of lying on the ground. There was one every season or so, lying on its side, knees pulled up and hands tucked between them. Quiet.

Sometimes we rest there ourselves on nice days. Sharing our once-daily cigarette. The breeze from the wind cave on our bare calves. The herbs wafting their beautiful scents (with just the tiniest tinge of smoke) in our direction.

The Chronicles  
of Tim  
will return in  
the next issue.

Individuals with Long Standing Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus (T2DM) have Secondary Symptoms of Low Grade Systemic Inflammation:

An essay concerning T2DM and its accompanying financial breakdown analyzed within the confines of Missy Elliot's 2002 critically acclaimed Billboard hit "Work It"

by Elfa Heimdahl

“Work It”

Missy Elliot

*This is a Missy Elliott one-time exclusive (Come on)*

[Chorus 1]

*Is it worth it, let me work it*

*I put my thing down, flip it and reverse it*

*Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I*

*Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I*

*(I put my thing down, flip it and reverse it [backwards 2X])*

*If you got a big \*\*\*\*(insert sound of elephant trumpeting here),  
let me search yah*

*And find out how hard I gotta work yah*

*Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I*

*Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I*

*(I put my thing down, flip it and reverse it [backwards 2X])*

It should be noted that Ms. Elliot is using the trumpeting of *Loxodonta africana* (or African elephant) here as a euphemistic sound illustration for the human male (*Homo sapiens*) penis. While diabetes has not yet been observed to act as a contributing factor to an increase in penis girth (certainly not to the size and scale of the average elephant<sup>1</sup> trunk, which can grow in lengths of 6 feet and weigh up to 400 pounds!) it has, however, been implicated in increased levels of Albuminuria (which occurs when the protein albumen—which is made by the liver and can be found in the white of a chicken egg—presents itself in the urine of type II diabetic (T2DM) patients as a cream colored foam). In a study performed at the University College of Medicine in Taiwan, researchers found that an increase in levels of albumen in the urine can act as reliable indicators of erectile dysfunction, especially in long standing diabetic patients. Erectile dysfunction is not typically looked for in the general treatment of diabetes (though it is a common side effect of this disease state) and perhaps, a urine test that includes testing for albumen levels should be included in the diabetic males monthly physical.

Urine Test: \$15-30

Uninsured physical: \$85-\$110

Viagra (generic): \$1.50/pill

<sup>1</sup> There is currently no data available that illuminates the effect T2DM has had on Global Elephant Populations (it can be assumed, at least, that it is lower on the spectrum of ailments than death by illegal poaching in the case of wild elephants, and arthritis with accompanying joint pain in the case of domesticated ones).

## Used Gravitrans

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[Verse 1]

*I'd like to get to know ya so I could show ya  
Put the pussy on ya like I told ya  
Gimme all your numbers so I could phone ya  
Your girl actin' stank then call me ovah  
Not on the bed, lay me on your sofa  
Phone before you come, I need to shave my chocha  
You do or you don't or you will or won'tcha  
Go downtown and eat it like a vult-cha*

Perhaps this young man's female companion is "acting stank" because T2DM has begun to affect her autonomic nervous system (ANS). T2DM is characterized by persistent, systemic, low-grade inflammation. This sustained level of inflammation combined with increased levels of glucose in the bloodstream can lead to nerve damage through degradation of the myelin sheath, a layer of fat and protein that wraps around the nerves of the body allowing them to relay messages in an efficient, protected way. A pivotal 1986 survey of women with T2DM found that 35% of them had issues with lubrication of the vaginal canal during intercourse, and that in 85% of these cases these issues began to occur only after being diagnosed with T2DM. This lubrication concern has been linked to neuropathy occurring in the ANS.

The frustration there must be immense, that, regardless of the manner in which you attempt to provide sexual pleasure to your lover—whether that be found:

- In between the pilled and faded Star Trek sheets of your weathered oak childhood twin bed while visiting your parents labor day weekend
  - On a micro suede couch that you knew was a bad purchase in raw almond, but couldn't resist how clean it looked (but not in a sterile way) next to that actual bowl of raw almonds you set down adjacent to it
  - While performing "cat" play (often characterized by one or both partners making guttural purring sounds and feeding each other Fancy Feast as a sexy pate off of one another's soft, dimpled bodies)
  - The ever exciting vulture position, which involves a lot of sitting in a corner and watching your partner sleep while wearing a foam beak over your nose
- she is unable to without the help of repeated applications of lubrication.

Yes, we understand that the temptation this young man must be experiencing when presented with a female who can provide him with an unencumbered sexual release that his girlfriend may not be able to give him, must certainly be an enticing reality for him. But, we would encourage him to explore other options. He began this relationship for a reason. He's

in love. This young man is in love, and while the opportunity doesn't often come along to sleep with a multi-platinum internationally celebrated musical artist who presumably does not have any diabetes related issues with her vagina, it does not negate the commitment he had made, those many moons ago, to his severely diabetic partner.

Warming Sensations Lubricant-5oz: \$11.95

*See my hips and my tips, don'tcha*  
*See my ass and my lips, don'tcha*  
*Lost a few pounds in my waifs fo' yah*  
*This the kinda beat that go ra-ta-ta*  
*Ra-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta*

Good for you Missy, good for you! Congratulations on losing the weight. While we don't feel that losing those few pounds for a perspective partner is necessarily a healthy, or lasting, approach to weight loss (just remember: you are a beautiful, talented woman who doesn't need a man in her life who only focuses on pant size) it is a positive indication that you are taking control of a diabetes free future. In a seven-year study released in 1997 in the journal Obesity, it was observed that waist-to-hip ratio was the best indicator to predict impending diabetes.

What is waist-to-hip ratio, and how do I calculate it? Good question we assume you were thinking, Missy! Essentially, waist-to-hip ratio is a number that allows you to understand body composition and, as we have just learned, potential for disease state. You see, when people carry excess fat around their waist that means that fat is also being stored viscerally, on their organs, which over time, will impair function. One way to calculate waist-to-hip ratio at home would be to measure around the smallest part of your waist and then measure around the largest part of your hips. Finally, divide the measurement from your waist by the measurement from you hips. For women, that number should be less than 0.8 and less than 0.9 for men.

12ft measuring tape in canary yellow: \$4

*Sex me so good I say blah-blah-blah*  
*Work it, I need a glass of watah*  
*Boy, oh, boy, it's good to know yah*

Do you get thirsty often Missy? What about your average level of fatigue, would you say it is unnaturally high? Have you noticed an increased need for some sort of ocular vision enhancement, such as spectacles or

## Used Gravitrans

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a monocle? Are any of the abrasions you may have incurred while diving into your vaulted pool of gold coins healing at a slower rate than usual?<sup>2</sup> Do you have unexplained weight loss or have you been purchasing greater quantities of lotion to ease your dry, irritated skin? Any issues with your sex life? We know that it would not appear to be so from the content of your lyrics, but perhaps, you are reminiscing on better times or your songs are an attempt to compensate for your ever-changing, sexually failing body? Have your feet and hands begun to tingle and twinkle and shake against your will?

If these symptoms have been occurring on a regular basis then perhaps you have been touring too much and should take a sabbatical to refocus and assess the future of your career...or, perhaps, you have diabetes.

Soft Shimmer Lotion-10oz: \$6.81

Reading Glasses: \$15

24-pack Bottled Spring Water-16.9oz/bottle: \$6.99

Band-Aids 10: \$3

### *[Chorus 2]*

*Is it worth it, let me work it*

*I put my thing down, flip it and reverse it*

*Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I*

*Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I*

*(I put my thing down, flip it and reverse it [backwards 2X])*

*If you got a big \*\*\*(elephant trumpeting), let me search yah*

*And find out how hard I gotta work yah*

*Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I*

*Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I*

*(I put my thing down, flip it and reverse it [backwards 2X])*

*(Come on)*

### *[Verse 2]*

*If you a fly gal get your nails done*

*Get a pedicure, get your hair did*

You may have a hard time finding someone to touch your feet if you are diabetic because you are at an increased risk of developing the toenail fungus onychomycosis. Oh, you are unfamiliar with this particular fungus? Perhaps you know it by its street name, “ringworm of the nail.”

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<sup>2</sup> Oh, you know what, we got you confused with Scrooge McDuck, the richest duck in all of Walt Disney World. We feel that it is understandable, you two are virtually unidentifiable from each other, in earning power and gold accessories at least, ever since you were awarded “Cash Queen” by Madame Noir Business. A website dedicated to The Black Female Professional.

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*Boy, lift it up, let's make a toast-a*

We love toast too, Missy, but you and I both know that you really shouldn't be eating carbohydrates if you have trouble regulating your insulin levels. It may be beneficial for you to adopt a low fruit, high vegetable, lean protein diet plan. Thought, if you are able to forgo meat altogether that may provide quicker results, there has been encouraging evidence that a raw vegan diet can reverse the effects of T2DM.

Vegan Cookbook: \$11

*Let's get drunk, that's gonna' bring us closah  
Don't I look like a Halle Berry postah*

Halle Berry has T2DM. We know, we know, how? Why? Are we sure it's not type 1 diabetes? Is anyone safe from diabetes foul grip? It would appear not. Most people get T2DM from their diet, but in Berry's case she acquired it from her family history. The woman with the five star abs and the one star 2004 film Catwoman has to regulate her insulin to keep her feet attached to her legs just like every other diabetic out there.

*See the Belvedere playin' tricks on yah  
Girlfriend wanna be like me, nevah  
You won't find a bitch that's even bettah  
I make you hot as Las Vegas weathah*

*Listen up close while I take it backwards  
Sdrawkcab ti ekat ot ekil yssim yaw eht hctaw  
(Watch the way Missy like to take it backwards)  
I'm not a prostitute, but I could give you what you want  
I love your braids and your mouth full of fronts*

We think it's really great of you Missy to not make this person who has dentures feel bad about themselves. It is such a shame though, that they let their diabetes induced periodontitis last as long as it did untreated. You'd think that this person with the enviable braids would have wanted to manage that gum infection well before their teeth started to go all soft and fall out of their mouth and leave their braids all alone on the top of their head to deal with all of the women who don't identify themselves as sex workers, but know how to and are willing to act like one for free. It may have been prudent for this young man and his braids to go to some sort of physician around the change in breath odor and bleeding gums phase.

## Used Gravitrons

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*Love the way my ass go babump-babump-bump  
Keep your eyes on my babump-babump-bump  
And think you can handle this gadunk-gadunk-dunk  
Take my thong off and my ass go whoom  
Cut the lights on so you see what I could do*

Missy, the audience to whom you are speaking may need more than the lights on to follow the trajectory path that the arc of your backside is cutting through the air in front of them. Diabetic retinopathy can cause glaucoma, blindness, retinal detachment, floaters (particles that obscure your field of vision), and areas of vision loss. Don't worry though, because,

“Many people with early diabetic retinopathy have no symptoms before major bleeding occurs in the eye” (Topiwala, et al. 2012), and we're sure you would have noticed if any of their eyes were bleeding when you turned the lights on so that they could “see what you could do.”

*[Chorus 3]*

*Is it worth it, let me work it  
I put my thing down, flip it and reverse it  
Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I  
Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I  
(I put my thing down, flip it and reverse it [backwards 2X])  
If you got a big \*\*\*(elephant trumpeting), let me search yah  
And find out how hard I gotta work yah  
Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I  
Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I  
(I put my thing down, flip it and reverse it [backwards 2X])  
(Come on)*

*[Verse 3]*

*Boys, boys, all type of boys*

...have diabetes at the following rates according to the 2007-2009 National Health Survey...

*Black (12.6%), white (7.1%), Puerto Rican (13.8%), Chinese (8.4%) boys  
Why-thai,-thai-o-toy-o-thai-thai  
Why-thai,-thai-o-toy-o-thai-thai  
Girl, girl, get that cash*

...because the 10.8% of you who are diabetic are going to need some way to pay for your medication.

Medication, physician visits, glucose test strips: \$6000/year

*If it's 9 to 5 or shakin' your ass  
Ain't no shame, ladies do your thing  
Just make sure you ahead of the game*

Missy brings up a good point here, preventative healthcare is an approach that our countries physicians need to be pushing if we are ever going to get the 70% of deaths caused by chronic disease in this country down. One in every two adult Americans has a chronic disease that they are managing with pills instead of a regimen of moderate physical activity three to five times a week, and a healthy diet plan made to meet their specific nutritional needs. In 2010, one in every ten Americans had T2DM with projections at one in three by 2050. Again, Missy, we appreciate your candor and shrewdness when speaking out against the overmedication and under-treatment of the American Public. Brava.

*Just 'cause I got a lot of fame supah  
Prince couldn't get me change my name papa  
Kunta Kinte a slave again, no sir  
Picture black sayin', "Oh, yes-a masah"  
Picture Lil' Kim dating a pastah  
Minute Man, Big Red can outlast yah  
Who is the best I don't have to ask yah  
When I come out you won't even mattah  
Why you act dumb like "yuh, duh"  
So you act dumb like "Uh, duh"  
As the drummer boy go ba-rrrom-pop-pom-pom  
Give you some-some-some of this Cinnabon*

A classic Cinnabon cinnamon roll has 813 calories and 117 grams of carbohydrates. This is not a diabetes friendly treat. And, in point of fact Missy, the person who is "acting dumb" may actually be suffering from the advanced stages of Alzheimer's (or type 3 diabetes) as a result of eating those cinnamon rolls. Diabetes is characterized by secondary symptoms of systemic low-grade inflammation. When ones body is subjected to that inflammation for long periods of time neuropathy (damage to the myelin sheath surrounding the nerves and the nerve itself) occurs. The largest collection of nerves in the human body is the brain. If you would like to avoid dementia later in life it may be prudent to decline the Cinnabon cinnamon roll that Missy Elliot is offering you in favor of some type of cruciferous vegetable such as cauliflower or broccoli and a piece of white fish.

## Used Gravitrans

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Tilapia-4 6oz steaks: \$24

Cauliflower per lb: \$1.74

*[Chorus 4]*

*Is it worth it, let me work it*

*I put my thing down, flip it and reverse it*

*Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I*

*Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I*

*(I put my thing down, flip it and reverse it [backwards 2X])*

*If you got a big \*\*\*(elephant trumpeting), let me search yah*

*And find out how hard I gotta work yah*

*Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I*

*Ti esrever dna ti pilf, nwod gniht ym tup I*

*(I put my thing down, flip it and reverse it [backwards 2X])*

*(Come on)*

*To my fellas*

*I like the way you work that*

*To my ladies*

*You sure know how to work that*

While Ms. Elliot does a thorough job of approaching the subject of Type 2 Diabetes on the total system level, we feel that a more pointed approach to the study of Individual System Destruction may be in order for the curious mind. One can think of many potential platforms for research: the glia of the upper GI tract as explored through Beyonce's Get Me Bodied, or, how Long-Standing Systemic Inflammation may affect to composition of H. Pylori in the stomach researched through the medium of one of T-Pain's lesser known musical compositions, Yo Stomach. Yes, a pinpointed view on the microscopic level has potential to lead to more cohesive therapies for the patients of T2DM.

But as Ms. Elliot mentions earlier in verse three, so would adopting a non-standard eating plan.

Overall breakdown of a diabetic lifestyle per year (excluding major health issues and more than one Viagra pill):

\$6,185.99-\$6,225.99

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# Six-Pack Story

by Helen Stevens

## Drink 1

A few years ago I discovered the Up Series. In 1964 they selected fourteen children aged 7 and interview them every seven years. They mention this quote "Give me a child until he is seven and I will give you the man." I think about this quote sometimes. Are we essentially the same person that we were when we were 7 years old?

If you told me what my life was going to be like when I was seven, I would have thought you were being silly. If you told me even 7 years ago that I would one day not be Mormon, I would drink, have sex outside of marriage, smoke pot and work in a bar I would have thought you were some weirdo crazy person.

Not to say that what we do is who we are... in many ways I am very similar to my seven year old self. I cry in sad movies, I love animals, I love art, I love to sing, I feel a greatness inside of me, I want my friends close to me, I don't really embrace all things "feminine".

I am just saying it is ironic that I am drinking and writing somewhat publicly about it. There is that small Mormon voice inside of me that is terrified that my Mormon friends will read this, but then my real brain says, so what if they read it. They all know you left. They still love you, regardless of wither you are a disappointment to them or not.

Which makes me think about the super ego. The importance of what our group thinks about us. Yikes.

I am going to guess that some of you are thinking something along the lines of, "Well now you can be free from all that religious dogma. You can be normal person. Those Mormons are a cult." I have discovered that although my old religion saw most of the world as a black and white. Life is grey. There are somethings that are black and white, but really most of life is grey, grey, grey; which includes my Mormon past. Some of it really hurt my heart, but some of it I think fondly of.

There is a feeling you get when you think you have it all figured out. That your plan is fool proof and you will be rewarded in the end for how you did it right. There was a special connection there, to God, to your fellow members. That if you traveled there would almost always be

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someone in that town or city who would be Mormon who would help you in a pinch. Which for me never happened, but the idea was comforting.

I could never go back in a similar way you can never go back to believing in Santa Clause. And I am not going to go to the other believing children and ruin Christmas. It is working for them. It didn't hurt them like it hurt me.

I started drinking about 4 years ago. I remember my first real drink with great clarity – it was a white Russian – I know weird first drink, I was going off a friends recommendations. I remember it made me feel comforted. Like when you are tired and you are getting ready for bed and you are thinking, “Man I am so tired, I am going to sleep and it is going to be awesome.” To me being drunk is like that feeling just before you head hits the pillow.

### Drink 2

When I left the Mormon faith I didn't plan on drinking alcohol ever. I thought, “Hey, it is expensive, I have lived for this long without it. I won't drink.” After about 8 months of being what I called a “normal person” I listened to a This American Life Story about the most drunk university, Pen State. The story is called #1 Party School. I was listening to the interviews about how much fun it was. One guy said, “If I had a drunk button...” and I thought, “Really it is that awesome? Okay I'll give it a try.” I will be honest with you there was a bit of fear that I had, that I could some day become an alcoholic. I didn't understand back then that most people don't become alcoholics.

Oh Goodness... should tell you about my night of debauchery? I think I heard the crowd scream “YES!”

Well I think life is full of surprises. Well one of the surprises of my life was when I met a girl I felt attracted to. I really can't describe why I thought she was interesting. I met her at a Karaoke bar. I spoke with her that evening and found out that we shared a conservative religious past. We exchanged numbers. A week or so later she invited me out. I met up with her and her male companion. They were already drunk and acting strange... God I already regret starting this... she kept on trying to get him to go outside and have a smoke alone. But he resisted her prodding and eventually turned to me and said, “Would you rather kiss me or her”. I avoided the question the best I could. When he was gone I told my friend that I was definitely straight, but that maybe someday I would kiss a girl.

The night progressed. I feel like you should be listening to Rihanna's We Found Love, because it was on where ever we went. We drank, we danced, we laughed. That male friend left and a new one joined. I had a few more drinks. We went to a gay bar. A met some weirdo. In a moment when we were alone, she asked to kiss me. We kissed. Men you are sexy and fun, but those whiskers. They sometimes ruin the fun. Sometimes you want a little pain with your pleasure. Kissing this girl drunk with no whiskers... was what I wanted that night.

### Drink 3

Maybe some of you are asking in your hearts, "Why don't Mormons drink alcohol?" Good think I am here to tell you. Or maybe you don't care? Just skip this paragraph if the second question is yours. So imagine it is 1830's or 1840's. I am a little hazy on what the year was. Anyways Joseph Smith is the Mormon boss. He has this awesome wife named Emma. So Joseph is hanging with his fellow Mormon leaders talking Mormon stuff about how they are going to organize everything. While they are sorting the shit out they are into chewing tobacco. Which is gross. They were trying to spit into spittoons. Emma's job was to clean up after the men. (My modern feminist mind is bristling at the idea of cleaning up after some guy fest). Anyways, Emma who is after my own mind is grossed out and says to Joseph, this is gross. You should ask God if this is okay. So Joseph asks God. God then reveals to Joseph some modern scripture (which he had been doing for some time). This book is called the Doctrine and Covenants. Sometimes Mormons all the D&C. ( little medical thing a D&C is a term for something very different, don't look it up unless you are okay being REALLY grossed out). Anyways back to the Joseph, this scripture is now referred to as "The Word of Wisdom". It says don't drink alcohol, or "strong drink - which means coffee/tea, go to bed early, get up early, eat meat sparingly, or in times of winter or famine. There is more shit in there.

PS- I love Lady Gaga.

So in the beginning this "scripture" is just suggested. But then earlier in this century Mormons were kinda seen as regular, but Mormons want to be seen as a "peculiar people" They want to be noticed. They want to be set apart, like they are chosen. So people say wow those Mormon really got it together and live healthy...

Do they encourage exercise and eating a healthy diet?.... I won't answer that question.

## Used Gravitrans

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### Drink 4

God, I am more than my Mormon past, but for some reason I can't think of much more to say than things that are connected. Except that fios is coming to my neighborhood and I can't wait to say Good Bye to Time Warner and their slow ass internet and HORRIBLE customer service.

Okay, sex... look when I was a virgin I figured that you guys were talking about sex and definitely had it figured out by your mid 20s. That anything I had to say about the subject would be like reading your teenage journal or college journal... that when I verbalize where I am at, when I express my... experience everyone would nod and say, "yeah I went through that a long time ago" but the truth is when I say stuff people blush and are shocked how blunt and open I am.

If you are imagining me to say something really sexy, I am going to disappoint you. Sometimes sex is not sexy.

So I found a lover who really got me excited. Who was focused on pleasing me... and the big O was not happening. I read and heard that I need to relax and enjoy the experience.... This is not necessarily the best advice... I relaxed I tried to let go and you know what happened? A QUEEF. A FUCKING QUEEF. IN FRONT OF one of the biggest crushes I have ever had.

Or when I was dating a sexually advanced man who was REALLY focused on anal sex... you can't see me, but my eyes are rolling. To those who love it good for you, I am happy for you, but I doubt you were getting your poop shoot lubed up after only a few years of experience and I am hopping you did it with someone you trusted and had a real relationship with. I had been with this guy for about 3 weeks. I wanted to scream. The relationship didn't last long.

Now when men ask for it I say, "When you are my boyfriend for a year ask me again and I'll consider it."

Also what I don't get is when men are like, "Let's have sex." And I am like "okay condom time", and they are like, "What? I don't want to use a condom. Can we have sex without one?" FOR HEALTH SAKE, FOR SCIENCE SAKE you should fucking be happy I am willing to entertain the idea of sex with you. You should be all about the condom and protecting yourself and me.

Sorry to be a Debbie downer, just had a recent... or many recent negative experiences.

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**Drink 5**

Where I grew up in Southern Alberta Canada, it is windy. REALLY windy. It didn't rain often. When it did it felt kinda magical. We would fast and pray for the farmers. Even now in NYC when it rains sometimes I think it is a miracle. I love the smell of rain, or just before it rains, when it is windy and warm. The sky is grey and you just don't know how strong the rain will be, or how long it will last. You just know that wet wet rain will fall. That you want to be inside when it hits the ground and turns dirt to mud and pavement to shiny sound effects.

When I was a child my grandparents had a very tall pin tree, maybe 4 stories tall. I would climb it. It was easy to climb. I remember when I was really young I would sometimes get scared and climb back down. When I was around 9 year old I tried to climb to the tip. To the very very top, wondering if the top of the tree would bend all the way over with the weight of my little body. I remember the smell of the sap. I found a piece of red yarn. When I climbed up I reached up and let the yarn entangle into the pine needles. Letting it be a mark as to how far I could reach.

In those days I was really into making witches potions out of what ever I could find: dirt, dead bugs, berries from juniper bushes, etc.

As a teenager my aunt and uncle bought my grandparents house. They changed much of the house. They cut down that pine tree. I guess it was a danger since there was the occasional wind storm that would blow over trees. I wonder if I climbed to its highest branches. I don't know if that red yarn was in the tree when it came down.

By then I was kissing boys in Lethbridge and fighting with my parents about my curfew.

I remember that last time I went to visit Southern Alberta a mother of one of my best friends asked me when I was moving back. I know now that she was trying to tell me that she wanted me around. But in the moment I was confused, I said, "That was never the plan. My life is in New York."

**Drink 6**

Man I don't get why people turn out the way they do. Life is grey. Some people said that once I left the Mormon Church I would get really crazy, have all kinds of crazy sex and do all the crazy drugs and get really

## Used Gravitrans

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drunk often. But that didn't happen.

I recently had a friend tell me that they are easily jealous because their father didn't pay them enough attention. My father didn't pay me much attention and I was glad cause he was cray cray and I find most men are dealing with their own issues that they usually throw on me and I really can't help them with.

We each got our own manicure in our maze to may lay.

Sometimes when I am trying to separate the wheat from the tares, the men who are worth my time from the ones who really don't get me, I talk about my enjoyment of Dungeons and Dragons.

Just think about sound for a moment. Something makes molecules in the air vibrate, they make other molecules vibrate, they eventually hit your ear drum which make electronic connections with your brain and they make you feel... pretty much every emotion possible. That is bezar.

Okay it is late, I am going to tell one more story then I got to go.

When I was in high school I was a drama geek. We had a festival with the surrounding communities. One year I made friends with a guy. Just because I am friendly. This was before the internet really got going. The next year this young man had a big frow and everyone was checking him out thinking he was the coolest guy (It was the 90s okay). Anyways I didn't recognize him and thought well this guy is the cool guy and I can't handle the fight to get his attention. But then he came to me and said my name. It was a special moment. I could tell that he wasn't into the hype and wanted a real connection or at least to say thanks for talking to me last year when no one gave a fuck about my flat hair.

Be nice to people and try to climb a tree. And be good to your body, give yourself enough sleep. Your body works so hard for you. Give it sleep. Like I am going to do now.

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# CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

**Sean Pessin** is a writing instructor at and proud alum of California State University, Northridge. His work has a bent for strange language, fabulist scenarios, and explicit references to what he is reading at the moment. He is currently attending Otis College of Art and Design, working towards his M.F.A. in Writing.

**Daniel Holloway** is a magazine editor living in Los Angeles. Visit [danielholloway.us](http://danielholloway.us).

**Kevin Hennessy** has been drawing since day one. He fell into the art crowds in Denver when he was a teen. Before long he was working enough to quit his kitchen job and focus on his real interest, tattooing. He's been tattooing five years now. This year he spent five months traveling and working at a tattoo shop in Oaxaca, Mexico. He resides currently in the Northwest, working on signs, tattooing at a shop in Boise and also doing a lot of screen and relief printing.

**Gloria Garfunkel** has a Ph.D. in Psychology from Harvard University and was a psychotherapist for thirty years. She is now a writer and has published over thirty stories.

**Sarah Overland** is originally from Minnesota, but has spent most of her adult life in Norway. Before becoming serious about writing, she was a management consultant. Now she spends her time raising three children and writing novels. Her fiction has appeared at Word Riot, The Sheepshead Review and Necessary Fiction.

**Keren Katz** is the illustrating half of The Katz Sisters duo. She is also the half that is not fictitious. Titles include "The Night Poetry Class in Room 1001", "Uncontested Spaces", "Before the Dark Gate", "Chronicles of the Falling Women" and "Crossing The Rubikon." Available through Domino Books and NO Press. For more of her work visit: <http://kerenkatz.carbonmade.com/>

**Mike Wiley** could not be reached for comment.

**Carly Berg** is a heart-shaped box with a couple of chocolates gone. Her stories appear in several dozen journals and anthologies, including PANK, Word Riot, Bartleby Snopes, and JMWJ, and she has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize as well. She can be found here: <http://www.carlyberg.com/index.html>

**Elfa Heimdahl** is a science enthusiast living in Chicago, IL.

From birth to the dawn of Adulthood the vast prairies, of Southern Alberta Canada, were **Helen Steven's** home. From this sparsely populated and artistically lacking area, she has made her way to New York City. Helen has been known to sing like an angel, play a guitar found in a dumpster, act in independent films, occasionally makes functional things like dressers, pencil holders and spice racks out of cardboard.

Fiction, poetry and complaints about this  
magazine may be submitted to:  
[usedgravitrons@gmail.com](mailto:usedgravitrons@gmail.com)

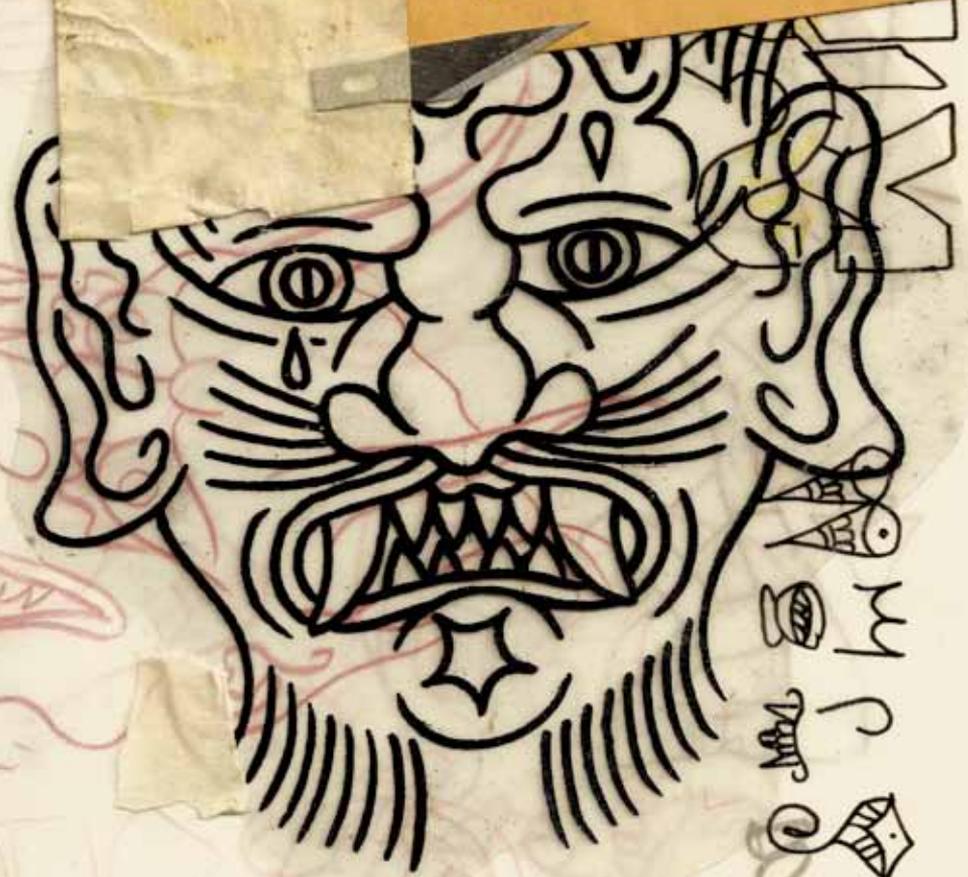
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