

◇ Defenestration ◇

Volume I, Issue IV

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A Third Person Study Of Myself
by
Brooke Bailey

Give me infamy
for being the crazy chick
that shoved Brooke Bailey's
empty head into
a high power paper shredder
with a crossword puzzle
about foreign things
that she forgot to finish,
too ignorant to fill in boxes
swearing the only exports
from Jamaica
where Marley and hash,
neither being five letters.

Mischief In The Heavens
by
Bryan Thao Worra

So here they go again:

Time with her pinwheel face

And Space, whose titanic feet

Stand tippy-toe

On

Cesium

Atoms

To peer over the fourth wall

For the sacred cookie jar of the gods.

How they frown to find it stuffed

With human souls that taste like carob.

It's like Karma coming by with another damn fruitcake

Joan's Question
by
Martha Braniff

In the stone church
of Lesser Towne,
Joan of Arc, Lorraine's maid,
prostrate on the transept floor,
her womb, a sacred sepulcher
of slandered witches.

As French armies fall, she prays
in a chapel where walls rage
with men-crushing dragons,
dead children hanging
on knights' silver shields,
a Savior dragging gilded cross,
flying horses,
and a spiked halo
on the Bishop.

Her mother, the organist,
and her father, the janitor,
try in vain to dissuade
Joan from listening
to the Angels who exhort her:

Beat the English.

March to Paris.

Send a hot epistle

to the Bishop of Beauvais,

insisting he

remain a loyal Frenchman.

A letter ignored at first,

then saved for her burning.

And at her trial,

the Bishop's main concern--

Joan dresses as a man.

Her last words to him,

a saint's simple query:

How can a woman fight a war,

if she wears a dress?

Chicken
by
Michael Levy

They called him;

not normal

un-serious

non-intellectual

a chicken hearted poet

They said his words were foul

from an academic standpoint

He replied;

It's just poultry in motion

We All Scream For Ice Cream

by
Deidra Garcia

The children of Greentown were not happy. Which was fairly odd, since none of them were regularly beaten. None of them had uncles that were always inviting them into the darkened rec room. None of them ever fell into the creek, causing them to break their legs and miss the big Halloween parade. None of them were orphans, or pressured to smoke cigarettes.

The children of Greentown should have been happy. They had huge yards to play in. They were allowed to run around and scream and break their toys, and yet were still not sent to bed without dinner.

Basically, the children of Greentown had everything a kid would need to have a fantastic childhood. Except for one thing. But that one thing meant everything in the world.

Because Greentown was a town without an ice cream man. No gentle strains of childish muzak filtered through the streets on hot summer days. No one heard the stampede of small feet as children recklessly threw themselves into the path of oncoming traffic just to get a Rocket Pop. And no one could really say why there wasn't an ice cream man. Old folks vaguely recalled having one years and years ago, but no one believed them because it was common knowledge that ice cream had been invented in 1974. With no gentle ice cream man to peddle his sweet wares up and down the main street, the children of Greentown grew bratty and lethargic. Their high school football team always lost the championships, and no one really knew why until someone would shake his head and say, "That's the town without an ice cream man." And then everyone would pity the poor football players as they trudged, broken-hearted, back to their bus.

This went on for awhile, the children of Greentown building clubhouses, having sleep-overs, and attending school without any zest for life at all. Until one day, Old Zeb, the town barber, found something peculiar in a catalogue one of his clients had left in his barbershop. The catalogue was full of gleaming inventions and shiny gadgets, expensive toys for fancy folk. Suddenly, Old Zeb saw something that told him exactly what to do to get all the children out of their funk. He grinned a toothless smile, and without a word, turned around and went into his back room to get a pen and an envelope.

This was unfortunate for the customer he had been working on since he only had one side of his hair cut, but no one really minded, and it became a popular style for awhile.

Three weeks later, a large brown box was delivered to Old Zeb's Parlor.

"What's in the box, Grandpa Old Zeb?" Jimmy, Old Zeb's grandson asked him.

Zeb smiled and yelled, "None of your business, punk!" Jimmy sometimes wondered if Old Zeb had a hearing problem or was just a jerk.

The box became a thing of mystery in Greentown, a dark presence by Old Zeb's shop. That is, until one soft summer evening when the children of Greentown gathered to play one of their half-hearted, boring games.

"What's two plus two?" Aaron Smith asked little Jackie Berkeley.

"Four."

"What's three plus three?"

"Six."

"What's four and four?"

"Eight."

"Nope," he said, "it's forty-four." This game had been played millions of times, and each time the wrong answer was called, the child who didn't get it right was supposed to be punched. Punched hard. But Aaron Smith didn't have the heart to do that, even though he was in love with little Jackie Berkeley and should have only been able to show it through violence. It wasn't even a real game, but no one felt like coming up with a new one.

"Come on, Aaron," said Byron Chesfield, "pop her one."

Aaron was about to turn around and go home to his boring toy collection, when suddenly a magical sound filled the humid, bright air.

All the children stopped their dumb games and listened.

"What is that?" asked Little Jackie.

Nobody knew, but before they could even investigate, they caught sight of a shiny metal object in the distance. As it crept closer, they could make out something about eight feet tall, shaped like a man, but with a grotesquely large head. A distorted rendition of "Roll Out the Barrels" seemed to be coming from its monstrous body. Its chest was barrel shaped, and it moved with strange jerky motions. It slowly made its way up Main Street to where the children were assembled. It stopped with a clank and "Roll out the Barrels" came to a deafening roar before it abruptly shut off.

In a metallic, gruesome voice, it croaked, "Ice Cream! Ice Cream here!"

All the children stared at this fantastic apparition. Then each one of them screamed and scrambled for their respective homes.

.....

"I thought it would help," screeched Old Zeb when parents came to his shop to complain about their horrified children. "They're always playing that stupid number game outside my shop, disturbing the brain," he hollered, "Maybe some ice cream'll shut'em up."

"But Old Zeb, the children are scared to death!" said Mr. Chesfield, Byron's father.

"My son Aaron actually stopped wetting the bed, he's so frightened," said Ms. Smith.

Father Michaels pulled at his priestly collar. "Old Zeb, we appreciate the thought you put into this gift for the town," he motioned at the metal giant standing beside the door, "but you have to realize what kind of impression this thing makes on our children!"

Old Zeb roared, "What are you talkin' about? This thing makes the best dang ice cream I ever ate." He motioned to the robot. "Hey moron! Come here!"

Obediently, the rusting menace made its slow laborious way to the group. From far away, the ice cream robot was unsettling, but up close, it was a nightmare. The catalogue Old Zeb had ordered it from had promised quality workmanship, but the thing was as pockmarked as a teenage boy's forehead. The form loomed above the parents, threatening at any moment to simply stop working, topple over, and crush them all.

"Chocolate and vanilla swirl with a turtle shell!" Old Zeb raged up at the hulking body.

As the parents watched, streams of dry ice vapor poured from the robot's eyes. A loud clanging sound rang out from its hollow chest. The robot began to shake and a low whistle rang out from somewhere deep inside it. Just as the noise became too unbearable to stand, a cone popped from the robot's sleeve. It held it up to one ear, and chocolate soft-serve slithered out. It held the cone next to the other one, and vanilla plopped on top. Finally it held the dripping mess to its nose, and appeared to sneeze out a chocolate covering. It handed the ice cream to Old Zeb with a metallic claw and sang out in a hideous, grating voice, "Another frozen novelty! Compliments of Zeb Jr., the ice cream bot!"

Old Zeb took a lick and then threw the cone on the ground. "I said chocolate and vanilla swirl! Not separate, ignoramus!" The robot didn't seem to mind the name calling and stood docilely before him, the faint whisper of chocolate drippings dribbling from its left ear.

Father Michaels shook with radical, religious rage. "Old Zeb, that was the most appalling thing I have ever been witness to! This thing is a disgusting horror and must be locked away!"

Old Zeb wiped his ice-creamy hands on his dirty smock. "Like hell he is!" he bellowed, "I paid 19.95 for him. Plus shipping and handling! It stays!"

Father Michaels turned as red as the fires of Hell. "We'll see about that!" He started to walk away, then turned back, "This thing is an abomination before God!" he yelled, but unfortunately he was too far away for anyone to hear him. He made a note to give this same quote in his next sermon and stormed off.

"That was really gross," said Byron's dad as he slipped away. All the other parents left as well, casting bewildered glances at the hunk of junk behind them.

Old Zeb stood with the robot for awhile and then screamed, "What do they know?" He yanked the robot back into his parlor. The metal helped his TV reception some, and now he could watch his stories without going down to the Laundromat.

The monstrosity stood by Old Zeb's door, scaring customers away. Although Old Zeb didn't care a lick about the parents of Greentown, he grew tired of filling the machine with ice

cream. All the children learned to stay away from Old Zeb's house when it came time to fill the meaningless interval between when they woke up in the morning and dinner.

All the children except Old Zeb's grandson, Jimmy.

"Why are all the kids afraid of you, Sparky?" Jimmy asked the hunk of metal. He had decided to name it Sparky since that was the name his parents said they would have given him if he had been a Labrador retriever instead of a boy.

The Ice Cream Bot stood motionless, unresponsive. But Jimmy thought he could detect a wet gleam in its horrible, dead eye.

"Awww, those kids are dumb anyway. They don't like me 'cause I wear this old engineer cap," the little boy said as he motioned to the moth-eaten hat on his head. "But Grandpa Old Zeb gave it to me because he knows I love trains so much," he scratched under the bill, "and to cover up that haircut he gave me."

Seconds passed, then slowly, the massive head of the robot grated to one side and regarded the boy.

"Do you think trains are cool, Sparky?" The robot blinked vacantly at him and then proceeded to lose a poorly attached arm.

"I bet you do, Sparky, I bet you do!" Jimmy yelped, then picked up the arm. "Come on, I got some glue in my room!"

From that time on Jimmy and the robot were inseparable. It was a disturbing sight to see, the pair lurching down Main Street, trying to fish in the lake by the perfume factory, having a tea party that Jimmy was vaguely ashamed of. And no one really bothered with them much, as they were too busy leading their singular, boring lives in Greentown. So the summer passed.

August hung on like a blood-starved leech, and heat waves shimmered on the black pavement of Main Street. Here and there, the bodies of sweat-drenched children littered the sidewalk. Aaron Smith managed to drag himself over to his half-inflated kiddie pool and almost got second-degree burns when he dipped a foot in. The air was ripe with stagnant heat and brutal tension.

Mr. Chesfield fanned himself on his porch. "Oooo weee. Sure is hot, isn't it Marge?"

Ms. Smith was lying on her lawn in a bikini that barely held her in. "Gets any hotter, I might have to get rid of this little old thing too," she said coyly, motioning to the straining swimsuit.

Mr. Chesfield shuddered at this image and desperately willed the sun to cool itself off. Mrs. Clark leaned out from her kitchen window where she'd been desperately trying to revive a toddler with ice cubes. "You know who I blame this on?" she yelled, "God!"

Father Michaels popped around the corner. "God hears all Mrs. Clark! God hears all!" He alone seemed unperturbed by the heat.

He stalked up to Mr. Chesfield's porch. "Do you know what I blame this on?"

Mr. Chesfield looked up dumbly. "God?"

"No!" He pointed with fury at Old Zeb's place. "That aberration before the Lord that sits over there!" He stared at the gleaming heap of metal, glinting sharply in the merciless sunlight. "It's like a silver idol, biding its time, waiting for us to fall down in worship before it!"

Ms. Smith yawned. "Why do you hate that robot so much? Jimmy seems to like it."

"The thoughts of a child do not concern me, Ms. Smith!" Father Michael looked at her yards of shiny flesh, "and let me remind you that there is a decency law in effect in this community!"

Mr. Chesfield scratched his head and called to the house next door. "How has Jimmy been, Mrs. Clark? Byron hasn't bragged about beating him up for a day or two now."

Mrs. Clark leaned back out her window. "How the hell should I know? I haven't seen him since yesterday. I thought he was camping with your son."

Mr. Chesfield said thoughtfully. "That's funny. My son thinks your boy is a geek. Why would he go camping with him? And besides, Byron's right over there." He motioned to a sun-stroked body in the grass.

"Then where's Jimmy?"

Everyone was silent a moment, then as one they turned to the silver ice cream man in the distance. It winked in the heat maliciously.

Father Michaels thundered, "The monster has destroyed him—as he will destroy us all!"

Mr. Chesfield put down his beer. "Aw, hell. I guess we gotta lynch it."

Lynching the robot was easier than everyone thought. It was simply a matter of finding a rope, directing the robot to a tree, and then stringing it up. It did not put up a fight, and everyone was vaguely disappointed.

Father Michaels rubbed his hands, "And now let us say a prayer."

Before anyone could even groan, a tiny voice came from the distance. It grew into a wail as it got closer and suddenly the small body of Jimmy Clark flashed through the crowd to the foot of the lynching tree.

"What did you do to Sparky!?" he yelled through a snot-filled nose.

Father Michaels bent down and gently put his hands on Jimmy's shoulders. He said softly, "I know it's hard for you to understand, but sometimes the Lord calls his creations up to Heaven so they can sing with the angels and float on clouds, and live forever and ever in

perfect harmony with God." He patted Jimmy's arm, "But not your robot, son. It was evil and we sent it to Hell."

Jimmy looked around in confusion. "But Sparky never did nothin' bad."

Mr. Chesfield cleared his throat. "Well, Jim, first of all that's a double negative right there. And second, we thought this robot had done something bad to you. Being as how your Ma didn't know where you were."

Jimmy turned to his mother. "But I told you that Grandpa Old Zeb was taking me to the train station so I could see the big engines."

His mother scowled at him. "Well, I can't keep track of everyone, you know. You could've left a note."

"I did."

"Well, next time don't just pin it to my nightgown. Tape it to your brother! How many times do I have to tell you that?!"

Old Zeb stumbled into the crowd. "What the sam hill is goin' on here?" He saw his magnificent robotic appliance hang from the branch and hollered, "My television antennae!" He rounded on the crowd. "Someone's gonna pay for this! My shows are on in fifteen minutes!"

While the adults were fighting amongst themselves about who would let Old Zeb watch TV in their house, Jimmy made his way to the swinging robot.

He sighed, "You were my only friend." A tear trickled from his little eye, and he put a hand on the dirty, rusty leg. "See you on the other side, brother."

Suddenly the robot's eyes flashed with a bright spark. The crowd stood in silence as the robot twisted its head until it broke the rope and fell to the ground.

Jimmy clapped his hands with delight. "Sparky! You're alive!"

"Of course I'm alive, Jimmy," the robot croaked in a voice a tankard of oil couldn't sweeten. "Everyone knows you can't kill a robot."

"Well, I'll be shucked," said Mr. Chesfield.

Jimmy ran forward and threw his arms around the gigantic form. "I love you, Sparky!" he yelled, looking up at the robot's hideous face.

"I love you too, Jimmy." Everyone said "Awww" as the Ice Cream Bot gave Jimmy a hug.

"Hey, Sparky," Jimmy's laughing, muffled voice said, "Let go! You're crushing me, buddy!" The robot's arms continued to circle Jimmy's small form. "You're huggin' me too tight. I can't breath...."

There was a sickening thud as every single one of Jimmy's bones was broken.

The robot let go of the limp form and dusted off its hands. It looked at the crowd. "Now—who wants an extra special treat?"

The old man kicked at the fire that was dying down. "That robot killed every single man, woman, child, and pet in Greentown. Nobody knows who installed laser beams in its eyes, but it sure got everyone." The old man tapped out the pipe he'd been smoking. "And that's why ice cream was officially outlawed in the United States."

There was silence around the small fire, as all the children thought about what the old man had just told them.

"You know, that's not a very good story." One of the children said.

The old man nodded. "Well. I'm drunk."

THE END

The Office
by
Guy Wilkinson

Watson runs three red lights so as not to be late for work. He arrives at the office at a quarter to eight. The first thing he does is pour himself a coffee. He has to be careful negotiating the way to his desk; the room is all angles and exceedingly sharp. He's cut himself more than a few times. Also he has to pass through the glare of an enormous lamp, with a bulbous shade. Watson hates that lamp. It haunts his dreams, a luminous stalk, haloed and watchful. He takes a sip of coffee and grimaces. The secretaries have spiked it with saltpetre again. Of course they are only following directives passed down from above - he'd received a memo about it. In fact most employees have gotten used to the coffee's bitter taste by now. Some even prefer it.

Watson sits at his desk, rubs his cheeks, then switches on the computer. The Director's face fills the screen. Watson's spine stiffens. This isn't the director he expected, but a new one. Watson struggles to suppress a groan. A new Director puts him back at square one. All the work, the humiliations . . . it comes as a complete surprise.

"Watson!" the new Director barks.

"Sir!" cries Watson, nearly snapping his back. He puts his face closer to the screen and tries to look confident.

The new Director has a red bloated face, like a balloon. "Watson!" he screams. "You patsy! Pathetic parasite!" Saliva splashes up against the screen. "I've been reviewing your files, Watson, and frankly, you disgust me! If I had any sense at all I'd come down there and personally throw you out on the street where you belong. Isn't that right, Watson?"

"Sir, yes sir!" he cries.

"What? So I'm senseless, am I? Why you sniveling tadpole! The former Director warned me about you. Watch out for Watson, he said - that slack artist! Well I'm watching. As of today, consider your wages reduced by half. And be grateful there are still people in this world who would employ a good for nothing gypsy like yourself!"

The screen goes blank. Wages cut in half? I'll still have enough to live on, thinks Watson - though he's recently sold his old Pontiac, and purchased a new, more expensive Oldsmobile. He can forget the power tools though. The worst of it is, he'd thought the former Director was finally warming to him. Now Watson has to start over. The notion occurs that if he can clear up some problematic outstanding accounts, he might be able to curry some of the new Director's favor.

Watson charts the company's helicopter, and in less than half an hour is deposited in a wide courtyard among tenements in the old part of town. Struggling for breath through an overwhelming odor of boiled cabbage, he feels the old fury, his despoliation of poverty, returning. Angrily he pounds on the door of cell 103. An old woman peers out. A small nut, withered and shrunken. It seems surprised to see him. Watson collects himself.

Professionalism is above all of importance. "Good morning, Mrs. Engels," he says. "Mrs. Engels, I represent the Federal Income and Revenue Foundation," (unlike his colleagues, Watson refuses to use the company acronym), "and we'd like to know why you've only been spending marginal fractions of the pension you take from the Government each month. As a matter of fact, we've had a complaint filed against you by a clerk in the Reliable Morning Alert Sector of the U.I.C. department store, low-income division. It seems you refused to purchase an alarm clock from him, even after it had been ascertained that there were no alarm clocks in your home."

"I don't need no alarm clock," the old lady snaps. "I wake up every morning at five a.m. sharp - all my life."

Watson smiles. "Now, Mrs. Engels, surely you see what an irresponsible, what an evasive reply that is. It's not merely the matter of an alarm clock, is it? No, there's more at stake than that. What if everyone decided to act like you, Mrs. Engels, and hoard capital? Think of the consequences of that! Why, the reduction of profits could instigate the closure of countless positions - whole departments could be shut down! Society would collapse - would you like to be responsible for that, Mrs. Engels? Would you like to be responsible for the collapse of society?"

"Alright, alright," retorts the old woman. "I'll go tomorrow and get one."

The node implanted in the side of his neck gives Watson a mild electric shock. "Why the old witch," he thinks. "She's lying!" They were right, you couldn't trust anyone. Watson thinks of his own dear sweet mother, whom he hasn't seen for some time. Policy clearly dictates how the situation must be handled, Watson recalls from his training sessions. For "Patriarchs" (over 65), the correct procedure is a knee to the testicles; for "Matriarchs", a jab to the eyes. But when Watson attempts to put policy into action, he is surprised to discover the old woman has anticipated him; she defends herself craftily with a strategical feint, bringing her right hand up perpendicular to the bridge of her nose, and then countering with a sharp left jab to the solar plexus. Watson exhales deeply and falls to the ground, where he is further tormented by a few well-placed kicks.

"Uncle, uncle," he cries out of his discomfort.

"Now then," says the crone, "no more games. You crawl into your eggbeater and hightail it back to the office, to your files and papers for bumwiping those cannibals who employ you. Oh, and by the way," adds the old woman. "You forgot to tell me to have a nice day!"

A speedy departure, a limping return to his desk, and Watson has scarcely begun tending to his wounds when Parsons arrives to rub salt in. Parsons - some of the people here Watson has worked with for years, and still he doesn't know their names, but in this fishbowl Parsons is infamous. It is no secret Parsons is being considered for the Employee of the Year award. It is Parsons who conceived what has become the last word in advertising - intimidation. Parsons, Watson reminds himself, is the man to thank for those "If you don't use this product, this is what will happen to you" commercials that have terrified so many so successfully. And didn't he take every opportunity to remind you of it? Parsons - Watson hates his smug shiny face.

"Watson," says Parsons, "I've come to tell you I'm relieving you of your post. You're going

down to Complaints."

Watson sees immediately the logic of it. If his salary has been slashed, it stands to reason he'll have to accept a more subordinate position. He immediately rises from his chair, dusts it off. "Here you go, Sir," he says. "It's not the most comfortable chair I'm afraid, a man of your standing deserves a much better chair than this. Have you, ah, met the new Director, yet?"

"Of course I've met him," says Parsons. "You must be a great fool to have to ask that question."

"Yes, of course, excuse me," says Watson, with gratuitous nods and bows. "I also managed to squeeze in a meeting this morning, and I think I can say unequivocally that the Corporation is destined for even greater achievements. Of course, we hear much the same sort of thing about yourself, Sir. Just the other day I was telling a colleague your advertising campaign is the greatest stroke of unmitigated genius that I've ever had the honor of being involved with."

Parson gapes. "What are you saying, Watson? You had nothing to do with that campaign, nor it with you."

"Of course not, I only meant that as we belong to the same company -"

But Parsons has taken Watson's chair and turned his back on him.

Complaints is in the basement, deep below ground. The walls grow damp as Watson descends; the hollow staircase is dimly lit. When he gets to the bottom he finds himself in knee-deep water. Suddenly he is confronted by a man with a hump, who shines a flashlight in his eyes. "You the new guy?" he asks.

"Watson," says Watson. "Public Relations."

"Yep, that's the one. Supposed to show you around. Course there ain't much to see, just the one room." They wade into the cavernous space. One of the four stone walls has a hole in it. In front of the hole stands a rickety backless stool. "This is your office," says the man with the hump. "And this is your chair."

"My chair?" Watson can scarcely believe this uncouth wretch.

"That's right. You sit on that chair, and you can see through that there hole clear into the reception room. Now don't get nervous - that wall's a foot thick, and solid rock.. Besides hell, that hole's the size of your head, ain't nothing but a baby could get through a hole like that. You ain't afraid of babies, are ya? Anyway, the Company's thought of everything. They even provide one of these here protective masks." He held up a pinkish-red Halloween devil mask, made out of coffee cup lids. "So they won't recognize you, see? Put it on."

Watson slips the mask over his face, and sits tentatively on the stool. Unfortunately, the hole has been made for a much shorter man; Watson has to slouch to see through it. This angers the hunchback; he rushes over to knock Watson off his perch. "Goddamit!" he shouts. "A huge corporation like this, and they can't find even one fool with the right

qualifications!" Out of nowhere he produces a rusty saw, kicks the stool over and begins hacking away at the legs. After a rough job he slams the stool upright. "There!" he says. Watson cautiously sits down again. The stool lurches forward. The hunchback frowns, then throws his hands in the air. "Look, just take this." He hands Watson the flashlight. "Turn it on, Simple Simon! Hold it against your chest, so that the light's pointing upward. Now - show me your devil face." Watson turns to look at him. "Not bad," says the hunchback. "Now watch the hole, and don't move." As Watson turns away, the hunchback vanishes into some recession in the walls.

It is hot work behind that mask. Watson stares into the next room, which is empty. He waits for someone to come and lodge a complaint - surely, he thinks, people have complaints these days. Now and again he glances over his shoulder, but the man with the hump doesn't reappear, and eventually Watson gives up looking for him. He sits there, masked, awaiting grievances. Eventually he begins to admire the thickness of the walls. The Corporation certainly isn't underestimating its public.

Watson performs his duties conscientiously until a familiar voice intervenes. "Watson," it shouted. Parsons! Watson swings around in his devil mask to face him

"Watson, you imbecile, what do you think you're doing?"

"Waiting for a complaint, Sir," he answers.

"Good God!" Parsons is incredulous. "Is it really possible to be so stupid? You were sent her to mop, Watson - to mop, not to lounge on a stool all day! Now where'd that hunchback get to? Mop up this water, Watson, and get back to your desk, the work's piling up. And take off that ridiculous mask!"

It is backbreaking work, that mopping. When he finishes it is all he can do to drag himself back up the stairs. He drops into his chair. Stacks of files piled up on his desk obscure his view of the office. The files, Watson knows, contain documents pertaining to loans the Corporation has made to a certain developing nation. The application was approved on that country's acceptance of the provision that the money would only be invested in Universal Information Corporation products or goods. UIC then persuaded the government of that nation to invest the loans in two commodities which - due to an error in production planning - UIC at that time held in surplus. The commodities were whisky and rifles. Then the government of that nation defaulted; now repayment was being extracted via the country's only remaining resources - whisky and rifles. Soon, Watson knows, UIC will have to intervene more deeply. To squash a revolution, or to assist one.

He is working through the files when a company messenger appears, carrying a pressed white tuxedo on hangers. "Put this on sir, and don't dawdle," he says. "You're wanted in the Boardroom!"

What miracle, thinks Watson, is this? In no time flat he dons the tuxedo, stands gleaming in virgin white. But he hasn't time to admire himself - he's been called for in the Boardroom. He races up the winding staircase, all the way to the top, down vast corridors to the great double-doored entrance of the Boardroom. He longs to fling these doors open, to shout "I am at your disposal!" But his way is barred by a mustachioed doorman, larger than himself, also dressed in white. He chops at Watson's neck with the side of his hand. Watson falls to

the floor.

"Fool!" curses the doorman. "Do you think you can waltz into the Boardroom? An insignificant creature such as yourself? They would tear you to pieces!" When Watson sits up, to rub his neck, the doorman grabs his ear and yanks him to his feet. But the tone of voice softens. "Listen, little friend, fools mustn't rush in unprepared. These are not men such as you or I. One must enter only when one has an offering."

"But what shall I offer?" cries Watson.

"Why, what has been requested, of course." He points with his forefinger to a low table beside the door. An oval service tray has been placed on it, with a matching domed cover; both pieces are solid silver. Watson can discern the edges of a lace doily between them. He doesn't hesitate, but immediately steps forward and hoists the tray. He holds it in one hand, at shoulder level. The doorkeeper marks his every gesture; now he looks gravely at Watson and nods. "Good - very good," he nods. "I see why you were chosen. Now stand aside. Make way for the ladies."

No sooner does the doorman speak than the doors fling open and out from the Boardroom a line of women drag by, ten of them, twenty, thirty-nine - women from the secretarial pool. All are dressed in colorful shiny bodices and some kind of rabbit accessories - long bunny ears, puffy tails. They wipe at their mouths with handkerchiefs, and have a dazed look in their eyes. When the last passes by, Watson moves toward the doors, but is again restrained by a hand to the chest. "Not yet," says the doorkeeper. A legion of tuxedoed waiters have turned a corner at the far end of the hall and are marching single file toward them. Watson stares incredulously at them. Thin they are; sticklike, like scarecrows. Eyes sunken and ashen skin. The first battalion bears magnums of wine, held as cautiously in white gloves as if they were landmines. Then waiters hefting silver ice buckets, with ice cubes crackling like milky diamonds. Then come the units bearing food, buckling under the weight of it, all embedded in gleaming silver. Sixty men, a hundred, a seemingly infinite line. Finally, bringing up the rear, two or three dozen waiters with sauce trays, sour cream, bacon bits. One last old soldier files by. The doorkeeper nods. Watson steps through the door.

He finds himself in a wide green meadow, in a gentle valley ensconced among rolling hills. Air unimaginably fresh and clean; so overwhelming that at first it makes him dizzy. He looks up in wonder at the sky, and the sun beaming benevolently down. "Beautiful," he whispers. It is the most beautiful boardroom he has ever seen.

Lost in amazement, he has fallen behind. Like a line of chalk, the procession winds up the steepest of the surrounding slopes. Watson runs to catch them, all the while balancing the tray in one hand. He can see the caravan's destination - some small crowd gathered at the top of the hill. Watson catches the back of the line just as the avant-garde reaches the summit.

At the top of the hill, thirteen men are seated at a table. A long table, elegantly set, with such a profusion of crystal and silver and gold candelabras and jewel-encrusted crockery it hurts the eyes to look at it. The thirteen men are of various nationalities but wear identical conservative business suits. Watson hears running water. The lineup stops moving. Then a man at the head of the table waves, and one at a time the waiters come forward, to fill glasses or set down silver trays.

Step by step, as the procession advances, Watson's nervousness increases. If he should trip and fall? To make matters worse, the line that had seemed endless only moments ago now seems unmercifully abbreviated. Then, as in a dream, Watson realizes it is his turn. And that man at the head of the table - the only one without a tray - that man is none other than the new Director himself. Watson's knees tremble as he starts the long walk to the far end of the table. The Board members sit still, watching him - they will not uncover their trays until the Director gives the sign. As he comes up beside the Director Watson averts his eyes. In doing so, and standing as he is now at the crest of the hill, he sees a river in the valley below. From the table all the way down to the river itself runs a long line of garbage, a line that broadens, forming small mounds on the bank. Watson sees tin cans, newspapers, plastic jugs, diapers, tires, washing machines, dented silver, slivered bones. Shopping carts buried upside down in the mulch. Vultures are winging over it. The stench is indescribable. Watson forces himself not to notice. It takes all his willpower to prevent his hands from shaking - but there, he's done it, he's set the tray down without fumbling. He takes two steps back, breathing a heavy sigh of relief. He has a clear view over the Director's shoulder as the Director reaches out to uncover his tray. Watson is surprised to see, on that gleaming silver platter, a banana. Nothing else.

The Director quickly swivels in his chair. "That's right, Watson. It's a banana. What were you expecting? I'm a bananian, Watson - all I eat is bananas. Is there something you'd like to say about that?"

"No sir," Watson squeals.

"Then keep your pointless emotions to yourself! Do you understand me? Don't even think!"

"Yes sir!" says Watson. He tries not to feel or think - a Herculean task.

The Director turns away from him. He picks up the fruit, slowly strips the skin off it, and tosses it heedlessly over his shoulder. He consumes the banana in three bites. Its disappearance seems a signal for the others to begin. As the Director sits back, putting his fingertips together, the Board members unfold their napkins and tuck them into their collars. Then altogether they uncover their food, with altogether the same result; the portions are so generous they spill over onto the tablecloth. But what food is this, wonders Watson. This isn't food at all! Those aren't peeled grapes one member is popping into his gullet. And the man beside him, his string of uncooked sausage looks extremely suspicious. And that bald one, what is he chewing on, it looks like some yellowish underwater sponge. And the blood that sits thickly on their plates - their meals are barely cooked! But when the man to the right of the Director picks up a hand, intact to the wrist, and baring his teeth bites into it, Watson knows at that moment the awful truth. All are chewing earnestly now, their hands covered in blood, blood oozing out of the corners of their mouths. Watson is stunned. It is a shock to realize how naïve he has been.

"Watson!" shouts the Director. "Fetch me some mineral water."

Happily, Watson takes off running. Down the side of the hill he scrambles. He crosses the meadows and the fields of daisies, and bursts through the doors back into the hallway. The doorkeeper is waiting with a glass bottle of water. Watson takes it and wordlessly turns and starts running back. He crosses the fields of daisies and the meadows. Up the side of the hill he sprints. But as he approaches the table, he slips on the discarded banana skin. Down goes Watson, face first to the ground; the bottle flies and strikes the Director squarely on the forehead.

Luckily, it doesn't kill him.

The Director slowly ascends from his chair, and comes over to Watson, who has remained on the ground. Stooping down, he seizes Watson by the lapels of his tuxedo and lifts him. Watson had not realized what a large man the Director is, physically, but Watson's feet are actually dangling off the ground. The Director brings his face close; his warm bananian breath mingles democratically with Watson's. "Watson," he says, "tomorrow you will clean out your desk. And an arduous task it will be, Watson - without thumbs!"

Nodding their approval, the Board members rise out of their chairs.

Mr. Crow, Volume 2
by
Jonathan Redhorse

(For the first Volume, check Defenestration Volume I, Issue III. NOW, damn it!)

3.

00:00

Filtspotter Clothing Store™ sat somber and unperturbed on 32nd Ave. between a sunglass emporium and a batch of public phones and restrooms. A single employee stood at the cash register, leering out the plate glass windows barred by mannequins wearing the height of fashion.

The employee's nametag read:

Gene.

00:13

Outside:

A black Cadillac pulled up alongside the curb. Two elderly men emerged. One wore a black suit. The other wore a green shirt that burned Gene's eyes and made him see colors when he looked away. The green-shirted man appeared to be carrying a box with balloons, although Gene wasn't sure because his view was obscured by the hand of a mannequin patting the air.

00:37

The security cameras aimed at the entrance of the store recorded, in black and white:

An elderly black-suited man entering the establishment

and

Another elderly man entering the establishment; this one wearing a patterned shirt that happened to create an extreme amount of visual interference on the video to such a degree that its recorded account was deemed unreliable.

00:58

Gene, following company training, said:

"Hello sirs. Is there anything I can assist you with?"

01:04

At this point, the black-suited man removed a fluid-filled balloon with a #1 drawn on it in black marker. He proceeded to pitch (#1) at a rack of winter party dresses hanging on the wall. The resulting liquid dispersal revealed that the balloon was filled with bleach, ruining the clothes. Their retail price was \$125 each.

01:11

Gene, dumbfounded by this attack, dropped his jaw, allowing the black-suited man to prepare a second attack (#2) against a cache of dress shirts of varying colors. Their retail price was \$20 each.

01:19

Thus emboldened, the black-suited man initiated a two-fisted balloon attack, firing both (#3) and (#4) at a rack of blouses, causing considerable damage to other clothing racks in close proximity. The monetary damage of these hits was about \$238.

01:24

Gene, discovering his inner strength, confronted the black-suited man:

"What what what?!"

Raising (#5), the black-suited man threateningly approached Gene, who said:

"No! Dear God!"

01:32

The balloon detonated against Gene's torso, ruining his black trousers by creating orangey white stains. Additionally, a puce dress shirt and matching tie, purchased by Gene's mother for his birthday, met their doom. The retail damage to Gene was about \$72, although his mother purchased his shirt on sale, so an exact figure was more like \$63.

01:39

Gene, overcome by bleach fumes and neuroses, fainted from the period of 01:40-04:32.

04:33

By this point, the black-suited man and his accomplice were firing (#28), (#29), (#30), and (#31) at a batch of tuxedos. Mannequins across the store had been knocked to the ground, their garments chemically blemished. One of the vandals had apparently taken the time to make Gene a comfortable headrest out of women's blouses. Bits of bleach had gotten into his dark hair, revealing orangey hues. Gene noticed all the store's clothing racks were ruined, save for a large display at the back of the store.

04:45

The black-suited man took the remaining balloons in the box, (#32), (#33), (#34), (#35), and (#36) and chucked them at the back wall. He then proceeded to exit the store while

his accomplice, using a sledge hammer, smashed all the store's plate glass windows to bits. Gene covered his ears as the alarms went off and the pair absquatulated.

05:00.

The opulent mansions of the town's wealthy lined Tregarthen Street with vast yards of emerald grass populated with towering trees bearing assorted types of fruits and leaves.

There was little parking.

When Monty and Maxwell arrived, the sidewalks of Tregarthen Street were lined, bumper to bumper, with luxury cars. There were a few motorized scooters here and there, and large militaresque vehicles scattered randomly about.

"Maybe it'd be best if you kept the engine running while I took care of this," Monty said, climbing out of the car.

"Alright," said Maxwell.

Monty Crow had been planning this event several times over in his mind for decades. His mental theatre showed him walking up these same steps and knocking on the door. Perhaps a servant would answer, a servant who would be quickly brushed aside, as Monty, in a flurry of movement, would take the house, finding its master, and knocking him squarely in the nose. The injured man (Filtspotter) would cradle his head in his hands, shamed, while his servants thumbed their perfectly uninjured noses at this defeated titan, some showering him with substantial gobs of spittle. The gobbed man would melt into the floor, a shadow of his former self, whimpering in agony, his tears flying away in exaggerated arcs.

Monty rapped the knocker on the white door leading inside Bobby Filtspotter's house. It opened after a brief shuffling of doorknob machinery, revealing the plushy posh furnishings of the Filtspotter living room and Filtspotter Himself, not aged a bit over 30! Taken aback by this chronological anomaly but a second, Monty delivered a knuckle sandwich straight to the face of his greeter with a triumphant "Haha!"

"Gahh!" the smacked said, crumpling to the floor.

Shaking his fist, weary from the impact, Monty regarded the people observing him in the living room. There were a few utterances of "Good Heavens" and a "Gracious me" from the crowd. They were a dour bunch, dressed in dark clothing and sad eyes. None moved to either assist the bleeding man on the ground or apprehend his assailant.

Feeling unease at the eyes pointed in his direction, Monty proceeded to back out of the room, only to spot someone else with the likeness of Filtspotter Himself, not aged a bit over 40! Unable to contain himself, Monty stormed past the guests to knock this Filtspotter in the face.

"Haha!" he said.

"Gahh!" the punched man said, backing into a plate of buffet shrimp.

There were various mutterings throughout the crowd. No servants came to spit. Feeling a need to escape, Monty turned around to exit, his view of Maxwell in the car suddenly blocked by an incoming fist, knocking him to the ground.

"Gahh!" Monty grunted, falling on top of the 40esque Filtspotter, who, feeling the brunt of the plummet, responded with an additional "Gahh!"

Eyes blurry, Monty squinted at his attacker, seeing grayed Mrs. Elizabeth Filtspotter, dressed in elegant black, shaking her fight-weary wrist.

She said:

"Montgomery Crow... couldn't see fit to settle his grudges and has now come in the winter of his life to seek his vengeance after his rival's death."

"Death?!" Monty replied, his eyes widening in pain.

"That's right. Now if you'd kindly raise yourself from my son, that would be greatly appreciated as we're trying to have a wake."

"Your son?"

"Yes, my son Nigel. You also managed to knock my Eric to the floor, you wicked man."

Elizabeth helped Nigel to his feet while Monty remained on the floor, baffled still.

"When did he...?"

"Doesn't matter. I severely doubt you're that interested, seeing as you've no doubt managed to avoid the wide coverage of his death for the past week."

Over by the doorway, Eric Filtspotter entreated to his mother for assistance:

"Mother... help me! I... I can't get up either."

"Oh hush up. I'm berating your father's enemies. Ask one of the guests."

Monty felt dizzy and was also unable to rise.

"I've been preoccupied."

"Yes, no doubt, an old retired man such as yourself. Overcome by revenge fantasies. This is such a horrible thing to have to happen," Elizabeth plucked a shrimp from the platter and shook it, menacingly, "So much death in this house. My youngest son sprawled over the same spot where his father's servants were dispatched."

Eric crossed himself. Elizabeth spit a mucousy gob on Monty that surprised all her guests by its viscosity.

"I suppose you don't even remember what you two were fighting about, eh?"

Monty struggled to answer, but stuttered. The shock of the spit was too much for him.

"Just as I suspected. Please leave," Elizabeth stood resolute as a statue, biting the shrimp and chewing.

Monty slowly rose up, thought about saying something more, and then proceeded to the door. As he made his way across the room, he felt a whap of something hit him on the side. He looked at his shoulder and saw a wet gob freshly planted. Then came another from the left. Soon all the guests were showering Monty with gobs as he went running out of the house to Maxwell waiting out in the car.

"What was that all about?" Maxwell asked, looking at the mob forming outside as they shook their fists and the like.

"Never mind," Monty replied, "Let's go burn something.

"What's that?"

"Let's go burn something."

The funny thing about school buildings is the ratio of students wishing for the incendiary destruction of said structure to the amount of proper kindling provided through paper and flammable chemicals contained within classrooms, libraries, janitorial closets, chemistry laboratories, etc. While statistically debatable, the possibility of a 1 to 1 relationship might tweak the mindsets of an educationally concerned adult prone to panic attacks. Nonetheless, the town's elementary school had been able to avoid such catastrophes. Unfortunately, when discussing the aforementioned ratios, the substitution of students' wishes with a Mr. Crow's wishes, along with the additional combustible resources implied by this new value tremendously affected this balance, negatively, depending on who you were. Monty and Maxwell gained access to the school through the assistance of a business-minded janitor named Wendell whose left pocket's cargo increased substantially by some \$1,000 through a chance exchange of services. Wendell, delighted by his night off, wandered off into town where he bought himself a nice pastrami sandwich for \$7.36, leaving him with a cool \$_____ left over. He then proceeded home from the restaurant at 7:47 PM with an average velocity of 31 MPH, arriving at his destination at 7:58 PM. The distance traveled was approximately _____. Monty and Maxwell doused the library with gasoline, the spontaneous ignition point of which is about 495° F. The conversions to ° C and K temperature scales would be ____ and ____ respectively. Hanging on a variety of hall walls were the drawings of young children, pilfered out of them in art classes. They too were drenched in gasoline, many of them smearing from the solvent qualities. After the preparation was made, Maxwell expressed his doubts about the feasibility of burning down the building due to the no-doubt sophisticated sprinkler system installed on the ceilings. While noting this potential failure, he peered into the exact room he had attended 4th grade in, immensely renovated since those bygone years, and where he had been embarrassed to admit he didn't know Montpelier was the capital of _____. Screw it, he said, meaning the sprinklers, and following out Monty while wishing they had something on the scale of a bomb perhaps and taking cover while the flames engulfed the building in the order of library, halls, classrooms, cafeteria and so on, creating a blinding destructive image as a blowtorch is to a _____.

4.

After the school visit, Monty began counting the moments up to his death.

First:

After helping Monty bury his suitcase of money for the fortune teller, Maxwell was driven home and dropped off. Maxwell's wife waved from the doorstep. Monty waved back.

Second:

Monty proceeded back to his own home. He entered his darkened house and took a seat on the living room armchair.

Third:

Looking at his watch, he decided to prepare for bed. He took a shower and put on his pajamas. After brushing his teeth, he laid on the left side of his king-sized mattress.

Fourth:

Monty turned off his bedside lamp and prepared for imminent death. He posed for it, flat on his back, with his arms crossed over his chest.

Fifth:

Monty began thinking about his skin becoming clammy and his slow decent into rigor mortis. Uncomforted by this he broke his pose and rolled around the empty space on his bed.

Sixth:

He began reviewing his life, as was the custom before death. The event he started with was the birth of his first child, James. James had been a nice enough kid. He recalled the birth of his second child, Burt, who was also nice enough, but not as nice as James. A few years later, Edgar was born. He was barely tolerable. His final child, Patricia, the only daughter, was a vicious abomination constantly at war with her father. Unable to reconcile the two, Monty's wife instead chose to pass away.

Seventh:

Monty could swear that he heard a noise outside the window. Like a clanking or something. But he dismissed the idea. He instead tried to remember the birth of his first grandchild. It was a memory filled with fog. And of course he couldn't remember the name of the first one either. It probably belonged to James and his wife. Trying to remember the births of the subsequent grandchildren was impossible.

Eighth:

He realized that he had spent most every night before sleep trying to remember the names of his grandchildren. Even if he only considered it for a second, Monty was certain he had been doing such a thing for the past decade or so.

Ninth:

Monty felt a pang of hunger. And so he went downstairs and made himself a nice pastrami sandwich with lots of ketchup.

Tenth:

He carried it back upstairs and got back into bed.

Eleventh:

He pondered about where his daughter Patricia had disappeared to. Lord knows what she looked like. Monty closed his eyes and tried to imagine her. Unable to do so, he opened them and saw a perfect image of Patricia, dressed as a gypsy and wielding a knife.

Twelfth:

This Gypsy Patricia took it upon herself to speak:

"Seems old age has finally caught up to you."

Patricia proceeded to plunge the knife into the bed several times, with pieces of flesh flying everywhere and a red stain growing on the blanket. Done with her work, she dropped the knife on the floor.

Thirteenth:

Monty, seeing the carnage done to his sandwich, tumbled off the bed and used the blanket as a net to capture his newly returned daughter.

"So that's how you knew I was going to die," Monty said, sitting on top of the blanket as it kicked aggressively.

"Let me out!"

"Do you know what this means?" Monty said, an idea forming in his mind.

"Let me out!"

"It means I'm going to live."

"Let me out! Damn you!"

"And I'll have to learn everybody's goddamn name. Hold on a sec."

Monty knocked the cordless phone off the nightstand with his foot. He dialed up his son James.

"James? Quick I need you to come over to the house. Bring everyone."

"Let me out!"

"Who's that?" James asked.

"That's Patricia. Tell the kids they're coming to see their Aunt Patricia."

"Patricia?"

"You have to hurry though. Use the key under the mat."

Monty called up his other two sons and told them to bring their children as well.

"It will be a night to remember," he said.

Having completed his calls, Monty returned his attention to his daughter whom he was sitting on.

"So, Patricia. Your brothers are coming over. They certainly sound excited to see you."

"Go to hell!"

"Now, now Patricia. Tell me, why were you going to nix off your dear old dad like this?"

The wriggling blanket underneath stopped. Puzzled, it said:

"Dad?"

"Yes, that's right. I'm your father, aren't I? How else did you know who I was and where I lived?"

There was a pause, and then:

"I... it's all coming together now, isn't it? Well shit. All this time I really thought I was psychic. Me knowing your name and everything. Right when you walked in, I knew everything about you, and what an evil man you were."

"Evil? What made me so evil?"

"I... I really don't remember right off hand. But it was a feeling I got. And it was such a strong feeling, that I felt obliged to kill you off, do the world a service... you're kidding me, right? You can't be my dad."

"Poor dear. Must've repressed the whole thing."

"Where's my knife? I'll show you repression."

Monty heard the sound of his sons coming up the stairs with their families. It turned out to be James and Burt. Edgar had to yet to arrive with his family. Marcie, James's wife, upon seeing the lewd inappropriate spectacle in the bedroom, tried to cover the eyes of her children, discovering she didn't have the proper number of hands to do so.

"What's going on here dad?" James made his way to the front of the crowd, "Who's that underneath the blanket?"

"It's your sister. I'm going to get up now. When I do, grab her and tie her up. We're all going for a little drive."

James and Burt weaved a little, trying to gather their bearings to tackle their sister as Monty rose from his position. Securing her amongst her protests, everyone made their way downstairs to the living room.

"Wait, wait don't tell me. I know who you are. You're James, aren't you? And you're Burt?" Patricia looked at her captors and shifted her attention to Edgar as he came in the door, "And that one over there... isn't that...Edgar? You're Edgar, I know it."

Edgar, taken aback by the gypsy outfit, said:

"How... how did you know my name?"

"Shut up Edgar. Everyone, get in your cars and follow me!" Monty, in his pajamas and a jacket, hopped into his Cadillac.

A caravan of Crows commuted through the town towards the high school football field while air raid sirens wailed off, alerting the members of the town's volunteer fire department that their assistance would be needed. A blaze that had started at the elementary school had grown momentarily out of control and was in the course of engulfing nearby buildings and threatening the business district.

Upon reaching the field, Monty assembled everyone at the 50 yard line. The youngest generation of Crows was peeling off their winter coats in the heat. Monty's sons and their wives were shivering and rubbing their hands together, saying, "Brr" every few seconds. Patricia, who had ridden in James's minivan, had apparently been gagged with a sock. She stood between two of her brothers, tied up by ropes in a makeshift straitjacket.

"Listen up," Monty announced, "I need one of you boys to dig at this area right here until you reach a briefcase. Whatever you find in there, I want you all to split it amongst yourselves. Edgar, talk to your sister. Try and remind her of pleasant childhood memories, if you can think of any."

Monty turned to the children.

"As for you, I want you all to line up. I'm going to have a little chat with each of you. Is that alright?"

"I wanna build a snowman," one of them said.

"Later," Monty looked and saw in the distance, a line of police cars with their strobe lights on headed towards the field, "Come along, we've got to do this quickly."

The children all lined up, facing Monty, as he reached into his pajama pockets, finding his wallet. Taking out his thousands of dollars, he prepared a hundred dollar bill, which he placed into the palm of the first child in line.

Despite the incoming lights and the sirens signaling destruction into the night, he stressed himself to speak gently to the first child:

“And who may I ask, are you?”

The First Sentence by Matthew Norman

Christopher Allison has written the same sentence seven times. He has deleted it six times. Now he's reading it over and over again. It is shit. It is completely void of poetry or depth or even meaning. Someone told him once that the first sentence of a story should summarize *everything* that follows it. He hasn't written a decent first sentence since, and just this afternoon he spent twenty minutes wondering what his computer would smell like if he set it on fire.

In his mind, Christopher has a story—a great story, a *New Yorker* story. It's about a man and a woman who are married. Through flashbacks we see that at one time they were desperately in love. But now, in the present tense, it is quite clear that they hate each other. Christopher has the metaphor all figured out. The couple, most likely named Jim and Tina, have two lovebirds. For whatever reason, these birds have turned on one another. Throughout the story, Jim and Tina fight and say horrible things to each other, until finally, in the story's dramatic conclusion, we see that one of the birds has at last pecked the other to death.

In his mind, his story is perfect. In the shower, Christopher can hear the dialogue; Jim and Tina bicker in his mind. At night, when he's trying to fall asleep, he can see them in their tiny apartment, most likely in New York, each moving closer and closer to a moment of revelation or drama. However, when he sits down at his computer, there is nothing. Jim and Tina simply disappear.

Christopher goes downstairs and gets another beer. Lately he's been drinking a lot while writing. He has convinced himself that drinking while writing will free him creatively. So far, this has not been the case at all. Instead he has written nothing and been at least partially drunk for 23 days straight.

Today, Christopher received two rejection letters in the mail. It's particularly painful to get two rejections in one day. It's as if God and the United States Postal Service have partnered to remind Christopher that he is wasting his life. At first he didn't even remember the story the letters were rejecting; it'd been months since he'd sent it out. However, like abandoned cats—diseased and covered in ticks—they have found their way back to him. The first was just a form letter. The second was the first page of his short story with the words "Needs more character!" scrawled across the top in red. This really hurts because Christopher knows that it is true. As hard as he tries, his stories don't really *have* characters. The protagonists are always just thinly veiled versions of himself living in cool cities and his antagonists are just unflattering composites of his horrible ex girlfriends.

Back at his desk, Christopher deletes the shit sentence and rewrites it again, this time switching the subject and the predicate. Still, it is shit. He thinks of Nick Hornby, the guy who wrote *High Fidelity*, and silently hates his guts. That limey bastard bitches about getting dumped for 300 pages and becomes a literary phenomenon in Europe; Christopher Allison bitches about getting dumped for 16 pages and is told that he *needs more character*. Fuck you, Nick Horby! And fuck you, too, John Cusack for starring in the movie version!

Christopher gets up from his desk and goes into the bathroom to look at himself in the mirror. He hasn't shaved in five days; he now decides that he needs to. Halfway through shaving, he thinks that it might be funny to see what he looks like with a mustache. Magnum P.I. had a mustache, and he drove a Ferrari. When he wipes the shaving gel from his face, he looks nothing like Magnum P.I. Instead, he looks like a thin, slightly gay version of his own father.

Three days ago, on the phone, Christopher's father asked him how the writing was coming.

"Not very good at all, Dad," Christopher replied. "I'm just really stuck."

"Well, Chris," his father said. "I bet even John Grisham gets stuck sometimes, and he's a millionaire."

For some reason, Christopher's father is convinced that Christopher wants to be like John Grisham. Although Christopher could never admit it to his other miserable writer friends, right now that doesn't sound half bad. But Grisham has the law to write about. Christopher doesn't know anything about the law. In fact, Christopher doesn't know *anything* about *anything*. The only things in which Christopher could be considered an expert are Simpson's Trivia and possibly the precise circumference of Britney Spears' navel thanks to the 700 picture currently saved on his hard drive.

With his new mustache itching his face, Christopher takes his beer to the window and looks down at his street. The sun is setting slowly through the trees and everything is orange and yellow and purple. Outside, a muscular guy in shorts jogs by listening to headphones. A little girl on a tricycle passes; a floppy eared Cocker Spaniel gives chase, barking happily. A pretty teenaged girl and a boy are sitting at the bus stop. The girl squeezes the boy's leg and he kisses her cheek and they both laugh, a sound Christopher can just barely hear through his closed window.

All of these people, each and every one of them, look so happy. None of them appear to be worried about two lovebirds and a married couple who do not exist. None of them are killing themselves over one stupid sentence. They are all too busy being happy.

However, just as jealousy and despair are about to take hold, something dawns on Christopher. All of these people, each and every one of them, are idiots. That is why they are so happy. They are young and tan and beautiful and utterly oblivious. The jogging man is running along, completely unaware that his wife will eventually leave him for the guy who cleans their pool. The little girl doesn't know that if she keeps letting that stupid dog run wild, it's going to get run over by the *FedEx* guy. The boy who is holding his girlfriend's hand has no idea that in two years she will lose her virginity to the quarterback of the football team and he will be playing *Dungeons and Dragons* in his mother's basement with two boys he met at Geometry Camp.

For the first time in weeks, looking down on this cruel world of delayed heartbreak, Christopher Allison is happy. He sits down in his chair; the worn fabric forms perfectly the contours of his rear end. He places his fingers on the home keys, each of them a shade darker than the other keys from years of abuse. Christopher straightens his shoulders, eyes the blinking cursor, and without pause, writes the first sentence again.

The IKEA Paradox
by
Rob Rosen

"Honey, come here!" screamed my husband from the bedroom.

"What?" I screamed back from the kitchen.

"Come quick!" he screamed, even louder.

In a panic, I rushed through our apartment, down the hall, and towards our bedroom. My husband is sadly accident-prone. Visions of severed fingers ran through my head as I raced towards him.

"What's wrong?" I shouted, nearly out of breath, as I sped into the room.

"Look!" he shouted.

I scanned the carpet for bits of his fingers. I looked at my husband for signs of bloody gashes. I screamed at him, "What? What?"

"There! Look!" He was pointing madly at the TV.

"The TV? What's wrong with the TV? Did you lose the remote again?" Besides being accident-prone, my husband has a propensity for losing things as well: car keys, his wallet, his wedding ring, and, frequently, the remote control.

"It's on the fucking bed." I said, angry with him for needlessly worrying me.

"No, not that. There!" He sounded desperate, so I looked at the TV again.

"What? It's a commercial. What am I looking for?"

"It's IKEA. They're opening up a store in Emeryville," he explained, beaming up at me.

"IKEA? That's why my heart is racing? What's the big deal?"

"It's IKEA!"

"So you said. And?"

He looked up at me with a bewildered look on his face. Like I was supposed to know what the hell he was so excited about. My husband and I often have differing opinions on what constitutes exciting, but this one was way beyond my comprehensive abilities. He had never shown a predilection for IKEA or Emeryville before. I stood there clueless as he sat there grinning at me.

"Okay, I give. Please tell me why we're so happy all of a sudden?"

"What's wrong with this apartment? He countered my question with his own.

"You want a list?" I stood there, arms akimbo, and glowered at him.

The apartment was always a sore spot with us. San Francisco apartments are notoriously small. My husband's apartment was just barely big enough for one person. When we met, and I moved in, we agreed that it would be a temporary thing, our living there together. But finding a vacant apartment in the city was about as easy as finding a needle in a field of hay. Especially an affordable one. So, five years later, there we were: happily cramped and resigned to the fact that we weren't moving anytime soon.

"Okay," he said, still smiling, "but what's the one biggest complaint."

That was easy. "No closet space." Which was true. We had one small closet; and it wasn't even a walk-in. Basically, we crammed all our belongings into whatever furniture each of us brought with us to the relationship. Nothing I owned was crease free. Finding specific clothes I wanted to wear was a huge headache. And we never, ever bought anything new. There simply wasn't room for it.

"Voila," he said, pointing again to the TV.

"What? Alpo? We're getting a dog?" The commercial had changed; my husband's demeanor had not.

"No, two armoires." He practically beamed.

"From IKEA?" Now I was getting it.

"From IKEA," he concurred, glad that I was finally with the program.

"And where do we put two new armoires?" I asked, even more nervous now than when I was imagining rushing my husband to the hospital, his pinky nicely chilling in a bag of ice.

"Easy. We get rid of that small thing, that small thing, and that small thing," he said, pointing out our old furniture, which was clearly brimming with our clothes and assorted accessories.

I stood there for a minute before speaking. It did make sense, what he was telling me. It would be wonderful to be able to hang my clothes up and actually be able to find them again. Still, a chilling sense of foreboding hung in the air.

"Well?" he asked.

"Weeeeell...okay. Sounds like a great idea." I like to see my man happy. That definitely did the trick. He jumped up and hugged me and planted a big wet one on my lips. Who knew Scandinavian furniture could have such an extraordinary effect?

IKEA was much bigger than I expected. Almost a small city unto itself. I never needed a map to maneuver my way through Macy's before. What if we followed the wrong overhead arrow? Would we end up in Stockholm? I was nervous, but still excited, nonetheless. I was getting some much-needed, new furniture, right? Visions of neatly folded t-shirts popped in my head. And my husband was clearly beside himself. So I pushed my worries to the back of my addled brain, and I happily smiled as my husband gleefully pointed to the home furnishings section that lay sprawling before us.

Okay. I hate to admit it, but IKEA really does sell some beautiful furniture. And it was all so large and practical. I would love to have had any of their reasonably priced furniture in our too small apartment.

"Which one do you want?" asked my husband.

Crap, this was going to be hard. I wasn't expecting so many viable options.

"That one!" I pointed, truly thrilled for the first time. It was an enormous armoire, made from beautiful, cherry wood. The doors were a translucent white material, framed in silver. And the inside had a long bar to hang a fair share of our shirts on. Centered below this, there were three deep drawers that would surely hold all of our underwear, and then some. On either side of this were three sets of shelves on the left side and three sets of shelves on the right side. And this was all in one armoire. I gladly imagined what we could store in two of these things. I was beginning to see why my husband was so excited about IKEA.

Until...

"How do we get these into our apartment?" I asked, my good senses finally returning to me.

"That's the beauty of it, hon. They sell it so cheap because we build it ourselves."

"We who?" I asked. "The last time you tried to hang a nail into the wall, you put a three inch hole into it."

"That's different. This stuff's made for your average person to be able to put together," he assured me.

I wasn't so sure, but it was awfully beautiful and easily large enough to hold practically all our stuff, so, "Okay. Why not? But let's get just one for now and see how it goes. We'll come back for its twin if it's as easy as you say. Deal?"

"Deal, sweetie. And don't worry. This'll be a snap."

That hole in our wall was still there, but I smiled at my husband as he signed for our new armoire, anyway.

That's where the snap stopped.

We were given our receipt and told where to go pick up our furniture. Seeing this wisely hidden area of IKEA was my first clue that all would not be "snappy". There were endless rows of stacks upon stacks of incredibly long boxes. I gulped when I looked down at our receipt and saw that we'd have to find six of these boxes to fit on our huge, flat, rolling dolly. And I thought Costco was a pain in the ass. That was nothing compared to this. My husband and I painfully strained our aging muscles loading these monstrosities. I remembered that the Swedes were descended from the Vikings. That made sense. Who else could have lifted this shit?

I kept reminding myself how little we paid for it, as we wheeled our belongings up to our noticeably small car. That was the only thing keeping me smiling.

"Um, how do we get all this in the car?" I asked. Yes, we could have had it delivered, but that cost extra. Wasn't the whole point of this to save money? I was beginning to wonder.

"We open the windows and have everything slightly hang out," my husband answered, still oblivious to the consequences of going cheap.

Okay, that could work. And forty minutes later, after countless shifting and reshifting, we actually made all six boxes fit; though it hung out of the windows way more than I would consider "slightly". I prayed that our fellow freeway drivers would see us coming and clear out of our way. We drove extra slow, just in case, and made it home in one piece – us and the armoire.

Now all we had to do was get it all out of the car, into the house, and built. Suddenly, my husband realized what we were in for. Our smiles were rapidly leaving our faces.

"New furniture!" My husband squeezed out one last ounce of jocularity.

"New furniture." I mimicked, less than enthused. I hoped our marriage was strong enough endure it.

I never realized how small our apartment really was until we tried to fit those six big boxes in it. Even with our old furniture gone, we had to put a few boxes in the bedroom and a few in the living room. How we were going to get all of it together and in one room was beyond me. I just had to have faith in my husband. I remembered what the minister had said: for better or worse, in sickness and in health. Too bad he never mentioned IKEA. I might have had second thoughts.

We stood there in our bedroom looking at each other, once the boxes were in place.

"Now what?" I asked. I could tell he had no clue. "The biggest boxes must be the outer frame. How about we open them first?"

"Yes," he said. "Of course."

I didn't think he was too happy with my suggestion. This was his baby, and I knew it.

"You know," I suggested, "there really isn't enough room in here for both of us and all of this. Why don't I let this be your little project?"

The smile returned. I gratefully let him be. If too many chefs spoil the stew, too many inept carpenters surely spoil the armoire. Besides, I was glad for the peace and quiet of my still uncluttered kitchen.

Twenty minutes later, I heard, "Fuck!"

"What's wrong?" I asked, after running through the house to check on him.

"Look at this," he said, handing me the papers from within one of the boxes.

There were no words, just diagrams. I supposed IKEA was now all over the world and this was an easy way for them to standardize the process. I could tell immediately why my husband was so upset. The instructions were pages long and incredibly difficult to figure out. This was going to be a major undertaking. Fuck indeed.

"Want some help?" I offered.

Dejectedly he said, "No. I can do this."

Thirty minutes later: "Honey, come here."

Nervously, I walked to our bedroom.

"Wow. The case is done," I said, as he stood there grinning. But then I noticed something. "Honey, what are those holes in the front?"

He looked down and I could see the creases in his brow start to form. He had the base on backwards.

"Fucking Swedes. I hate them. I hate their meatballs. I hate...I hate...ABBA. I hate...them." I guess he couldn't think of too many Swedish things to hate. I didn't want to rub salt in the wound and remind him about the Volvo parked in our driveway. I quietly left the room. I don't think he noticed. Poor man.

I started to make dinner to try and keep my mind off the turmoil that was surely ensuing in the other room. If patience was a virtue, my husband would not be considered a virtuous man. I'm sure the armoire was testing his limits. I was happy, another thirty minutes later, when I heard a gleeful, "Honey!"

"Nice," I commented, upon entering and seeing the case done, correctly this time. "What's wrong with your hand?" His hand was wrapped in paper towels.

"It's nothing. Minor accident. Okay, back to the kitchen now." I was being dismissed.

"Okay, sweetie, call me if you need anything." Like a tourniquet or an ambulance or anything.

Ten minutes later: "Honey, where's the power drill?" Uh-oh. I was afraid of that one.

"I thought all you'd need is a hammer and a screwdriver. Isn't a power drill a bit...um...extreme?"

"You have to drill holes in the doors to install the door pull things."

"Oh. At the store they looked like they were already part of the door," I said, and regretted it immediately.

I could see he was counting to ten before he responded. "Please, just tell me where the power drill is." I did and rushed back to the kitchen. I prayed our nice, hardwood floors would somehow miss being marred by that power drill. Better yet, my husband's hand.

An hour later: "Honey!"

"Wow, the doors look great. It's almost done, huh?" I smiled appreciatively at my husband. In truth, the door pulls were just slightly uneven, but there was no way I was going to make mention of it. Besides, the floors and his hands were still in tact, so I was counting my blessings.

"Almost, just the inside stuff needs to be put together. I'd say...another half hour."

"Would you like dinner first? It's almost done."

"No, this shouldn't take long and I'd like to get it done."

"Okay, sweetie. I'll keep it warm for you. Great job, by the way." He smiled, but went right back to his work.

An hour and a half later: "Honey!"

Thank God. I was starving by that point. But then...

"Oh, not done yet?" I asked, timidly.

"Close. Those bastards had three sets of screws that all looked about the same on the diagrams, but weren't as interchangeable as I thought they'd be. Had to start over again midway through. Fuckers. Anyway, fifteen more minutes, tops, okay?"

"Sure sweetie, no problem. Take your time." Poor thing.

Thirty minutes later: "Honey!"

"It's beautiful!" I beamed. He beamed back at me. I didn't mention the mysterious extra parts that were lying on the floor, or the several bandages wrapped around both this hands. And it really was beautiful. I couldn't wait to put our clothes in it and be done with this whole thing.

Then I remembered: "What about the other one?"

My husband paused before answering. I held my breath.

"JC Penny's. We're only buying American from now on. Fucking Swedes. Now, what's for dinner? I'm starved."

"Hamburgers and fries, honey."

Can't get any more American than that.

The Two-Headed Rhino
by
Charlotte Jones (Photo)
and
Top *Defenestration* Scientists (Text)



This is a photograph of the rare two-headed rhinoceros, known by its scientific classification as *Ceratotherium pushmepullyou*. Two-headed rhinos such as this are regarded as sacred by many of the more superstitious tribes of Africa, whose native word for the beast roughly means "That which cannot empty its bowels in the savannah."

While photographer Charlotte Jones claims that the picture was merely two normal rhinos standing in just the right position, we brushed off such a ridiculous claim as being "boring as hell."

Arse Kissing 101
by
Steven Paro Jr. (Comic and Shirt Design)
and
Luigi Fairbanks (Text)





Luigi Fairbanks: Hello Eileen

Eileen: Hello Luigi

Luigi: Tell me Eileen, is it true you called this interview in order to publicly defame this sweatshirt as it is a blatant disregard of your talents?

Eileen: No.

Luigi: Then you hold no jealousy towards the fact that the sweatshirt is clearly a love letter to your Editor-in-Chief, Andrew the Magnificent.

Eileen: I wanted that free pizza you were offering. *shrugs* I'll talk about the comic though.

Luigi: And how that is also a blatant disregard of your talents?

Eileen: I just wanted to clarify that my beloved homeland, Planet Eileen, land of the free is a peace loving planet. We don't—nor would we ever—condone futuristic laser battles between warring alien empires. Instead, we spend much of our time mocking others and braiding the long luxurious locks of our beloved ponies while—

Luigi: So you hate Amber.

Eileen: I don't hate anyone!

Luigi: So you love Andrew.

Eileen: *sputters* What?!

Luigi: *leans forward, intent with his newly discovered spotlight* Admit it! You can't deny the power of the Kaye!

Eileen: *leans forward as well* Don't make me stuff you some place where the sun don't shine.

Luigi: Perhaps in that closet of yours, filled to the brim with AK sweatshirts and other Andrew memorabilia products?

Eileen: *stands up and pulls off microphone* This interview is over! I should never had believed you were offering free pizza! *looks around* Especially in a dumpster.

Luigi: It's not a dumpster! It's my spacious office with a skyline view!

Eileen: *throws a discarded egg carton at Luigi as she hefts herself out of his Waste Management bin.*

Luigi: Damn. I am SO going to piss in her coffee tomorrow morning.

Contributor Biographies

Brooke Bailey says the following about herself (but we know she's lying): "I'm a double x-chromosomed geek-magnet with shy girl syndrome on a mission to shake things up with my writing and maybe score a few numbers in the process."

Lao American poet **Bryan Thao Worra** currently resides in St. Paul surrounded by snow and giant Snoopy sculptures. His work has appeared in many places, including impromptu placemats, birdcages, and underneath steaming drinks of cheap hippies hitting on beautiful women without a chance in the world. He also keeps a website at <http://members.aol.com/thaoworra> and gives a big thumbs up to everyone at the SatJaDham Lao Literary Project, <http://www.satjadham.org> (but still can't pronounce SatJaDham worth a damn. He also likes sea monkeys, hermit crabs and stroganoff.

A message to **Martha Braniff**: We tried contacting Bill Gates just like you asked, but he wasn't very responsive to what we had to say about *Defenestration* and the thesaurus and all of that. Which was kind of a bummer, because we brought him muffins and cups of apple juice. They had chocolate chips in them, too. The muffins, not the apple juice.

Michael Levy is the author four books "What is the Point? "Minds of Blue Souls of Gold" "Enjoy Yourself - It's Later Than You Think" and "Invest with a Genius." Michael's poetry and essays now grace many web sites, Journals and Magazines throughout the world. His philosophies have become a major source of Truth, Wisdom and Love for many people. Just one example from many..... The Royal Collage of Psychiatry has recently published two of his works. Web Sites: <http://www.pointoflife.com> and <http://www.polfoundation.org>
E-mail: mikmikl@aol.com

Deidra Garcia recently invested a lot of money to buy an English degree from New York University, and will now be paying that back for the next decade of her life. Following the attainment of this degree, she then worked at a snotty video store for over a year. She currently does freelance work for a small publishing company, and lives in NY. Deidra does not own any pets, but she has been able to maintain three plants through several apartment moves, so she's got that going for her.

Guy Wilkinson wanted his biography to read the as the following: "Guy Wilkinson lives in Vancouver and teaches English at Langara College." We were going to add something funny to this, then thought the better of it.

Jonathan Redhorse is a student at the University of Denver. He does not like the month of February. He enjoys March and April. May's iffy. In the month of August, Jonathan had a verbal shouting match with June that called for the mediation skills of October, who tried to bring in November, but was denied since November had this big date with December planned since like, September and so everything just fell apart into chaos. A quote from an angry January, who received a black eye during the summit: "July oughtta be wiped off the f_____ planet."

Matthew Norman lives in Arlington, VA and is a fiction writer in George Mason University's MFA program. He spends his days in an office working for the man and his nights exploring new ways to avoid writing.

Rob Rosen lives, loves, and works in San Francisco. In his next life he hopes to come back as a Kookaburra, where he'll sit in an old gum tree all day, laughing his tail off. His first novel, "Sparkle", was published in 2001 to critical acclaim.

Charlotte Jones, after three successful submission attempts with *Defenestration*, has since gone on to many things. The only one she feels is worth noting, however, is her getting published in *Nerve Cowboy*. Which we think is a video game of some sort.

The scientists working at *Defenestration* have been taking Quaaludes since the day they were hired. After successfully determining that televisions will never learn to fly even with proper training, they have since kept busy trying to surgically graft various kitchen appliances to large sea mammals.

Steven Paro, Jr., says: "I decided to let my girlfriend speak out my bio and here's what she had to say: 'He has the best girlfriend in the whole world! I am a fish. OK stop typing! Nooo... it's like being in frickin' court where they write everything you say! Nooo stoppit grrr! Steven stop writing what I say? OK, stop... now what are you typing? :ahem: No, what are you typing? Answer meee Steeeve. That's not very nice. OK, you're done...! OK this is something very personal now so stop typing. Are you done? OK, well I wanted to know if you like how...' We have absolutely no idea what that was about.

Luigi Fairbanks has yet to beat the last level of Super Mario Bros. He also hates interviewing Eileen with a passion.