

# ◇ Defenestration ◇

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**Dark Matter**  
by  
**Magda Knight**

Although I'm alone in thinking this, it all started in a small pub at half past closing time. Several drinks in and an unspecified number of brain cells down, we approached the topics of the day with all the swagger of emperors and kings.

It was Madeleine who broached the question first. She wrote it on the back of a beer mat, refusing to buy the next round until we'd considered her words with what she considered to be a suitable measure of gravitas.

The beer mat read:

*A vast meteorite heads towards the earth. Then scientists announce it is actually a gigantic poo. Are you:*

- a) More scared*
- b) Less scared?*

Well. We didn't realise it at the time, but Madeleine – who'd always had a touch of the mad, the divine – must have been a part-time prophetess. The question took us on a journey lasting several more rounds, all the way back home to Madeleine's (two night buses and a drunken walk in the wrong direction) and right into next morning.

What was the density of the poo? Was it flammable? Was it likely to burn up in the atmosphere, or would it rain down upon us all in flaming chunks? If the poo narrowly missed us, would the earth be covered in a great cloud of methane, a noxious but totally viable energy source to put to global use? Would the poo be a glamorously long stool or a cowpat-style Frisbee? In the great likelihood of it being a diarrhetic poo, all wet and sloppy, would it cover us in a very literal shower of shit? Would there be corn in the poo? If so, would they be giant chunks of space corn, or just regular corn?

So many questions. We grabbed no-doubt willing bystanders on the night bus in the hope they might prove to be astronomers and physicists. Night shift workers in fast food outlet uniforms, who may also have been physicists, explained, when pawed and clutched tightly, that all space poo would be universally exposed to near absolute zero temperatures to become a frozen lump equivalent to deadly rock, and that if the poo was any larger than a truck, it might as well be a vast meteorite for all the difference it would make.

This was heartening. Night shift workers were taking us seriously. We felt vindicated.

We, and by 'we' I mean Madeleine, started spreading the word. The conundrum became a postcard, then a small feature in a magazine, then a larger item in the national press. It was name checked by TV comedians looking for a bit of filler, an easy laugh. It was the new vampires, the new zombies. It captured people's imaginations. It was the perfect cosy new threat. Everything had gone a bit tits-up since the fall of the Euro and the Big 3, and people needed a manageable villain to make them feel cheery in their time of need.

No credit to Madeleine, of course. No-one invented vampires. No-one invented zombies. No-one invented poo.

And then... the first fecal meteorite. Suddenly, the joke wasn't funny anymore.

It was a near-miss. Two weeks before impact, its course was detailed with greater precision. We were safe, this time.

But we were no longer alone.

Dipping soggy biscuits into cold tea, Madeleine and I fought for room on her lumpy sofa, glued to the sphere while scientists talked in fast, high-pitched voices about the turnaround on their theories of Dark Matter being, in fact, fecal matter – the building blocks of all that exists. Madeleine and I didn't hold with their theory. That would suggest that the universe was basically shit, and we didn't think that was a positive outlook.

Then the second meteorite came. Or rather – it's coming. Only a few hundred thousand miles or so away from us, now, I forget the numbers. 50 km wide. The ram pressure will be huge and the impact crater will be even bigger.

Goodbye, Russia. And the rest of it.

Yes, of course everyone's spending their remaining days worrying about the nature of the creatures that could produce such a giant emission. It hardly needs to be said. There's something huge out there, hopefully not divine, because that would be insult to injury, and it's using the vast emptiness of space as a toilet. The chances of a direct strike are astronomical, so either the damn thing's very close to us or the universe is teeming with them.

Today's the day. Madeleine took some Captain Cody to help her sleep but it only kicked in at 5am, so it's dangerously close to midnight and she's only just come into the pub. Good job for her we got a round in – double-parked her, too. Dark-ringed and puffy-eyed, she's greeted with a Bombardier ale and a nice peaty Laphroaig to wash it down with.

"I had a bad dream last night," she whispers, gazing into the circles of dark golden liquid honey before her. "We don't survive. But they do. The bacteria. They'll live on. They'll become the dominant life form on our planet. The poo people."

"Perhaps this may not help," says our mate Trevor, far more gaunt than he was two weeks ago, "but all atoms bar hydrogen are basically the poo of stars. So it's a moot point – we're all made of poo, anyway."

"You're right."

"Am I?"

"It doesn't help," says Madeleine, not looking up from her glass.

I still believe that Madeleine has something of the prophetess about her. Codeine or not, I believe her dream. It's more coherent and less sad, somehow, than the ones I've been having.

Even though we all smoke like troopers we stay inside the pub, in the back, in the dark windowless cubbyholes. Far better to stick with what we know.

Will we get a lock-in tonight? It all depends.

The bell rings.

It's closing time.

**Indexers in Love**  
by  
**Mary Cresswell**

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**A Thankless Job for It's [sic] Worker's [sic]**  
by  
**Vanessa Weibler Paris**

Jonah sat before the panel of blinking red lights. Merry Christmas, except not merry and not Christmas. It was a hot July night, and he'd just started the second of a double shift.

"Pedantics," he said, taking the next call.

Jonah could remember when teachers still used red pens. There were moans and groans and no-fairs every time a paper was returned. "God," his friend Emmett complained after class. "She's a million years old and half-blind; how can she even see such a tiny mistake and who the fuck even cares?"

"I fucking care," Jonah yelled at him, and then Emmett wasn't his friend any longer.

The switchboard had 125 lines and the blips and bleeps of red just kept flashing. Jonah thought he saw two that were unlit, but even as he blinked to be sure, they both fluoresced urgently at him.

Jonah's parents told him stories of their own school days, a time when two spaces between a period and a capital letter were required, when the difference between an en dash and an em dash actually mattered.

Over the years, his mother said, people cared less. They were worried about politics and money and pop culture and the economy; who could be bothered to fight the good fights? Who even knew which was good for sure any longer?

Politics and pop culture, while Sarah shakespeared refudiation and Alanis assassinated irony.

"Pedantics," Jonah answered the next in queue.

"At the county fair," the voice hissed. "Rampant misuse, it's all over the place. Raspberry apostrophe ess, horse apostrophe ess, you get the idea."

It was Malcolm, one of his regulars. He could always count on Mal to scope out the worst abuse. Late July, it was country fair season. He'd be hearing from Mal again, and soon.

"I'll sent out the local crew to take care of it," he assured Mal. The local crew was three guys with Sharpies, but it was better than nothing. Apostrophes was the quickest and easiest role in Punctuation, but for now, it suited Jonah. He'd started here just out of college, and in the last six years he'd risen from Sharpie guy all the way to this: heading up the entire Apostrophe section of Pedantics' tri-state office. Someday, maybe, he'd move up and even beyond. Breaking into Spelling was the ultimate goal, but Jonah was in no big hurry.

"News headline," said the next caller.

"Circulation?" Jonah asked. He was known for his quick triage and got the White-Out folks on the road.

"Billboard," reported the next caller. Jonah dispatched Spraypaint.

Over the next eight hours, the blinking never stopped, not for a minute. He dealt with plenty of possessive faux pas, several dozen your/you're bloopers (which required dotted-line reports to Spelling), and nearly a hundred its/it's issues.

Then Leonard Heizter called in sick, not sounding sick at all, and Jonah was stuck for another shift. No one else to call. The pedants were growing scarcer and scarcer. His parents were right: People just didn't care like they used to.

The calls kept coming.

"Three more fairs," reported Malcolm, and Jonah could picture Mal's hair sticking out in fifty different directions. The crazier Mal sounded, the crazier Mal's hair got. "There are FRY'S here, and my head is killing me just telling you that. Send help before it explodes."

The lights kept lighting and the blinks kept blinking and Jonah's eyes kept flickering, but the calls kept coming. Who else was there? No one, that's who. That's who? No, wait: "That's who."

Jonah yawned. Spelling probably wasn't too busy tonight. If the switchboard would ever slow down, even for a second, he could call over and ask Mark, Mark who was in charge of...his head hit the table and he jolted up.

"Pedantics," he said. Street sign, a quick fix.

"Pedantics," he answered. Neighborhood garage sale, problems all over the place.

"Pedan..."

"Country FAIR," Malcolm shrieked. "The peach's and cherry's and pie's, God help us all!"

Eight more hours. July was always busy, but not this busy. The lights. The red lights, beaming and blazing. The switchboard. The headset. The...

"Sick with a hachoo hachoo cough cough cough," faked Sue Jiminez, scheduled to relieve him for the next shift. Jonah hung up on her before she could continue.

If he could just catch a catnap, just for a few minute's...

"Downtown, a bunch of protestors with really bad signs."

"It's an apostrophe catastrophe!"

The calls came faster.

The night or day or afternoon, whatever it was, the room had no windows and no lights except for the flashing red red red red red ("PIG'S and COW'S, for fuck's sake, when will fair season END?" raged Mal) and Jonah slept.

He slept below the red flashing lights that foretold years of coming Christmas's and present's and loved one's, if he could just get some zzz's, just a few minute's and he could start answering the phone's again, could fix all the mistake's before it was too late.

## **Like 911, It's Just a Number** by **Adriana Tosun**

Let's cut to the chase: Milky (16) likes Joe and Joe (17) likes Milky, but since they're teenage boys who have known each other for half their lives and who talk mostly about video games and homework and breasts, neither one knows how the other feels, and anyway neither of them is too sure about that gay shit (spoiler: they both end up liking it enough to stick with it). This, however, is not their story, although anybody could assure you it's a rollicking good one, with drama and intrigue and a fair amount of make-up sex.

Instead, it is a story about their friend, Hallelujah (16), who has fallen in love with Mr. Farneaux (39), her period three English teacher.

If you asked Hallelujah to define herself--and Mr. Farneaux does, on the first day of class, which is approximately four days before she begins to feel heartwarminglly woozy around him--she would hand you this list:

1. a Believer in Jesus Christ Our Lord and Savior Amen
2. possible future astronaut
3. an avid birdwatcher
4. collector of 1980s plastic wristwatches
5. a good friend

(Numbers 1 and 3 are lies she tells for her mother's sake, but three out of five ain't too shabby.)

Hallelujah has never felt about anybody the way she feels about Mr. Farneaux, who suffers from slightly off-center male pattern baldness and whose wedding ring slips to the knuckle every time he gestures downwards. When he speaks, she feels her heart tremble, like a shivering quail has taken residence in her chest cavity, gentle and hollow-boned, easily crushed.

English, for her, has always been pure torture; now it's a delicious one.

\*\*\*

The first afternoon Milky ditches Hallelujah to stare around at Joe and work up the nerve to kiss him (spoiler: it doesn't happen) is the afternoon Hallelujah stares around at Mr. Farneaux to do exactly the same thing, although if you asked someone other than Hallelujah, they would probably tell you she's taking a make-up quiz for the math class she missed when she passed out after trying to crash diet and really only crashing her blood sugar.

Despite being a junior, Hallelujah has never before been in the detention room, and its suffocating quiet comes as a shock to her. There are two hooded delinquents (she waves to one when she realizes it's her cousin (15), who's now going by the name of Satana), but everyone else just looks like a bored version of themselves. Mr. Farneaux is sitting at the desk reading a self-help book called *I Can't Do This Anymore*.

"Hi," says Hallelujah. "Uh. Mrs. Canon should have left a quiz for me?"

Mr. Farneaux squints at her and then says, "Oh, Hallelujah! Sure. Here."

Their fingers brush as she takes the paper from him and she tries not to pass out again. She goes to sit next to Satana and frowns down at the quiz, which says

Name:  
Mrs. Canon  
Pd. 7 Pre-Calculus

- 1) Given the following triangle, find the value of Z.
- 2) Using the attached formula sheet, prove your answer to 1).

Hallelujah turns the page over; there aren't any formulae there, either. She looks up to see if Mr. Farneaux's accidentally left it on the desk or something, but he isn't anywhere to be seen, which at least explains why Satana has started sculpting her half of the table with a pair of safety scissors.

Hallelujah sighs and cracks her knuckles.

\*\*\*

Name: *Hallelujah Mourning*  
Mrs. Canon  
Pd. 7 Pre-Calculus

- 1) Given the following triangle, find the value of Z  
 $Z = 3.2$

- 2) Using the attached formula sheet, prove your answer to 1).  
*Using the proof of Heron's formula I have provided on notebook paper, we can eventually prove that  $Z = \sqrt{[s(s-a)(s-b)(s-c)]}$ , and, plugging in, we're left with  $Z = 3.2$   
I have never understood why you insist on using Z rather than A when we're calculating area. NEXT TIME GIVE ME A FUCKING FORMULA SHEET. >:(*

\*\*\*

She gets a detention like she plans, but there's a different teacher at the desk, reading the same worn copy of *I Can't Do This Anymore*. Hallelujah is faintly disappointed that Mr. Farneaux is not possessed of a need to better himself but immediately revises their wedding plans to include her mother once again, now she knows they won't need any of that New Agey anti-Christian stuff during the ceremony.

"It's too bad," Milky says when she tells him. "The glowing crystals were a nice touch, I thought."

"You could keep them for table centerpieces," Joe points out. "No harm, no foul."

Hallelujah makes a note and then wonders when they'll get their act together (spoiler: following an embarrassing post-Prom encounter, they work it out by graduation).

\*\*\*

The Friday after Valentine's Day, Hallelujah has received

1. a platonic Valentine's Day card from Joe
2. a platonic Valentine's Day card from Milky
3. a vaguely ominous box of candy hearts signed from You Know Who (she doesn't)
4. a note from Mr. Farneaux to please see him on Friday after class

Hallelujah feels buoyed by hope and sick with nerves. Will she kiss him? Will she cry? So far every kiss she's ever had--all three of them--have ended in tears for *somebody*.

She knocks on the door of the English office and then opens it. "Mr. Farneaux?"

Four overweight, bespectacled women are sitting at the desks placed around the room; they all turn to look at her in one simultaneous movement. "I think he's in his classroom," says Mrs. Adelmann (53) eventually.

"Okay, thanks," Hallelujah says, and beats a hasty retreat.

\*\*\*

Mr. Farneaux is, in fact, sitting at his desk when Hallelujah comes to find him, reading something that appears to be titled *What To Do When You Can't Do Anything*. Hallelujah guiltily puts the crystals back on the altar and kicks her mother back out of the church.

"Oh, yes, Hallelujah," Mr. Farneaux says. "Thank you for coming."

"N-n-no problem," Hallelujah stammers, and curses her wretched tongue. "I mean, it's cool. What's up?"

Mr. Farneaux gestures at the chair across from him and says, "I admire the progress you've made this marking period."

"Thanks, I guess," says Hallelujah, sitting down. "I've been working pretty hard."

Mr. Farneaux nods. "I can tell," he says. The silence is awkward between them.

"So," Hallelujah tries when the heat of the classroom gets too oppressive, "how come you asked me to come talk to you?"

Mr. Farneaux clears his throat and says, "Well, Hallelujah, I--I like you."

Hallelujah feels an answering stab of want from the pit of her stomach (well, that or the hot lunch was acting up, she couldn't tell; star-crossed love and indigestion seemed to share a lot of the same symptoms). "I like you, too, Mr. Farneaux," she says. "I like you an awful lot."

"I thought so," he says, "I really did, otherwise I wouldn't be talking to you. Look, Hallelujah, can you keep a secret?"

Hallelujah is about to nod when he darts out his tongue to lick the corner of his mouth. She's never seen him make a gesture so furtive before--so *dirty*--and all of a sudden she can picture it: his undershirt's collar ringed yellow in sweat, his love handles jiggling portentously under her palms, her fingers in his chest hair. "Maybe," she says nervously.

Mr. Farneaux reaches forward to pat her hand. "I need a yes or no from you, Hallelujah," he says. "I need a yes."

Hallelujah looks at their hands on his desk, almost intertwined. "I don't think so," she says.

He offers her a lollipop a little desperately. She trashes it as she leaves the classroom.

\*\*\*

"I guess it wasn't meant to be," Hallelujah sighs.

"Maybe not," Milky agrees. "He wasn't your type, anyway."

"No?" Hallelujah asks. "No, I suppose you're right. Too much of a daredevil."

"I heard his wife is pregnant," Joe says with a twist to his mouth.

"Next time," Hallelujah promises herself (spoiler: it's not the next time, nor the time after, but it *is* the one after that, the one who looks at her and sees more than her mousy hair and her thin lips, who sees all the wonders she contains, who sees more than the sum of her parts, who doesn't object to the crystalline table favors, who sets her small quail of a heart free).

**Heyoka**  
by  
**Peter Cole Friedman**

Each joke  
is a crack  
of thunder,  
a rupture  
in the sky's  
grammar.  
Punch lines  
Spider across,  
fissuring, logic.  
Here's the trick:  
The surface  
is so thin tha t  
bit s of outer-  
space leak i n,  
until there is  
a silence  
so tireless  
you can break it  
with an ything &  
s till m a k e s e n s e

Potato.

## **"High IQ" is Now Trending on Twitter**

by  
**Stacey Resnikoff**

Theft can be so cliché. "Don't move." "Gimme me all your money." Blah blah blah. Occasionally, however, you run into a criminal with panache. A maverick among the immoral, who surprises with a command like: "Give me those spectacular Italian shoes. Or you're deader than Olga Knipper." Now that'll send you reeling. Especially if you are a Russian symphony conductor with a penchant for Anton Chekhov trivia and weakness for custom leather. Even more so if you don't realize this information is on your Wikipedia bio.

So it was with Maksim Sandofsky one random, rainy Tuesday evening in North Cambridge, as he approached Pemberton Farms gourmet shop just outside Porter Square for a bottle of Bandol. A scruffy 22-year-old had snuck behind him – something reflective in his hand.

Could it be? Mere steps away from twenty-dollar-a-pound wild-caught Alaskan salmon, chrysanthemum bunches and prosciutto-wrapped artichoke hearts, Sandofsky would be mugged. Just a short walk from his favorite French/Cambodian restaurant and that trendy Thai place with the embarrassingly bland Ho Mok Pla. But here he was. Facing death. Before dinner.

"Hold on, hold on," Sandofsky raised his ample eyebrows for a hearing. After all, he was a conductor. A maestro. A man who set the tempo. "Crime doesn't pay, you realize. It may amass wealth, but it doesn't actually pay. It lacks a union or health benefits. At your age, you need a career. Something with staying power. Have you considered the culinary arts?" He motioned toward the cooking school one block down. "I hear you can do quite well selling Canadian prescription drugs on eBay. Do you have a passport?"

Sandofsky hoped to outwit the criminal with banter and non sequiturs, leaving him briefly confused and easy to knee in the groin. Something a Czech bassoonist in the North Philly Philharmonic had taught him: The Knee and Flee.

But the hoodlum acted friendly. "Sorry, Sandofsky, I crowdsourced my opener – and that's what won: Olga Knipper. It could've been worse. Second place was, 'What's that scent you're wearing: Rusty Samovar?' That would've just been weird."

The young man revealed a silvery mobile phone. He was filming Sandofsky's monologue like a paparazzo. Yet who would be interested in "punking" a youth orchestra conductor? A newly defunded and deranged PBS?

"This is a joke," Sandofsky said. "You don't want my shoes – my money."

"No, no. I do this for my show. You're on 'W-T-F: What The Follow' I'm Dex."

Coincidentally, "Dex" was a dog in Sandofsky's building: a migraine-invoking mix of a Jack Russell and Russell Brand. "Dex" was also a factor of ten. And Sandofsky had noticed the dog always barked in tens, whatever the provocation. He noticed details like that. Just as he noticed this Dex had a mole on his left temple that looked like the Apple logo. That should really be checked. And he wore the oddest T-shirt, illustrated with a stick figure being chased by what appeared to be a rabid partridge.

"I follow people—I actually *follow* people—who don't use Twitter," Dex explained, still filming. "Smart people who think they're too good to tweet. It's just funny. You know that YouTube video of the skunk that gets caught in the kids' bouncy house? I have more hits than *that*. And I have endorsements. Want a free bag of SunChips?"

Sandofsky felt at once provoked, relieved and vaguely disappointed. He lived for great dinner stories. He could've shared his brush with death over a terrine of duck's liver.

"You're cool, man. When I followed Mattie Hayes – the MIT professor – she threw her scone at me," Dex said. "It was awesome. Most hits ever. Make a PhD throw food and you go *viral*. That's when Starbucks came on as sponsor."

Sponsored stalking? Sandofsky didn't remember reading about this in the *Wall Street Journal*. Of course, anything was possible. He'd recently been asked at a memorial service to "like" the funeral home.

"I don't go viral," he said, his tongue dry and gallingly wineless. Yet Dex did not lower his phone. He smiled giddily as if his serotonin were spiking.

It had begun to lightly rain on Sandofsky's spectacular shoes. Pemberton glowed with abundance. And he craved Bandol.

"Don't follow me," he warned, turning abruptly. Yet Dex did, much like his namesake terrier.

"Why you insolent—"

Suddenly headlocked, Dex felt his spine seize. He tried to clasp his phone, but felt it slip away. There was *second man*. A real mugger. With white hair and beard, smelling of ganja and BenGay, and wearing a coffee-stained "Trust Me, I'm a Genius" T-shirt. Sandofsky noticed all these things, as well as the pocket protector that somehow clung to the man's shirt despite lack of pocket. *Prestissimo* Sandofsky issued a Knee and Flee, causing the attacker to drop the phone and hobble up Mass Ave shouting what all failed muggers must be thinking: "I'll hack you so bad your hard drive will melt!" and "I'm boycotting Starbucks!"

Dex scooped up his phone and dried it with his T-shirt edge, paternally. "I think it's okay." He tapped at the screen.

"What about your neck?" Sandofsky asked. The sudden Knee and Flee had pulled his *popa*.

Dex rolled his head for a moment like a yogi, his eyes still fixed on his phone as he tapped. "It's okay, I think. Oh, sweet! I've got the video."

"Who was that man? Never mind. Just erase it. Erase the whole thing. It's the least you can do."

Dex paused, finally looking at Sandofsky, who was rubbing his injured hip. "I'll think about it, Maks-a-million."

Sandofsky shook his head, muttering in Russian as he limped to gastronomecca. Though his dinner was delayed, he now had a gripping story: Rhythmic rain. A sudden struggle. A fleeing criminal. And one final crescendo: a Kermit Lynch-imported Bandol at Pemberton for

just 23 dollars a bottle. Injured sciatic nerve or not, that's something you buy two cases of on the spot.

Yet as he dined that evening, the "Mad Maestro" episode of "WTF" was posted to YouTube. An angry Sandofsky calling Dex "insolent" followed by dramatically lurching video. A blur of shots: an old man's hand, Sandofsky's custom loafers, Dex's logo-mole. Audio of a muffled struggle, an offensive stream of Russienglish expletives, and then Dex's voice: "Dude, no way. Don't drop it." Darkness.

By all appearances, Sandofsky had kicked Dex's *papa*.

The next morning, as Sandofsky finished his croissant au beurre, the episode was already before the board of directors of the Bostoniana, the celebrated youth orchestra he lead. Hastily, they issued a press release that their esteemed conductor of 20 years was being put on unpaid leave while the matter of the "Mad Maestro" could be investigated.

Sandofsky wondered where he was: Eighteenth century court? National Public Radio? He had to defend himself. Quickly. Directly. He testily took up the gauntlet: Twitter.

As @CherryOrchard3, Sandofsky began tweeting. To Dex, begging for clarification. To his students, to rally support. And to irreverent blogger BosTongue, asking to please remove a Photoshopped image of him as a burly, bare-chested Russian World Wrestling Entertainment character called The Conductinator.

After two weeks of entweeties – and the quickly popularized student-launched Twitter hashtag #WTFWTF – Dex finally cleared things up in a tweet: "NO ONE was harmed by @CherryOrchard3 in the filming of WTF." By sundown, his screen filled with 140-character-or-less congratulations, the maestro was reinstated with a sizeable apology bonus. The money was quickly spent on a new phone, perfect for keeping in touch with @MashaWept, the 40-something Chekhov trivia champion and flautist he met through Twitter.

Meanwhile, after the higher-than-ever hits of "Mad Maestro," Dex was invited by the new PBS cable reality network NoBS to develop a show for television: "IQ Posse." On the show, a madcap crew – including Dex, a sexy Rhodes scholar and a humanoid robot named Satoshi – ambush everyone from neurologists to Nobel laureates at professionally inconvenient times to deliver on-the-spot Mensa Workouts. After thirteen episodes, one lucky player chosen by a peer-reviewed panel will nab the top prize: a \$500,000 MacArthur Genius Grant. Brainiacs from Harvard to Stanford are tripping over themselves to be considered. And thanks to the carefully orchestrated social media buzz, "high IQ" is now trending on Twitter.

**The Importance Of Being Careful  
(Or Tolstoy's Goat)  
by  
Joseph Buehler**

While Tolstoy wrote outdoors,  
his goat  
would eye him suspiciously,  
making sure he wrote nothing  
that was anti-goat,  
although usually the goat (whose  
name happened to be Ivan)  
wasn't quite sure he understood what  
the great man  
was actually writing about.  
But if Tolstoy should ever happen to write the word 'goat',  
Ivan was instantly ready to butt him down off his wooden  
chair as violently as he possibly could.

So Tolstoy  
always watched himself very carefully and only wrote the word  
'goat' when he was sure the goat wasn't staring at him,  
or else he wrote indoors.

**Shoes**  
**by**  
**Eric Suhem**

Gary divorced Gabriela over what he termed as her 'lack of support for my shoe choices'. In the settlement, Gabriela kept the house, and Gary moved into the Capri Village Apartments. Now single, he felt freer to explore his shoe preferences. Taking a walk, he noticed a shoe store around the corner. "What a stroke of luck!" declared Gary, eyeing his chipped wobbly clogs.

Entering the store, he was greeted by a salesman. "Hello sir, my name is Walt, may I help you?" asked the salesman.

"I'd like to try on the walking shoes in the window," said Gary.

"Well I want to try on *your* shoes!" snapped back the salesman, fixated on the clogs.

The manager noticed, and squinted with disapproval, saying, "I'm sorry sir, about our associate's unprofessional behavior." He told the salesman to go sit in the corner and think about what he'd done. "We're interviewing for his replacement, and we're down to two candidates," confided the manager. As he helped Gary with his shoe needs, the interview process in the back room could be overheard:

"So you had plastic surgery to change your face into a foot-measuring device, but do you really want this job?" and "Well what about this resume from Mrs. Hubbard? Anyone who lives in a shoe must be dedicated, and with all those mouths to feed." The store immediately hired the man with the foot-measuring device face, who was on the floor practicing, and fired the salesman Walt, who walked dejectedly out the door. Gary chose to purchase a snappy hiking boot, and left the store, in search of adventure.

Meanwhile, Gary's ex-wife Gabriela visualized her thoughts soaring into the clouds. She thought, "Today I will wear my brown patent leather shoes." She went to the window and saw her words in a billowy cloud: 'Today I will wear my brown patent-leather shoes'. The cloud formed into a storm, and raindrops began to fall, escalating into a deluge. Gabriela looked out the window to see her patent leather brown shoes floating down the street in a flood of storm water.

She jumped out of her house and followed the stream down the street, as it carried her brown patent leather shoes through the open front door of the seedy Capri Village Apartments, into the bleak lobby, dusty potted plants upturned and pulled into the onslaught of water. The shoes and potted plants ended up in the apartments' turgid, half-filled, cracked pool, situated under a decaying diving board.

Days later, after the storm had cleared, 3 people sat by the apartment complex pool: 1. Gary, enjoying the single life, sun burnt and overweight in his Speedo and wooden clogs. 2. A middle-aged platinum blonde cocktail waitress named Wanda, on a chaise lounge, wearing white enamel-trim sunglasses, and smoking a cigarette entrenched in a bizarre imitation gold-plated holder. 3. Walt, the fired shoe salesman, who also lived in the Capri Village Apartments. On most days, Walt would sit in his Barcalounger, drapes drawn, watching cable sports programs, after having bought a large plastic bottle of discount vodka at the

generic drugstore in the hazy morning, wearing plaid shorts, and black socks that squeezed his white, puffy, blue-veined ankles. However, today Walt had decided to sit by the pool, hoping to strike up a conversation with Wanda, to whom he had become attracted.

Wanda eyed the brown patent-leather shoes floating into the deep end of the pool, near the 8.5 foot sign, soon gathering them in with a nearby insect net, adopting them as her own. Gary, recognizing the brown patent-leather shoes as Gabriela's, felt tears of regret in his eyes as he thought of her. "I must have those shoes!" he yelled, grabbing at Wanda's insect net.

Walt, sensing his opportunity, stepped in. "Leave that net alone, those are now Wanda's shoes!" he screamed, pushing Gary back. Gary lost balance on his wooden clogs, and fell into the foul swimming pool.

Walt and Wanda would soon develop a steamy, long-term romance that would become the talk of the Capri Village Apartments. Wanda described the shoe incident to her fellow waitresses at the cocktail lounge, including the new waitress named Gabriela.

## More Human Than Human

by  
Anna Zoria

Sometimes I ask myself if it meant anything at all—me, you, the roast chicken, those two years together that now feel murky and placed under thick fog. You driving to work after one hour of sleep, week after week after week. You going crazy from no sleep, from too much me, from us taking each other's brain hostage. You and me staying up drinking scotch, playing chess, smoking pack after pack, listening to Kid A, taking baths on E. Me taking up the whole bed every night, me waking up laughing, me screaming in my sleep. Us sleeping through every Saturday. Your love for dates and numbers.

Your notes, left behind in the morning signed *Tiny, I love you*. The wine gums, only the black and red ones, cause that's the ones you like. Me leaving a trail of bobby pins around your house so you could find them later, I bet you still find one once in a while, yeah you probably still find one gathering dust somewhere behind the couch.

The Lions Gate bridge, your post card that said "This is where you tell her, this is where you tell her, this is where you tell her that she is never to be forgotten". Your eyes in the morning, between the sheets. Your sounds of breakfast making, of reading a book in another room. The sound of sprinklers—who knew that sounds could hurt?

Me crying on the phone, me suffocating under your presence, me punching a hole in my wall, me jumping out of the car. Reading aloud from *Wide Sargasso Sea*: "Say die and I will die. I watched her die many times".

Your hands crawling up my legs, that night you said that you can hold me like a six pack. Your whiskey breath, your ring, your eyes always looking back, always careful, always thinking: what if she does, what if she doesn't.

Our nights in the cabin on the island and my *Elegie* in E minor. With the lights off and the windows boarded up: city dwellers obsessed by the discovery of darkness. *Elegie*: a mournful, melancholic or plaintive funeral song or a lament for the dead. You know, that was the summer we still had a year ahead of us.

Our naps in the winter time with the rain falling outside. The rain falling outside while we were on a bus in Florence had a different quality. The belts tied to the bed, the ghost in the elevator.

Our time that we wasted, our endless numbered days. Our time when I played the *Elegie* for you on the piano, this time at my mother's house. I played it over and over, I didn't want to play anything else because nothing else fit and nothing felt right at all. That same evening when we baked cherry pie. Was it all broken already then? Maybe the pie was blueberry, maybe I wasn't lucky, maybe I was lonely, maybe we were both lonely, who can remember now.

But night after night I take myself back to us watching *Blade Runner*. The world was large but we were larger, do you remember? Us dancing to *La Javanaise*, Serge Gainsbourg in your living room, lasagna that took five hours to make burning to coals in the oven. You running to the gas station at 4:30 am on a Tuesday night to get us two Rolo ice cream

cones and a pack of Dunhills Special Reserve. The breeze on my sweaty back, an arm dangling out the window. Do you remember?

Your love of the smell of rosemary. Your wooden table where I scratched the letters "TINY LOVE" and you added "S SOMEONE ELSE".

You're tired of saying sorry but I was touching those carved letters when I read your letters to her.

**A Place Where Kids' Word Is Law**  
by  
**Michael Giddings**

I'm sitting on the couch watching TV with the kids when the Party Action Party Packrat explodes out of the screen and into our living room.

The kids, of course, go absolutely wild.

"Hello friends!" says the Party Action Party Packrat. His name is Pizza Pete, and you never see it in print without a tm at the end.

"Pizza Pete!" says Andrea, my daughter. "Oh, Pizza Pete, I'm so happy to see you! You're here to take us to Party Action Party for the day, aren't you? You must be!"

By way of response Pizza Pete begins doing a jig on the rug. Andrea gets to her feet and joins him. Her little pink slippers become a blur as they dance.

Tommy has crawled onto the couch next to me for assurance. He's always been one to look for assurance.

"Is this okay, dad?"

I watch the five foot three inch cartoon packrat swing my daughter into the air. She is laughing. Her eyes are filled with embers of glee.

"I'm not sure," I tell my son. Tommy puts his head down on my arm.

The commercials for Party Action Party play out as follows: two children are sitting around watching television. Pizza Pete bursts in wearing a backwards baseball cap, a purple shirt with a slice of pizza on it, and no pants. After a brief and completely unnecessary introduction (the children always know his name) he whisks them off to the nearest Party Action Party establishment where they have the time of their lives with curly slides, ball pits, video games, and prizes. Pizza is consumed. Children screech and shout. Party Action Party, they quickly decide, is a heavenly kingdom.

My daughter Andrea is lactose intolerant and has to take a pill before going there.

"Who wants to rage?" booms Pizza Pete, putting a foot on the coffee table. "Who wants to party?"

"I do!" screams Andrea who has fallen to the carpet and is flailing around in her nightgown, displaying not a trace of modesty. "I do! I do!"

"Let's go to..." Pizza Pet slobbers over the suspense, his whiskers quivering. "*Party! Action! Party!*"

"Can we go with him, dad?" Tommy wants to know.

"I should make a phone call first," I excuse myself and go into the kitchen.

\*\*\*

Keeping an eye on the packrat I dial the number of the local PAP.

"Party Action Party," says a lifeless voice on the other end. "A place where kids' word is law. This is Lynette speaking. How may I help you?"

"I have your packrat in my living room," I say.

Lynette hangs up thinking it's a prank call.

Pizza Pete is swinging Andrea back and forth by her ankles. The little girl is shrieking with the fun of it.

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We get in the car with the kids in back and Pizza Pete riding shotgun.

"I want to listen to the Banana Hannah tape," Andrea demands so I put it on.

"How you doing?" Pizza Pete asks me while the backseat sings the Banana Song.

"I'm well," I tell him.

The sun is blinding in our neighborhood because there are no trees. Each house is cream colored, each lawn stiff and green. It only takes five minutes to get to the highway.

Banana Hannah sings something about the mistakes that can be made between cupcakes and birthday cakes as we go.

"She's quite a fox," Pizza Pete tells me.

"I wouldn't know," I tell him back.

"Next exit."

\*\*\*

As soon as the car is parked Pizza Pete grabs my kids by the hand and races across the parking lot. I lock the car and follow them inside. Party Action Party is exactly the same as it was the last time I was here: bright, loud, and vomity.

"Welcome to Party Action Party," says Lynette at the front desk. "A place where kids' word is law. How many are you with today, sir?"

"Just the two," I say motioning to Andrea and Tommy, now kicking a discarded slice back and forth over by the trashcans. "And—"

I think better of mentioning the escaped packrat again. He's no longer with us anyway. He is no longer with us but his presence is felt. He leers down from every poster on the wall, each piece of merchandise, and the many stacks of greasy paper plates they have yet to dispose of. I pay for the tickets while avoiding his gaze from the center of Lynette's crooked visor.

Tommy takes my shirtsleeve as we push through the bubbly plastic gates into everlasting fun. Andrea has abandoned us for the Spider Stomp game. Tommy has always been one to be abandoned.

"Thanks for taking us here," he says softly. "I really like it here."

There is an animatronic Pizza Pete holding a guitar near the food plaza. It is short-circuiting. Its vast black eye winks and dilates to the cries of children.

**Stooges**  
**by**  
**Tina Posner**

*I must confess I am not quite so Nice,  
To Damn all little Gallantries for Vice  
—Sarah Fyge, "The Repulse to Alcander"*

I can't remember my dreams  
but they leave me bathed in sweat.  
Maybe the problem is  
I still haven't figured out how  
my family was replaced by three  
goldfish, named after the Stooges.  
The fourth, who arrived DOA,  
was Shemp, and he appears to be  
unmourned. Nor do they seem to miss  
the jailbird daddy who left them behind.  
But, I think the fish might love me  
or at least they recognize me as  
the food lady. They swim to  
my gaze and mouth wet kisses.  
The cat is surprisingly indifferent  
or oblivious to these orphans.  
I guess peaceful coexistence  
for a cat and three fish is possible  
as long the food lady comes through.

And although the sound  
of their tank filter makes me  
have to pee all the time,  
I guess I love them too—  
partly because they were  
nearly flushed down the toilet  
by someone from social services,  
and partly because their water  
is so hopeless murky, it's like they're  
swimming around in my head.  
But I love them most for rising  
to the surface to look for one last  
crumb of food that might be floating there.  
Their optimism is so touching, and  
when the sunlight works its alchemy  
on their golden scales, they glow  
incandescent inside algaed glass  
sporting their punch lines of shit.

## **The Pests from Beyond** by **Ryan Currier**

When ghosts moved into my house, my first thought was live and let live. Actually, my first thought was, *Great, here comes the dementia*. My second thought was that I was the victim of some kind of perverted trick, played out by one of my friends. I hoped it was my perverted friend Bob, so I could flatten his nose so bad he'd only smell lip.

But no, these were definitely ghosts.

After I got a quote from an exorcist (\$300!!!), that's when I had my third thought--*live and let live*. And times were good. Without a care in the world, ghosts scurried about between the walls. Ghosts climbed through the dishes in the sink sounding off a ceramic cacophony. Sometimes ghosts would even wake me in the middle of the night with their warm, furry, scratches. Positively otherworldly. Ghosts aren't all bad, and they did some good too. I have this problem, see? During reruns of *Everyone Loves Raymond*, my mouth releases a constant spray of food, the result of clam chowder and top-rate comedy writing. Like clockwork, each mess I made disappeared in a matter of weeks, only to show up elsewhere in the form of ghost-pellets.

My long-term girlfriend, however, wasn't convinced by my stories. The ghosts were clever enough to only operate at nighttime, and no one believes a drunk. My long-term girlfriend told me again and again that my house was infested. "With ghosts," I'd add, and she'd storm off, unable to believe anything other than her own narrow point of view. Things got so bad that she considered moving out, and so I capitulated by calling an exterminator, though the quote they gave me was too high for full capitulation (\$300!!!). And so I thought, live and let live.

Then things changed. Something must have pissed off the ghosts, probably my long-term girlfriend, because they started to act out. What could I do? Its not like I could flatten a ghost's nose. Heck, I'm not even sure if they have noses. The ghost pellets started to turn up everywhere. I mean everywhere. I didn't even have to look under my stack of festering trash bags to know what I'd find down there. They even got into my chocolate sprinkles. For three hours I sorted ghost-pellets from sprinkles before I realized—I *don't even own sprinkles*. Unfortunately, I realized that after I fixed up a Sundae.

About a week or so after that, quarters and dimes began mysteriously disappearing from the change jar. And then my longtime girlfriend accused me of smoking, a vile and nasty habit she cured me of when we originally started dating. Because she doesn't date smokers. So what if some change went missing? So what if my clothes reeked of smoke, and cigarette butts fell out of my jean jacket pocket? But those arguments aside, my long-term girlfriend still wanted answers. It was clear to me. "Ghosts," I told her.

The next afternoon, I came home from a hard day of checking parking meters, vending machines, and the pockets of sleeping sidewalk men for loose change. I walked into the most horrific scene. All of my possessions—my clothes, my collection of rocks and semi-precious minerals, my newspaper clippings of chip-dip recipes—all heaped into a pile in the middle of the living room. And then I heard a voice, almost ethereal, emanating from the mouth of my long-term girlfriend. "Get out," it said. "Ghosts," I thought, "big-time." I had never seen levitation before, but a one pound hunk of drusy quartz shot across the room,

barely missing my forehead. The incident was no less spectacular that the mineral was helped along by my long-term girlfriend's throwing arm.

Why it is that ghosts chose that house, I don't know. Was there a violent murder there? Was it built over of an Indian burial site? Or, like some undead beacon, were ghosts drawn in by that stack of trash bags in the kitchen? The house stands empty now, occupied only by ghosts. Ghosts and my long-term girlfriend, and some new guy named Shawn. I walked by the house the other day. I noticed a fresh coat of paint and new window treatments. Definitely ghosts.

**What to do when Joelene comes calling**  
by  
**Rijn Collins**

It was April when it began.

It might have started earlier, but that was when I noticed the first sign. I was chatting to my mother, the phone in one hand and a pen in the other. It was only when I hung up that I looked down and saw, in thin black strokes, that I'd absently drawn a round little banjo.

And that's how it started.

It was a few days later that the second sign occurred. I was locking up the salon when I turned to Tina and Lois, my chief manicurists, and out of my mouth fell "See y'all tomorrow."

I've never, in my entire life, said "y'all" before. I had absolutely no idea why I was taking it up now.

Tina and Lois seemed as surprised as I was at my choice of words, and as I climbed into my car I could see their heads bent together, whispering.

After that, I just couldn't stop it happening. By the time I got home and kissed my husband hello, everything out of my mouth was in a twang straight out of Tennessee. I heard the words, I saw my husband's raised eyebrows, but I could do nothing to halt the flow.

When I heard myself say "I'm fixin' to make a mess of polk salad for dinner," I had to head for the bedroom and slam the door.

I sat on the edge of the bed, my head in my hands as my heart slammed against my ribcage.

There was no doubt about it.

*I was turning into Dolly Parton.*

I slid back onto the bedspread and hugged my knees, shaking my head to throw the thought clear. How could this be? I wasn't even a fan! I'd grown up with her free spirited exuberance and infectious laughter bouncing out of my dad's stereo, and had often been told tales of her dirt poor upbringing as one of twelve children in the Smoky Mountains, but when in my musing I actually used the word "younguns," I began to rock back and forth on the bed.

Why me? I'm the opposite of free spirited—I only ever engage with my husband with the lights off, and I've been known to iron my underwear. Once, he kissed the top of my head and said with a sigh I didn't quite understand, "There's not much frivolity in you, is there, babe?"

No wonder he was tapping at the door, asking if I were ok. When I hollered "I'm a-coming!" I clapped my hands over my mouth in horror.

I reached for the bedside phone, shaking as I dialed.

"Mum! Something weird is happening to me."

I could hear the anxiety in her voice.

"What is it?"

"It's just...well, I seem to be turning into Dolly Parton."

She was silent—a fair enough response, considering. But I wasn't prepared for what came out of her mouth next.

"Ah...I was afraid that might happen."

My eyes grew huge.

"What?!"

Her voice was gentle, as though talking to a small child, which is just what I felt like, to be honest.

"It's in our blood, you see, my love. I don't know what it is about us O'Hallorans, but at certain points the women do tend to morph, I'm afraid."

I held the phone to my ear, and blinked, hard.

"I myself spent several months in the late 70's as Nana Mouskouri," she admitted. "I guess you were too young to remember, but I have to say, your father did have a soft spot for the glasses. I still bring them out for special occasions, if you know what I mean."

"Mum!"

"Darling, lighten up! You could learn a few lessons from Dolly, you know. There's not much you can do about it, I'm sorry, so best just go along with it."

"Is... is there anything else I should know?"

"Well, just one thing: some husbands seem to absorb it too, and they can alter when their wives do. It's not likely darling, but it's possible."

After I hung up, I sat on the bed in a daze. What if I woke up one morning and found myself lying next to...next to...*Liberace*? I slid off the bed and staggered to the mirror, and what I saw made my jaw drop.

My hair, usually kept pinned back tightly, had shimmied out of its moorings and risen in a teased halo so big it wouldn't fit within the frame of the mirror. And you know, I have to say it quite suited me.

The changes still take me by surprise, but all these months later, I'm learning to live with them. Who would have thought that long, gaudy Dolly talons would prove so popular at the

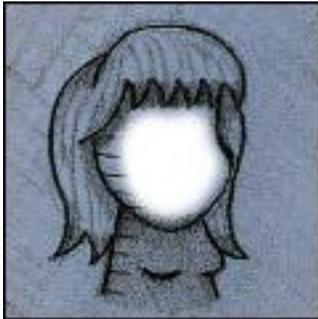
salon? We're booked solid, and the customers seem to love my tales of red-headed hussies, possum stew and coats my grandmammy used to sew. As for the physical alteration, well, let's just say that with the changes to my figure, I'm now comfortable leaving the lights on, if you get my drift.

But that's not the most exciting part. The other morning, I went to wake my husband for his grits and gravy, and stopped, my hand frozen in mid-air. There, his face deep in slumber, was what I swear looked like the beginnings of an Elvis sneer.

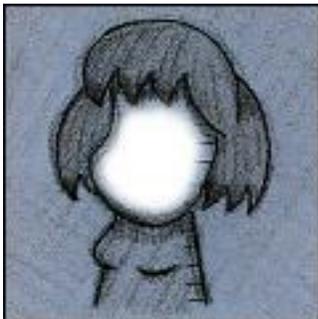
## Contributor Biographies



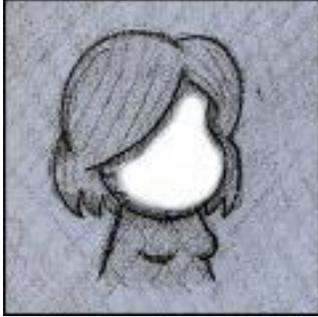
**Magda Knight** has been published in UK's seminal national science fiction comic *2000AD* (nepotism), and also in the *What Would Bill Hicks Say* anthology (not nepotism). She's also the founder and editor of [MOOKYCHICK.CO.UK](http://MOOKYCHICK.CO.UK), an online finishing school for the alternative young miss of today. Magda is basically Miss Jean Brodie, but not a fascist. She was once very drunk and accidentally asked her favourite comedian who he was. When he told me, she stared blankly at him until he walked away.



**Mary Cresswell** is a retired science editor from Los Angeles who lives on New Zealand's Kapiti coast. Her third book, *Trace Fossils*, was just published in New Zealand. She has had work in *Light Quarterly* and *LightenUpOnline*, and she is also capable of taking things seriously. More about her at: [www.bookcouncil.org.nz/Writers/Profiles/Cresswell,%20Mary](http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/Writers/Profiles/Cresswell,%20Mary)



**Vanessa Weibler Paris** lives, works, writes, and does some other stuff (like eating hot peppers and mulling the Oxford comma) in Erie, PA.



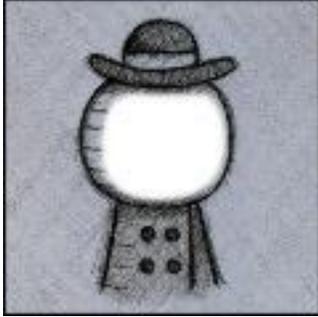
**Adriana Tosun** currently lives in Paris, but before that she lived on a schooner in Maine. Go figure. Her poetry has been published in *Divine Dirt Quarterly*.



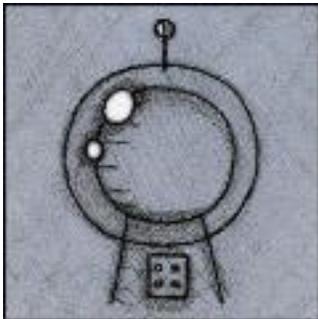
**Peter Cole Friedman** recently graduated from Hunter College in NYC, with a degree in Religious Studies but a keen interest in everything. He is thin but healthy. He strums a guitar and writes songs. He makes vast batches of soup. For money, he takes pictures of people's eyeballs in a medical office. The entire literary magazine circuit, save *Nibble*, *Writers' Bloc*, and *Right Hand Pointing*, has prudently steered clear of his work. Check out his blog of illustrated witticisms at [www.theidiotsage.wordpress.com](http://www.theidiotsage.wordpress.com)



**Stacey Resnikoff** is a writer, both for hire and by obsession. Her work includes short stories, essays, plays, music, news articles, and advertising. She is a graduate of Bard College and lives in the Boston area. You'll find more of her fiction and essay writing at <http://www.staceysaid.com>, <http://spunamuck.posterous.com>, and publications such as *The Big Jewel* and *paperplates*.



**Joseph Buehler** lives with his wife Trish near Bethlehem, Georgia. He is a retired deputy property appraiser for Sarasota County, Florida. He has published three short stories in the *Kansas Magazine* and a short story in the *Canadian Forum* and has published three poems recently in *Bumble Jacket Miscellany*. He enjoys all types of poetry, whether humorous or serious; many poems should combine both elements, and that is what he strives to do.



**Eric Suhem** lives in California and enjoys the qualities of his vegetable juicer. He is in the orange hallway ([www.orangehallway.com](http://www.orangehallway.com))



**Anna Zoria** is a student living in Vancouver, British Columbia. She grew up in Eastern Siberia, where it was too cold to do anything but read. She currently studies literature and painting in hopes of one day fulfilling her lifelong goal of becoming a barista. In her free time Anna likes to post pictures of cats on Tumblr and contribute to her student newspaper, *the Ubyssy*.



**Michael Giddings** is from Brooklyn. Most of his stories concern the specific laughs of ancient cartoon characters. Muttley, for instance. He is the proud father of short stories such as "Raccoons & Bacon," "Gabie Goes to Japan," and "Banana Hannah."



**Tina Posner** is a freelance writer living in Austin, Texas. John Ashbery once called her "Galileo" in an elevator because she said, "Up," when he asked where the elevator was going. This has only contributed to her awkward relationship with the Church.



**Ryan Currier** has a fear of clowns and failure. I guess if he had to rank them it would go failure first, clowns second. He's also afraid of being alone, but then when he's around people for too long, it's like AAAAAH, give me some me-time, you know? So I guess that's a distant third. He believes every mystery pain is a sure-sign he's dying and he lives in the Baltimore area.



**Rijn Collins** is a Melbourne writer whose latest stories have involved trichotillomaniacs, Finnish cowboys, taxidermy, Eastern European reality TV stars and those phobic about the colour red. Her writing has been published in numerous anthologies and magazines, as well as online journals such as *Metazen*, *Jersey Devil Press* and *Lowestoft Chronicle*. Her stories have been performed at the Melbourne Emerging Writers' Festival and adapted for radio by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. She's currently writing a novel, and trying not to include Elvis in it. So far, so good.