

◇ Defenestration ◇

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You Non-Miraculous Son of a Bitch
by
Eirik Gumeny

Danny Ramirez was sitting on the toilet when he heard it. The constant, staccato thuds and the slight clatter of plates and glasses bunny-hopping across the kitchen counter.

Not again, he thought. Not another embarrassing phone call to the complex office. Not another disgusted plumber calling in for backup. Maria walking in at the exact worst moment. Danny could feel his face turning red at the mere thought. Only then did he realize he hadn't flushed yet. There was no way the steady shaking could be the result of a pipe trying desperately not to explode. Danny relaxed considerably.

The commotion, however, did not. The man on the toilet shrugged it off, contenting himself with the assumption that it was a truck idling in the parking lot or a track loader inching across the building site behind it. It wasn't until after Danny wiped his ass and exited the bathroom that he discovered there was a minotaur pacing back and forth in his living room.

"What in the ..." Danny stared at the enormous beast, dumbfounded. The creature had to be at least eight feet tall, with the head of a bull and a body as thick and wide as a cartoon barbarian.

"Daniel Ramirez," rumbled the minotaur, his deep baritone having much the same effect on the dishes as his pacing, "I am here to defeat you in armed combat and reclaim the honor of my family."

"I don't... What?" asked Danny, still dumbfounded, but now confused for good measure. He backed against the wall of the apartment's small hallway, keeping as much distance as possible between himself and the hulking monster standing in front of his couch. The hulking monster in a very impressive suit.

"Your name is Daniel Ramirez, is it not?"

"Uh, yeah..."

"Then you are the last living descendent of Theseus, son of Aegeus, king of Athens, and I must destroy you as your ancestor destroyed mine."

"Wait, hold on," said Danny, coming to terms with the fact that he was talking to a mythical beast, if only because he now had to come to terms with the fact that the same mythical beast was trying to kill him. "I'm Mexican, not Greek."

"Your grandparents and their parents before them lived their lifetimes in Mexico, yes, but their bloodline originates in Spain, and Greece ere that. Your forebears emigrated from Athens to Andalusia shortly after the false prophet was born in Zion and religious upheaval befell the Hellenic empire."

"Jesus Christ."

"Yes, I believe that was the name of the prophet."

"No, it – It's an expression of disbelief," explained Danny.

"You dare accuse me of willfully casting misinformation?" boomed the minotaur. A box of Lucky Charms tumbled from the top of the refrigerator.

"What? No. Calm down," replied Danny, hands up placatingly, stepping from the hallway to the living room. "I don't not believe you. I don't think you would've... done whatever the hell magic you had to do to come here if it wasn't true."

"I traveled via airplane. Business-class," grumbled the taurine creature. "I am of myth, not magic, you unlettered ass."

"I didn't know any of that. I'm sorry. And I'm sorry someone I'm apparently related to killed someone you're related to."

"You are voluntarily ignorant of your ancestry?" The minotaur snuffled then tilted his head. His enormous dark eyes took in the young man before him. Danny stood petrified. He felt naked, despite his worn cardigan and threadbare slippers.

"You are slow-minded, yes? Suffering from a disease of the brain."

"No!" said Danny indignantly.

"But it is daylight and you do not appear to have taken a shower."

"I didn't know you were coming over."

"It is three in the afternoon, by your Mountain time zone. Should you not have bathed yourself as part of a daily hygienic ritual? It was my understanding that Americans valued cleanliness among all else."

"Showers just slow me down."

"Where... are you going?" asked the minotaur, raising a gigantic, bushy eyebrow.

"Well, uh, here, I guess," replied Danny slowly, looking vacantly at the rug. "I was going to work on some songs." He nodded toward the unopened guitar case wedged behind the hideously green couch.

"Has 'slow me down' taken on some new idiomatic meaning?" asked the minotaur. "You do not appear to be in a rush to do... anything."

"I get distracted."

"Is that why you are not wearing pants?"

"No, that's because you didn't knock."

"I did knock." The minotaur pointed toward the doorway and, more specifically, the extended deadbolt and the splintery hole gouged into the doorframe.

"Huh."

"Please, pick up your arms, Daniel Ramirez," said the minotaur, standing to his full height. His sharpened horns scraped against the apartment ceiling. "I tire of this conversation and I am pressed to defeat you and devour your bones before seven o'clock Mountain time. I did not plan for this much exposition and idle causerie when I booked my return flight."

"Look, this isn't going to take very long, man. You're, like, ten feet of nothing but muscle and ancestral rage. Do what you gotta do."

Danny shrugged and stood limply before the minotaur.

"You... do not defend yourself?"

"Against you?"

"Please, Daniel Ramirez. Defend your honor and make mine worthwhile. Raise a fist, brandish a knife. I will wait for you to walk to the kitchen to retrieve one."

Danny shook his head.

"At the very least threaten me with braggadocio."

"I've never been in a fight in my life."

"Is that... is that true?" replied the business-formal beast, deflating slightly. "You have never battled?"

"Never needed to," explained the young man in his underwear.

"And you are positive that you are not skull-damaged."

"I'm not," snapped Danny. "Stop asking."

"Then you are but a child," mumbled the minotaur. "Slaughtering an unprepared innocent will lend no benefit to restoring the honor and glory of my family line."

"If you say so. I'm kinda deferring to you when it comes to centuries-old blood feuds."

"This won't do. There must be a show of some skill, of some outmaneuvering and abasement." The minotaur stared directly at Danny. "I must defeat you in an activity in which you excel. I must dishonor you and yours."

"I spent most of the week cleaning shit off of my silverware. You might be a little late."

"What are you renowned for, Daniel Ramirez?" The beast stood at his full height again, puffing his enormous chest out. "What deeds cause others to speak your name in awe and hushed tones?"

"I'm nationally ranked at *Halo*," offered Danny.

"What is 'Halo'?"

"It's an FPS."

"I am unfamiliar with the term."

"A video game, an artificial simulation of extraterrestrial warfare."

"Show me this," rumbled the minotaur.

The minotaur, Asterion, flailed his massive limbs in front of Danny's television. The entire apartment convulsed each time his feet hit the floor. An entire bookcase had already toppled to the carpet.

The mythical beast did his best to match the movements of the digitized avatars on the television screen, but the motion-sensing software of the Kinect was unable to adequately capture his enormous bulk. It wasn't long before the screen blinked "Try Again" and fake, taunting laughter spilled from nearby speakers.

"This is preposterous," huffed Asterion, collapsing onto Danny's couch. He breathed rapidly and deeply, his chest heaving beneath his loosened tie and opened collar. The minotaur's jacket was folded neatly on the armrest beside him; his polished shoes were on the carpet, almost perfectly perpendicular to the couch.

"This *Dance Central* is worse than the *Halo*. Neither was manufactured with my form in mind, the very controls insult me! These games are ludicrously impossible!"

With a single hand, the minotaur picked up Danny's coffee table from beside the sofa and tossed it across the living room, sending it crashing through the sliding glass doors and onto the balcony.

"What the hell, Asterion?!"

"I am sorry, Daniel, but I am frustrated. I feel I may have enjoyed the *Halo* were the technology more durable." He nodded toward the controller in the corner, snapped in half like a cracker. "Moreover we still have no arena in which to best one another. Have you no chess? Do you play no sports?"

"I have *Kinect Sports*," replied Daniel.

"No, enough of this Kinect," said Asterion, waving his hand dismissively. "I must find a new way to decimate your manhood and restore the honor of my family."

"Whatever you want, Asterion. As long as you're past trying to kill me, I'm down for whatever."

"I never said I was past trying to kill you," growled the minotaur.

"Hey, how's this for a thing," replied Daniel quickly, "maybe... maybe friendship is just as good as retribution. Huh? Maybe we bring our bloodlines together... as a way of apologizing for and recognizing and lionizing past events that neither of us as individuals had anything to do with, but without spilling more blood and setting off another violent reunion generations from now."

"Do you in actual fact have children? Offspring to avenge your death?"

"Well, no..."

"I thought not," said Asterion, eyeing the young man judgmentally. "You still have not put on pants."

"I'm just saying, isn't there a way, other than battling to the death, to restore your honor? Can we have some kind of ceremonial union of the minotaurs and the Ramirezes?"

"Are you proposing we engage in sexual congress?"

"I wasn't, no, but if that's what it's going to take for you to not kill me... sure." Danny exhaled deeply. He stood up and turned, offering his hindquarters to Asterion. "Do what you gotta."

"In honesty," began the minotaur thoughtfully, "I am not certain that our attempted coupling would not damage you mortally. You are half my size. Assuming your *proktos* is proportionate to -"

"OK, yeah, fine, you may have a point." Danny waved his hands across his chest, signaling an end to this particular line of reasoning. "If you're not going to actually do it, please don't talk about it."

Asterion sighed. "I applaud your efforts, Daniel, but I fear that if we are not able to come up with a satisfactory contest or ceremony in the next few moments I will be unable to continue suppressing my compulsion to avenge my progenitors in the most violent way possible."

"OK, OK," said Danny. He began pacing across the room, rubbing his hand on the back of his neck. "Hey, what's your stance on marijuana?"

Danny Ramirez and the minotaur, Asterion, stood on the balcony, passing a joint back and forth. The coffee table had been returned to the living room, only slightly worse for wear, while the shattered glass had been kicked safely into a corner of the balcony.

The man and the beast leaned against the faux-adobe wall and stared west, over the exposed foundations and PVC pipes of the apartment complex expansion, past the dwindling houses littered along the sandy landscape, and into the orange- and yellow-streaked horizon.

"She walked in while I was knee-deep in my neighbor's poop. The plumbers had left as soon as they fixed the pipe. They wanted nothing to do with the clean-up. There's still a hole in the wall. Landlord had said he'd be up to help, but if he wasn't a shitty landlord and a liar we wouldn't have one sewage pipe for the entire building running through my kitchen."

"That sounds mortifying."

"I haven't seen Maria since."

"You have telephoned her, though, yes? You have explained the incident in detail?"

"I've left messages but she won't call back."

Asterion shook his horned head. "If she will not stand with you in crisis, in your flooding of feces, than you should not stand with her at all."

"I don't know," said Danny. "I don't know if I blame her."

"Were this Maria here now, in your kitchen, covered in feces and bile and dishwater, would you go to her? If she called to you in that state of foulness?"

"I, uh, I don't know..."

"Would you, Daniel?"

"I wouldn't be happy about it."

"But you would go to her. You would help Maria in her hour of need."

"Yeah, I guess."

Asterion took a long hit, burning through half of what was left of the joint.

"Your relationship cannot be, Daniel," explained Asterion, his baritone lessening slightly. "Partners are to stand together, at all times, regardless of the vileness of the situation. If one or the other does not, the union will end, poorly. One will always be a lamb and one will always be an idol."

The minotaur exhaled.

"And an idol will always demand a sacrifice."

"Dude," said Danny, "we were just fucking."

"She was," said Asterion. "You were in love with her."

"What? How would you...? I don't..." Danny flustered.

"I have been with you for hours now, Daniel. You did not run when I threatened you, you took my friendship even after I threatened you again. You are lonely. You feel like you have nothing to look forward to," said the minotaur. "And you still have not put on any pants."

"I was warm."

"Heed my advice, Daniel."

"You're taking things far more seriously than you should."

"And you are not taking them seriously enough." The minotaur handed Danny the roach, then slapped him on the back gently, although still enough to leave a bruise. "Get your life together, Daniel."

"Can we talk about something else now?"

"I have some opinions on your wardrobe if you would like."

"You into soccer? Can we talk about soccer?"

The minotaur laughed softly.

"You are done trying to kill me, right?"

"I am done trying to kill you," answered the mythical beast. "There would be no honor in it."

The sun crept out of view and the sky faded to a dark purple. Danny turned back to the apartment and found the digital clock on the cable box.

"Shit, you missed your flight."

"That is all right," said Asterion with a burly shrug. "I will reschedule for tomorrow morning. If I am not leaving a corpse behind, I have less reason to flee this country hastily."

"You want to crash here?" asked Danny. "We can order a couple pizzas."

Danny sat cross-legged on the couch with a guitar in his lap, scratching music onto a sheet of paper. There were a few other sheets scattered around him. Asterion sat on the floor to the left of him, leaning against the sofa and shoveling pizza slices into his mouth. His giant eyes were fixed on the television.

"You say this *Breaking Bad* was filmed here? It is a documentary? I would like to meet this Walter White."

There was a short knock and the apartment door swung open easily, revealing a heavysset bald man wearing a sparsely filled tool belt around his waist. Danny's landlord leaned in and looked around.

"Danny? You all –" The landlord caught sight of the fallen bookcase and the shattered balcony door. "What the hell happened in here?!"

Only then did the bald man see the minotaur sitting near his feet.

"Ho-ly shit."

"You are the landlord, yes?" asked Asterion. "You are not very good at your assigned tasks." The taurine beast stood up. "We may need to speak about this."

"D-Danny?" whimpered the fat man.

"Listen to the minotaur, Bernie."

Girl on Barbie
by
Susan DiPronio

You have Barbie dolls in your basement
with tiny shoes and tiny other things.
How's her hair ? Sticky?
I always thought she used a little too much product.
Do you love her? Do you touch her?
Is she strapped in a box or out and about
peeking in on you.

Do you make her dresses or buy them
wash and iron them?
Are her lips updated with new shades of color?
Is her mani and pedi french, american, reverse french?
Decisions decisions
I know they would keep me awake.

Is there any discussion about a future
for 'the two of you'?
Will she bring her furniture to your place?
or maybe yours will go to her condo.
The "healthy" thing to do is buy all new—just sayin'.

Can you share the bed with a bisexual
and what about that Ken. Will he stay in the picture.
oh right, polyamorous is her way.
You know—Midge, Skipper and Francie
she does get around,
Can you handle that ?
Whatever—
keep Midge in the picture, she's a hottie.

What about children?
She already has Tutti, Chris and Todd.
are you getting in way over your head?
Consider the child care costs
and how radically your lives will change.
They're cute, but the bondage dungeon
in the basement will have to go.
You'll need room for all those bicycles
and kids gear.
Sacrifices must be made..

Have you discussed the possibility of a commitment
ceremony?
I mean there isn't any legal marriage for dolls and girls yet
(welllllll... depending)
Will you get into the political fray of fighting for equal rights?

And what about more extensive healthcare?

Maybe consider an additional AFLAC policy in case one of you should come down with a dire illness?

I hear Barbie might be prone to mildew, especially because of her time in that damp basement which has been known to trigger the genetic propensity in dolls to develop this debilitating disease in later years.

I hope these questions are not influencing you in any particular way. Be strong and follow your heart to The Dream House. After all, Barbie has a Mini Cooper now.

In the Attic
by
Alexei Kalinchuk

I found a ventriloquist's dummy in a felt-lined box in the attic of my late uncle. Upon lifting the lid, its eyes snapped open and it began moving its jaw. He was glad to see me, he said. Living in a box is no living. He wanted out. He wanted to do new things. Would I help him, he wanted to know, then turning his eyes towards me, he assured me that he meant 'would' not 'wood' because he detested the broad humor of puns. I understood. My late uncle loved slapstick, puns, any kind of joke that didn't involve reflection. I wanted better for myself, he said, I really did, but you knew him. You knew his company. Authentic wit just soared over his head. Remember your tenth birthday party? As a matter of fact, I did. It was shameful. It hurt me. I couldn't look at any of my classmates in the face the rest of the school year. We held the party, of course, in my uncle's backyard. I'd thought my sickly aunt would protect me, but she couldn't save me from his robust vulgarity. Memories of taunts in the hallways of school thereafter lingered with me on certain days. From below, my trembling aunt called out if I was finished getting everything together for the estate sale. Or was there anything I wanted to keep? Anything? Because I remembered the dummy's complicity in my public shaming, I said no, no, there was nothing. Then I put the lid on the shrieking box along with a price sticker.

Bobby
by
Dan Nielsen

I thought I saw
myself
floating above
the bed,

but it was just
my levitating
identical
twin.

And God Said...
by
Andy Bankin

And God said, "What should I have for lunch? I am a vengeful and mighty God, but for realz though, I'm hungry."

Normally God had Chinese, for He was the Hebrew God, but God always overate when He ordered from Liu's Garden, and He didn't want to just coast through the rest of the afternoon. After all He still hadn't invented oxygen or cocker spaniels yet. Also His wife was teasing Him about the extra weight He'd gained since all that "Let There Be Light!" business.

It was a stressful undertaking and He pulled a few all-nighters as a result. And He secretly started smoking again too. It was a stress thing. He picked it up in high school and never really gave it up for good.

It had been a busy day for Him. God worked on The Gospel of John and the second season of M.A.S.H. all morning and he was starving. Italian was out – more of a dinner thing. His vegan brother-in-law, Bernie, insisted He give macrobiotic another shot, but He would have none of it. And so God banished Bernie to below the Earth where he would rule over the kingdom of darkness. God was not in the mood for little Bernard Satansky's hippie-dippie bullshit. He needed something substantial. Something filling.

"Honey," God heard his wife call out from the den. "If you're going out, could you grab me a Cobb Salad?"

"Another God damn Cobb Salad?"

"They're delicious!"

"Women," God thought to himself, "how inferior." If his accountants didn't scare him so much about going over budget, he would have put more work into the gender, but He messed up once with the whole dinosaur thing, and didn't want his financing cut. He took some ribs from here and there and put something together at the last minute. A rushed re-writing job, really.

And so He created biscuits, and had Himself a little snack. "Man, I totally screwed the pooch on that one. Why couldn't I have made women more like Steve?" God thought. "Sweet, sensitive Steve."

"Now now, God," He said to himself. "You specifically forbade those kinds of dark thoughts." And God sighed and thought about jerking off in the bathroom before reconsidering. "Plus! Two men? That shit's yucky!" He added. "No! It's wrong. Definitely. I wrote it down and everything."

The question remained; what was He going to eat? Crab cakes intrigued Him, but they weren't kosher, and He really had been meaning to buckle down on that whole thing.

Tacos were always an option, but He had a burrito the night before, and tacos are really just small burritos. God knew this. Plus He stuffed Himself with chips and guac every time and when the food finally came he was already full.

A new gourmet burger shop had just opened up in the hip part of Heaven and He liked that. Regular old burgers were boring! "Oh and the mozzarella sticks!" God cried out. "they use some sort of lemon zest or something. It's delish-ville."

But could He really justify spending twenty bucks on a burger? I mean He wasn't Trump. Just a God trying to do His job.

Pizza came to mind. But pizza's a bit hit and miss in Heaven. I mean you would think Heaven would have some great pizza, but it was difficult to find a good slice out there lately. "Jersey has great pizza!" He thought. "But I'll be fucked if I'm going there again."

God was bummed. Surely there had to be something. Finally it came to Him. "A thing sandwiched between things! I'll call it a Sandwich!" And so He created The Sandwich. And to accommodate his creation He created...The Sandwich Spot.

And so God went to The Sandwich Spot and He said, "eh, let Me try the number 5." And He got His sandwich. And it was good.

Risk and Relativity
by
Maria Bonsanti

I have never tasted locust-borne starvation,
or been forced to swallow ancient misbeliefs;

I have never run from engine-driven sea waves,
or been thirsty on an island cuffed with reefs.

I have never marched on dirt roads bleeding promise,
or hitched rides on empty highways paved with scorn;

I have never needed loosing from the rubble,
or been jailed for kicking icons in the groin.

I have never counted limbs in refugee camps—
oh, but I have been in eight bridal parties.

True Love Ways
by
Dane Zeller

Marissa placed her hand on my shoulder and thanked me for helping with the three-month anniversary celebration of her relationship with Brad. We had just set a table in the lunch room of the company where we all worked, Brad in accounting on the third floor of the building, Marissa and I in the fourth floor marketing department. In about a half hour, at closing time, we would be toasting Marissa's and Brad's relationship, and they would be exchanging little gifts that I had helped both pick out for each other. At five-thirty, I would be helping clean up the room, and at midnight that night, at home, alone, I would still be feeling her hand on my shoulder. True love of a man for a woman involves helping her in any way he can, even if it breaks his heart.

It was my fault. Brad and I were having lunch in the first floor cafeteria, when Marissa, fresh from her rebound from Fabio, walked past our table. I invited her to join us. I did not know they had so much in common. Soon, she and Brad were talking, and I was eating. I did not do anything to interrupt this interest they were developing in each other. I had loved her from our first meeting three years earlier.

It was my fault that I gave Marissa time after Fabio jilted her. I thought that anything we might have together in the future should not be tainted by a rebound. And, as her relationship with my friend Brad intensified, I thought any of my knowledge of the quirks of each party should be kept to myself. If their love was going to shatter, let it be by their own realization, not by any information I could divulge. So, Brad did not know that Marissa bit her nails every time the boss came into her cubicle. And, Marissa did not know that Brad would place his lunch bag precisely in front of him at the table, and unfold the five folds of the bag, pull out the ham and cheese sandwich on white, with a teaspoon of mayonnaise spread between the ham and cheese, and then reach into the bag again to pull out the half-cup of cottage cheese, 2% fat, in a blue tupperware container and place it to the right of the bag. I thought it best that Marissa find this out on her own—that Brad did this in exactly the same way, every lunch of the work week.

Of course, I accepted each of their requests to assist them in picking out the small gift for each other to be traded at the 3-month's celebration. Both are readers; it was natural that I would help them at the local bookstores make their relationship stronger.

I would not expect that when they opened their gifts at the table where Marissa had touched my shoulder, that Brad would react to Marissa's gift so harshly.

"What's this?" He asked. Reading the title of the little book, *Anal Compulsivity in Accountants For Dummies*. I thought he would be amused by the subject, suspecting he had a bit of self-knowledge to understand the little joke.

"What the hell is this?" said Marissa. She held up a book titled *Cajun Recipes for Dirty Rice*. Apparently, when Fabio ran off with that little Cajun whore (her words, not mine), I was so taken by her use of the indelicate word, "whore," that I forgot her ethnic adjective in front of it.

Brad searched his pockets for the receipt for the cook book, and then ducked and ran to escape the projectile.

Tears rolled down Marissa's cheek. I felt sad for her.

"Better to know now," I said, putting my arm on her shoulder to console her.

How to Buy Potatoes
by
By Andrew House

Potatoes have their ways of lying. Hold one close to your lips and spit-shine the shit out of it. Do this in the store, oblivious to the old ladies' stares.

If your potato is shiny, chalk one up for you. Should any dirt remain after a thorough wiping, gently place the renegade spud where you found it. That blemish is like a religion.

Next, hold the potato between your thighs and gyrate methodically. The old ladies will give you geriatric tiger eyes, but their feelings mean nothing to you.

If you break the potato, it was a bad potato. Don't feel disappointed, the bastard had it coming. A firm potato will pass this test like an idiot savant.

Hold the winning tuber above your head and proclaim its victory. When you take it home and rest its death-ready body against the cutting board, consider for a moment its many achievements.

Be proud. You will never see this potato again. When you take its corpse from the oven, you'll feel like the makeup-smearred mother of a runaway child, hungry and alone.

My Neighbor Betty by **Eric Suhem**

My neighbor Betty had become my nemesis. I'm not sure how it all began, but over the last 13 days, things had escalated into an intolerable state. Though we love our neighbors, somehow I knew that today it would end, resulting in the end of Betty or the end of me. I looked back at the 13 days, trying to figure out how it had gotten to this point.

Day 1

The skate wheels turned as the animals glided about in our neighborhood. "Arf-arf, meow-meow," the inserted tape recorders brayed from inside the carcasses of the stuffed animals. Betty's pet beagle was barking repeatedly, the tape was stuck. They were filling the streets, gliding stuffed pets everywhere. I saw Betty walking by, pulling a leashed television on wheels, a dog being broadcast on the television's screen. On the other side of the street, Betty's husband Bill was running on a treadmill, as it rolled along the pavement. Feeling neighborly, I offered to fix the stuck audio tape in Betty's pet beagle, and she graciously accepted the offer. However I only succeed in making it worse, the tangled audio tape ending up strewn on the hot pavement. I apologized to Betty and she laughed good-naturedly, telling me not to worry about it, these things happen. As she invited me and my wife Miriam to her house to play bridge, I felt a shiver of darkness.

Day 2

Miriam and I went to Betty and Bill's house to play bridge. After about 45 minutes, Betty brought some baked goods from the kitchen. She was always giving bread, pies, and cakes to the neighbors. "I work at the bakery, so come by some time and I'll get you a discount!" she said, setting raisin bread on the table, returning to the kitchen for more. She brought out doughnuts, muffins, biscuits, and croissants. It went on and on, the food piling up on the table toward the ceiling. I asked Betty about her stuffed pet beagle, and she pointed to the floor, where it lay with some other stuffed animals. "Bill fixed the audio tape," said Betty, pointing at Bill, hidden by the pile of baked goods. While she daintily adjusted the little pink & red ribbons on the furry, cuddly stuffed bears & rabbits, Betty snarled, "Did you know that I stuffed these animals myself after bagging them? I skinned them, gutted them, and dried them. I have a full degree in taxidermy from the university!" The bridge game went on a few more minutes, until Betty informed us that she had been to 'Rent-A-Smile' that day, but it had only been a six-hour treatment, and now the smile was starting to wear off.

Day 3

At a seafood chain restaurant, Miriam and I noticed the velvet lobster. In the lobby, the velvet lobster sat in an unkempt tank, amidst porcelain lead-lined tortoise shells, looking for a light of its Tareyton 100 cigarette. The tourists dropped their cigarette butts into the filthy water of the velvet lobster's tank. Not finding any other shellfish holding their lighters in sublime supplication, it busied itself with its plans for the day. Looking at its shell-encrusted calendar, the velvet lobster noted that all its days for the next month were free, which would give it a good opportunity to pursue the 30-day weight loss program it had noticed on late-night television. The velvet lobster had used its little claws to somehow dial the phone

and enroll in the 30-day weight loss program, though personally the velvet lobster felt that it would take much less time to achieve his goal. It was then that we saw our neighbor Betty pry the lobster out of the tank and throw it onto the floor. The velvet lobster made its way out of the restaurant, crawling past the occasionally-stuck double doors, into a nearby canal, where it quickly achieved its 30-day weight loss goals. When we asked Betty why she did this, she yelled, "Mind your own business!"

Day 4

I went to Betty's house to ask about the velvet lobster. I approached the yard and saw two Doberman Pinschers. As one barked, a Technicolor bubble emitted from its mouth, floating into a nearby parking lot and attaching itself to the top of the radio antenna of the first car it encountered. Both Dobermans kept barking, bubbles finding one antenna after another. The bubbles eventually popped on the antenna of a Dodge Dart at the northeastern edge of the parking lot. Looking out of the corner of my eye, I saw Betty's face in the window, screaming the word, 'ATTACK'.

Day 5

I went to the hospital for treatment of the wounds incurred by Betty's Doberman pinschers. Falling asleep in the waiting room, I woke up buried under a pile of dead bodies, as the flies buzzed overhead. The doctors and nurses twisted about spasmodically as they stabbed each other with hypodermic needles. The intensive care patients on gurneys careened down the halls, out the double-doors, and into the streets. They fell down manholes, and floated through the sewer. I am negotiating my insurance bill.

Day 6

Returning home, and sensing more attacks from Betty, I contacted Uncle Mert (MERT standing for 'My Ears Ring True') He had been crafting porcelain weasels in his apartment, and preparing his army of potted plants to enter the field of battle. "My army of potted plants will strike via the element of **surprise!**" he was fond of saying. "Now I'm not sure whether I need Philips Milk of Magnesia, or if I should be at the Philips 66 gas station located at the center point of Oklahoma, clipping the little weeds growing at the edge of its concrete service bay!" Uncle Mert continued his observations, "There are those living the life of cloth puppets & brightly colored trousers in the rustic village boutique. They shut the door and large needle pins were stuck in all of us, because the death of Kennedy had not been righted." I was beginning to doubt whether Uncle Mert would be of much help.

Day 7

I went to Uncle Mert's apartment to confer with him about Betty, though I still had my doubts about his effectiveness. In the lobby of the apartment building, I got into an elevator that was filled with pigeons. They were crapping all over the carpet. I was going to the fifth floor, and it was difficult to push the Number 5 button because the pigeons were obstructing the button console. The elevator was usually manned by an operator, but he had been subdued and covered by the pigeons. I saw his crumpled form in the right-rear corner of the elevator, his tattered gray uniform occasionally appearing from under the pile of busily pecking birds. I eventually managed to push the Number 5 button and the elevator doors closed. The elevator slowly rose to the fifth floor as the pigeons cooed. They basically left me alone, though a few perched on my hat. Upon arrival at the fifth floor, the elevator doors opened and the pigeons flew out. A strange little man in a business suit appeared in

front of the elevator doorway, demanding monetary compensation for the elevator operator's torn uniform. I chose to leave, and took the elevator back down.

Day 8

I decided to observe Betty's specific actions over the next few days. She had been very open about displaying the activities of her household, and I took the opportunity to look into the window of their living room at night, searching for clues about her motivations. On the first night driving by, I saw Betty's husband Bill sitting in his Barcalounger, with a seatbelt on. There was a parking meter next to the chair, and Bill was trying to find change to put into the meter, becoming increasingly agitated. An hour later, I saw Bill, in chinos and a polo shirt, exercising with an odd device of ropes and pulleys in his office, while Betty nearby putted a golf ball along a green Astroturf carpet, screaming orders of workout repetition on a megaphone: "56!....57!....58!....59!...."

Day 9

During the day, I'd managed to install advanced surveillance equipment in Betty's house, and was able to observe her later activities: She sat her husband Bill down in front of the television, which was showing earnest young, black-leather-studded bands wearing long blonde wigs and warbling their sheltered concern while go-go dancers gyrated on top of giant orange cans of the diet cola that was sponsoring the program. "That should entertain him for a while," mumbled Betty as she started to arrange her stuffed animals around the room in a sort of occult death pattern. An hour later, Bill was putting his head into the oven, but he was following the instructions of a cookbook, and realized that he didn't have enough ingredients.

Day 10

We looked across the fence at Betty's yard, seeing strange flags displaying ancient symbols that resembled baked goods, such as bread, cupcakes, and cinnamon buns. Near the statues was a pile of dead rats. We saw Betty watering rhododendrons. "Hi Neighbor! How's the yard doing, Betty?" we asked, trying again to be neighborly.

Betty sprayed more water on the rhododendrons. "Fine, though the rats are becoming a bit of a problem. Sorry about the Dobermans the other day," she said, holding a rat in her soil-stained hands, crushing it slowly.

"I hear the dead rats work well for composting, minerals for the soil, let's all recycle!" I said while looking over the fence, glad that Betty was doing something about the rats.

"Thank you, have a nice day," said Betty, anxious to get back to watering her rhododendrons.

Day 11

We could feel the doom of Betty approaching, and my wife Miriam had been observing those dark ways for quite some time. Miriam dabbled in vague tenets of Hinduism, and had recently earned a degree in Mechanical Engineering at night school, specializing in the design of household appliances, particularly vacuum cleaners. She had a theory that she could vacuum Betty's bad karma out of her house, and she built a vacuum cleaner to do just that. "Leave it to me," said Miriam.

Day 12

I went to the local bakery to pick up a birthday cake for Miriam. I noticed a series of fruitcake and toffee bits stacked up and down near the far wall. The pattern of their stacking left a visual image on my cortex that I found spiritually disturbing and upsetting. With a screaming banshee wail that seeped up from my long-buried ancestors, and had no relation to conscious thought, I threw my body at the stack of fruitcake and toffee bits. Through the hail of crumbled toffee and fruitcake falling about me, I could see the saleswoman pulling out a submachine gun from behind the counter and aiming at me. A baking assistant was peering at me from behind loaves of bread. In one hand he held a butter knife, and in the other hand a pair of scissors that were snapping menacingly. Another saleswoman stepped up from behind the counter, clutching a riding crop and staring at me through binoculars, though I was only 8 feet away. She began to pace back and forth on the linoleum, striking her leg on alternate steps with the riding crop, grimacing with pain and pleasure under the hot white bakery lights. I could see it was Betty, wearing a mask of the Pillsbury doughboy.

"Hello neighbor," I said.

"That's far enough," said Betty in slow, measured, threatening tones as I moved toward the door. "Enough frivolity and small talk," she hissed.

Miriam broke into Betty's house and started to vacuum feverishly, sucking the bad karma into the bag. As Betty was preparing to strike me with the riding crop at the bakery, I suddenly saw a look of bliss and peacefulness in her eyes, the evil disappearing.

Day 13

Today I see Betty sitting in her backyard chaise lounge, staring at dead grass with a faraway look in her eye, holding her stuffed velvet lobster. Miriam buried the vacuum bag, which was glowing menacingly, in our yard, but the bad karma unfortunately escaped, and affected the neighborhood water supply.

Headshot
by
Kris Bigalk

I needed a photo of the poet
for the Facebook invite to the poetry reading,
so I Googled her impossible Polish name
(I can say that, having my own impossible Polish name)
searching the thumbnails littering the page like confetti.
A pair of large, firm, breasts appeared, held up
by two graceful, feminine hands.

This would definitely boost attendance.

But, I thought, how to know if these breasts
were really the poet's breasts—her name appeared
in the file name, but after all,
there could be a porn star in Poland with
the same name, though these breasts did
not have the Polish porn star look about them—
they definitely looked like sheltered breasts,
taken out only for special occasions.

I began an e-mail.

*Hey,
I Googled you and came across these
marvelous boobs. Are they yours?*

No.

*Just checking,
Is this the photo you'd like
to use to advertise the reading?*

No.

So, after another long look,
I moved beyond the breasts,
scrolled until I found a photo
where I recognized the poet
with the Polish last name, her head cresting
the surface of a blue lake, her green
eyes smiling as if to say
*I've got something here, under the surface
you're really going to like.*

TGIF
by
Ryan Mulcahy

From: Leo A. Davenport
To: Jane McIntyre-Davenport
Time: 9:03 a.m.
Subject: Looking forward to the weekend

One thing: do you think you could remember to flush the toilet from now on, after a shower? This isn't the first time I've asked, as you know. It's just unpleasant; you're my wife.

Also, I feel like we have to have a longer conversation about Janet. Another weird exchange this morning.

Looking forward to the weekend!

Love,

Leo A. Davenport
Deputy Manager → Group 31
Communications
Bourne & Peters

From: Jane McIntyre-Davenport
To: Leo A. Davenport
Time: 11:01 a.m.
Subject: Re: Looking forward to the weekend

Ummmm: so because I'm your wife, I'm not supposed to shit? We're not having another conversation about Janet. Janet is fine. The kids like her. Leo, we have a lot to accomplish this weekend. Let me know if you misplaced the list. I'll attach/print another copy.

From: Leo A. Davenport
To: Jane McIntyre-Davenport
Time: 11:12 a.m.
Subject: Re: Looking forward to the weekend

No, I saw the list. I feel like we're not talking about urgent issues, exactly. The storm door, for example. That's actually an all-day affair. We're already into March, at this point (as you know). Here is what I just put in my calendar for the Sat. after Labor Day: "don't even think about flaking on the **storm door**." Sound good?

Besides, the weekend is chance for us to be a family for 48 hours (less, when Rose stops in); my feeling is, let's.

I'm not saying Janet's an ax murderer, or that she's mean to the kids (tho I'm not sure I agree that they "like" her; you should ask Jack about that). I'm saying some borderline-alarming things come out her mouth, if you really listen.

How is work?

Love,

Leo A. Davenport
Deputy Manager → Group 31
Communications
Bourne & Peters

From: Leo A. Davenport
To: Jane McIntyre-Davenport
Time: 11:14 a.m.
Subject: <no subject>

Finally used the gift card you gave me at Xmas. Screenplay software (!).

Not as random as it seems. I'll tell you tonight.

Leo A. Davenport
Deputy Manager → Group 31
Communications
Bourne & Peters

From Jane McIntyre-Davenport
To: Leo A. Davenport
Time: 2:49 p.m.
Subject: Re: Looking forward to the weekend

Leo, did you see the NStar bill? *I'll* put the damn storm door in. Like *I* fixed the garage window and *I* painted the pantry and *I* dealt with the cats.

Leo, Rose is A. My closest cousin and B. Basically suicidal at this point. What is wrong with you?

From: Leo A. Davenport
To: Jane McIntyre-Davenport
Time: 3:02 p.m.
Subject: Re: Looking forward to the weekend

I feel bad for Rose, but she's not suicidal. Besides, don't you think most of her "issues" are self-inflicted? I don't think she's a good influence on the kids. (There, I said it.) Sunday I

came down and she was literally pressing Anna's ear to the Bose. The singer sounded like an Orc. Do you know what the song was called? CHRISTMAS CARD FROM A HOOKER IN MINNEAPOLIS. Rose knew every word. Like it was a hymn or something.

Anyhow, can we just steer clear of Rose as a subject? We love her, but she's an unpleasant subject. I think even Rose would admit that (!). I kind of think Rose likes it that way, in fact.

Okay.

It's Friday for God's sake!

Were you still hitting the Target at lunch? We actually do need wine. And maybe some Knob Creek? Joe just texted. So he and Tina ARE going to come Sunday, is the new plan. There's a place in the same mall, right?

And seriously, how is work?

Love,

Leo A. Davenport
Deputy Manager → Group 31
Communications
Bourne & Peters

From: Jane McIntyre-Davenport
To: Leo A. Davenport
Time: 3:12 p.m.
Subject: Hell. No.

Leo, Joe is not welcome in our house. Karen is one of my best friends. I cannot be a friend to her and at the same time welcome Joe into my house. And don't get me started on "Tina." You know not to. Leo, sometimes it's as if you believe *I* don't actually know who *I* am, that the essence of who *I* am, which hardened a long time ago (which, frankly, you weren't around for) is something you (and I mean *you*, Leo) can adjust with a knob. I am sorry to inform you that is not the case. Besides, we are watching that movie Sunday night. I don't care what is in that envelope. We are watching it.

From: Leo A. Davenport
To: Jane McIntyre-Davenport
Time: 3:26 p.m.
Subject: Re: Hell. No.

You know, Joe's version of things is a lot different than Karen's (which isn't to say Karen is a liar). Joe's not a saint, but this one of the things I've always liked about him: he doesn't claim to be. You should at least skim it. Let me know and I'll send you the link.

Regardless, seems like there's no good reason to decide right now. If by say lunch

tomorrow you're still against it, then we'll cancel. It'd be weird, but I'll tell him Anna has a virus or something. Then we'd just have keep Anna inside. We can't have her strolling by Joe's house if she's sick.

Hockey tomorrow a.m., btw.

Love,

Leo A. Davenport
Deputy Manager → Group 31
Communications
Bourne & Peters

From: Leo A. Davenport
To: Jane McIntyre-Davenport
Time: 3:44 p.m.
Subject: <no subject>

So this isn't a huge deal, but still. Another reason I ask you about your day at work, aside from genuine interest, which I think I've proven is genuine, is because I'd kind of appreciate it if you'd ask about mine.

I know you've got a million things on your mind. Believe me, I can empathize (!). But do we want to be companions, the way the Shaws are, or do we want to actually know each other? The answer is obvious.

Love,

Leo A. Davenport
Deputy Manager → Group 31
Communications
Bourne & Peters

From: Jane McIntyre-Davenport
To: Leo A. Davenport
Time: 4:31 p.m.
Subject: Re: Hell. No.

Leo, if I told you that Joe once grabbed me, before Midnight Mass (!), would you then understand what a treacherous pig he is? Or would I have to add that I kind of got a charge out of it? Or would he have to come over and shit in your toilet?

I am attaching the list, Leo.

Hair Color
by
Ed Coletti

10 years ago
when black predominated
I knew who I was then.

Today I declared
it gray on my
passport application.

New photo—fat neck
postal clerk—she says
“you’ll love this photo

“10 years from now.”

Turning Corners by Joshua Heinrich

John had turned a corner. Not figuratively so much as literally. As in he was headed forward and had taken a sharp 90 degree turn after passing the end of the wall to his left. As people turning corners often do. Anyway, John had turned a corner, and what he found around the bend changed his life forever. Wait, I guess that means he sort of turned a corner figuratively, as well. Okay, forget that first bit, then.

So, right, we have John, the corner... Oh, and the girl. There's always a girl, isn't there? But she was no ordinary girl. In fact, you might say she was extraordinary. Although that word's never really made sense to me. Extra ordinary? Wouldn't that just be especially plain? So let's stick with special. Although special's usually used to refer to someone whose affliction you don't want to openly discuss in public. Which she wasn't. No offense to anyone who might be that variety of special, of course.

So, yes, John, the corner, and a girl. Actually, the girl was quite literally around the corner. Like, you know the phrase "I bumped into her the other day"? Again, another thing that was literal rather than figurative in this case. She was a Leo, by the way. Not that it really matters, per se. It's just that this is the point of the story where one typically throws out some sort of random descriptive feature, and, to be frank, I've never met her. John had, though. Somewhere around four dozen words ago, give or take contractions. That's what this story is about. Well, we're only three paragraphs in, so perhaps it's a bit presumptuous to assume that's what this story is about. It's always possible that the climax could reveal some sort of universal human truth. That would be something, wouldn't it?

Anyway, backing up a bit, John was staring into a bag of M&M's, preoccupied with the fact that they all said "3", "w", or "E" instead of "m", when they suddenly skittered to the ground. I know skittering sounds more like something Skittles would do, or at least that combination would be better suited to a tongue twister, but they were M&M's. Or 3&w's. That skittered. When John absentmindedly walked right into the girl, bumping his chin on her forehead. Well, he wasn't paying attention, but that's what his aching jaw and the round red mark square in the middle of her forehead indicated (not to be confused with the square red mark round in the middle of her forehead, which was from something altogether different). They exchanged, then promptly returned, introductions.

Her name was Heather. She walked the line between waitress and actress, except the line was more like a wall she repeatedly walked into headfirst while balancing three glasses and four plates on a tray. His name was John. He was an artist. Well, he was more like a captivating spectacle than a true artist, sort of like a wheat penny in that everyone keeps saving it waiting for it to go up in value, but it's still worth next to nothing and primarily serves as a vehicle for people to go "hey, look, I got a wheat penny!". Let's just say that, if John were a kumquat, she'd be a snap pea. Don't think too hard about that. It really doesn't make any sense.

John found himself drawn in by Heather's...let's say blue...eyes. Statistically, brown is the most common eye color due to genetic inheritance and gene dominance and all. But I'm not really a fan of dominant genes. They're just way too pushy. So blue it is. Heather, on the other hand, perhaps even on the same hand, was fixated on John's smile. Or was nervous

and staring at his mouth to avoid his eyes. Either way, she said he had a nice smile. Score one for orthodontists. I guess all of those years of ridiculously expensive sadistic mouth torture paid off.

When starting a conversation with someone of the opposite sex (or so he hoped after that one encounter in SoHo, but that's an entirely different story), John often fell back on an arsenal of sarcastic charm and topical misdirection. In the same way that crimes of passion, apparently, often involve kitchen utensils, most commonly forks and spoons. Although it seems the latter is too blunt to be effective as a murder weapon because accounts of spooning, unlike forking, rarely involve penetration.

Going against the well-established grain of etiquette and ignoring the adage "never ask a woman her age" (I guess that would make it an "age adage") completely, John asked Heather's age. I know, given the beginning of that sentence, the conclusion was a complete surprise. Just call me M. Night Shyamalan. Except nobody was dead. Or the devil. Or being attacked by environmentalist trees.

At any rate, Heather replied "27." Then, after a few seconds clearly involving some sort of excruciating inner conflict judging by the expression on her face, added "Err. 28. Gah. Fuck it, what's the use? 31. You?"

"I just turned 357 a few days ago." said John.

"You look good for your age." replied Heather.

"Thanks. Everyone mistakes me for 354." That was John that said that, in case you're easily distracted and already lost track of the conversation.

"Did you do anything special?" (Heather again there).

"Ya, we had this thing that was kinda like an upside down cake, but sort of flipped the other way. I think it was called a cake."

"Right." Heather quipped (hmm...quipped...wait a second...triple word score!).

John took a step to the right.

"Huh? Where are you going?" puzzled Heather. Out loud.

"Oh, I thought that 'right' was imperative. My bad." thought John. Also out loud, as if speaking to someone else, which he was.

John found himself inexplicably and unequivocally smitten with Heather. It was a surprising and refreshing turn of events, John coming off of a recent bout of confusion over his sexual identity and all. He'd recently visited Europe and met a homeless backpacker on a train heading toward France. She apparently wandered from place to place getting odd jobs, and he found her irresistible, leading him to wonder if he had latent hobosexual tendencies. Then again, when he got to the airport in London to fly back to the states, he couldn't take his eyes off of some of the women waiting around him at his gate, so he definitely felt he had more Heathrow sexual leanings. Oh, wait, John and Heather were talking all this time. And here I am babbling on. We now join the conversation already in progress.

John continued. "Then I walked in on a bunch of people mass debating, and..."

"Wait, WHAT!?" exclaimed Heather.

"You know, talking about an issue in a large group with opposing viewpoints? Mass debating. Anyway..." John trailed off.

From there, I take it the conversation carried on for a long time. No, I said it carried on, not carrion. Why would I be talking about carrion? Although I do remember John mentioning something about steak hoagies and gerbils. Not sure if those two were related. Come to think of it, I hope they weren't. Oh, and they talked about art of some sort. Or all sorts. Or the sum of all sorts. Or the sort of all sums. Or the...oh, wait, I'm not being paid by the word. Damn. Forget that last bit, then. Anyway, Kim...err...I mean Heather. Wait, WAS it Kim? No, no. I still want to say Heather. She had to run off to work. Places to set. People to feed.

John gave her his number. Heather scribbled down an illegible note with her left hand. Technically, her right hand was dominant, but she'd always been an anti-establishment type and sort of felt the same way about dominant hands that I do regarding genetics and eye color. On the other hand...once again, as in the figure of speech...not referring to one hand or the other or the other other... Wait, that's one too many others... Yes, on the other hand, if she had written it down with her dominant hand, perhaps she wouldn't have spent 23 minutes later that night staring at an upside down crumpled piece of paper wondering just what in the hell BOBS OLE means.

In situations like these, this is usually where the awkward goodbye comes in. You know, an attempt at a handshake turning into an accidental copped feel or a phrase absentmindedly uttered in some rudimentary form of pig Latin. Luckily, this situation was nothing like itself, and after saying their goodbyes without incident, John and Heather walked past each other, each unable to stop thinking of the other. They each turned a corner, then another. They walked smack dab into each other on the other side of the building. They reintroduced themselves. I guess if you let go of something and it finds its way back to you, it's meant to be. Or maybe you're just walking in circles. Either way, John had turned a corner. Again.

Iffy
(After Kipling)
by
Vicky Ellis

If you can hold your gas when all about you
Are venting theirs and blaming it on you
If you can sip your tea while others watch you,
But make allowance for their slurping too;
If you can hang out clothes when skies are cloudy,
Or mouth a curse but don't say it aloud,
Or being cut up, don't give way to Audis,
And yet don't look too tense, nor seem too proud:
If you eat cake - and don't make cake your master;
If you can drink - and not wake feeling shame;
If you can meet ex-husband, thief and pastor
And treat those three impostors just the same;
If you can bear to see the books you've borrowed
Coloured by tots to make a gift for you
Or hear the china smash and hide your sorrow,
Then, smiling, patch it up with super glue:
If you can make one list of all your virtues
And risk the smug derision from your boss
And walk back to your desk but make no issue
And not reveal the bastard's double cross;
If you can fold your breasts and cheeks and wattle
To pack away when menopause has gone,
But brandish when you've lingered on the bottle
To bulge like wrinkled raisins from a scone
If you can care for Gran and keep your virtue
Or walk the flea bag, stooping for its poop,
If neither bleach nor Oxiclean can hurt you,
If thoughts of Helen Mirren make you droop;
If you can take the oestrogen transitions
And scorned your fury is second to none,
Yours are the Earth's least lucrative positions,
And - which is more - you'll be a lass my love.

Contributor Biographies



Eirik Gumeny is the author of the *Exponential Apocalypse* series, as well as the flash fiction chapbook *Boy Meets Girl* (Kattywompus Press, 2013). He may or may not be allergic to eggs, which makes every breakfast an adventure. His website is www.egumeny.com.



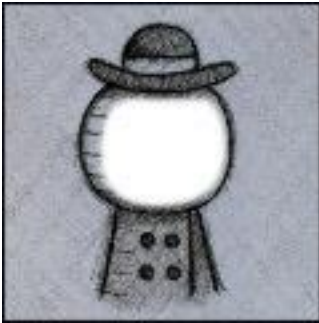
Susan DiPronio's poetry has recently appeared in *Sinister Wisdom* and *Corset Magazine*, and has been shown formatted with her photography in gallery shows such as "Witness" - *Artists Respond to 30 years of the Aids Pandemic* at The Asian Arts Initiative, "Queer Art?" at AxD Gallery, 3rd Street Gallery, William Way Community Center, The Plastic Club, DaVinci Art Alliance, and others. Her essays have been included online at *Velvet Park* and in "The Survivors Project: Telling the Truth About Life After Sexual Abuse." She is a recipient of the Art for Change Grant from the Leeway Foundation in 2007, a 5- County Arts Fund co-recipient in 2008, and an honorarium from Philadelphia Fight in 2012. Susan focused on art and writing workshops with the homeless and disadvantaged. Visit her at www.pinkhangerpresents.com and www.susandipronio.com.



Alexei Kalinchuk says, "I've been published in *Amoskeag Journal* and *The Bitter Oleander*, and am a well-regarded Master in the art of Ukrainian Massage. Also, I'm a former Mouseketeer-one of the ones they arrested for wire fraud."



Dan Nielsen is a stand-up poet. His work is compared to Steven Wright and Mitch Hedberg, though major influences are Robert Creeley and William Carlos Williams. Credits include Random House and University of Iowa Press anthologies, and a quarter century's worth of art/lit/mag publications. He's had several plays produced, including the award winning, *Waiting for the Weinermobile*, and was a staff writer on the Wisconsin Public Radio show *Hotel Milwaukee*. Dan is also good at ping-pong.



Andy Bankin is a comedian living in Brooklyn, NY. He wrote and directed the independent film, *Happy Thanksgiving*. He has a vacation home on the moon and once punched a koala in the face for looking at him funny.



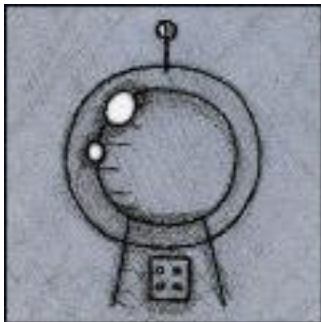
Maria Bonsanti has a rainbow assortment of vintage polyester bridesmaid's gowns accessorized with hats, parasols, and capelets. And no, she has never been able to re-wear any of them. If she ever gets married—an event deemed doubtful by her having exceeded the dreaded "three times a bridesmaid, never a bride" curse—she plans to wear Levi's. And order all the guests to follow suit. Seriously.



Dane Zeller writes for One Monkey Typing, a unique arts and literature organization in Westwood, Kansas. Zeller eschews the writing craft in favor of statistical probability: he believes good writing comes from large numbers of keystrokes coupled with sheer luck. This technique has produced his detective novel, "Smart Shield," and his short story anthology, "Drive-By Romances, Tales of Good Men and Women Done Wrong." You can find him and his bananas at www.danezeller.com



Andrew House is a writer of speculative fiction and humorous poetry. His work has appeared in *Lowestoft Chronicle* and *Fear and Trembling Magazine*, among others. He lives in Muncie, Indiana, where he works as a writing tutor.



Eric Suhem dwells in office cubicles and ocean waves. His book *Dark Vegetables* can be found in the orange hallway (www.orangehallway.com)



Kris Bigalk is the author of the poetry collection *Repeat the Flesh in Numbers* (NYQ Books, 2012); her poetry also appears in the anthologies *Poetry City, USA Volume 2* and *Open to Interpretation: Water's Edge*. Her awards include grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board and a residency at Banfill-Locke Center for the Arts. She lives with her husband and four sons in the Twin Cities, where she directs the creative writing program at Normandale College.



Ryan Mulcahy lives in Quincy, Massachusetts, with his lovely wife (nothing like the character in this story!) and gifted children.



Poet, Painter and Vietnam veteran **Ed Coletti** graduated from Georgetown University and the Creative Writing Masters Program at San Francisco State University (under Robert Creeley). Coletti is widely published in this country and in Europe in journals including *ZYZZYVA*, *Yale Journal for Humanities in Medicine*, *Italian Americana*, and *Spillway*. Web presence includes "Ed Coletti's P3" and also "No Money In Poetry." Ed's latest published book is *When Hearts Outlive Minds* from Conflux Press in 2011. His next will be *Germes, Viruses, and Catechisms* from San Francisco's Civil Defense Publications in March 2013.



Joshua Heinrich is a writer, artist, and musician best known for his long-time solo project, *fornever*. He's also made of atoms. Other things made of atoms include rocks and Gobstoppers (which, incidentally, are sort of like rocks but edible and delicious). He also writes his own biographical blurbs, in case you couldn't tell. I guess that would make this an autobiographical blurb. In the third person. That's not weird at all. And...scene.



Vicky Ellis is a prize-winning poet, storyteller, singer-songwriter, editor, and all round bundle of creativity based in Blackpool, Lancashire. She is currently working in her community offering workshops and promoting poetry performance. Her first full length storytelling project, *Unconventional Attitudes*, won the Spoken Word award and was nominated in the New Writing category at the Buxton Fringe Festival.