

◇ Defenestration ◇

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Millionaire's Bestiary
by
Brittany Shutts

Vicugna pacos

Everywhere I go, my alpacas come with me. How many alpacas can fit into a car? I can tell you from experience that the answer is five, unless an alpaca is driving. Unlike children, taking alpacas to the supermarket is enchanting. They want to help me reach the highest box of breadcrumbs and offer the ripest bunch of bananas pinched between their toes. With gentle nodding, they encourage me to select the high-fiber cereal for my health. When my crew of beatific quadrupeds parades the sidewalk behind me, people turn their heads and smile. Cheeky children reevaluate their Christmas lists and tug daddy's arm. My enemies from high school cannot disguise their envy.

Sciurus carolinensis

This expertly-trained team of squirrels will assist me in carrying out complicated plots of revenge against those who have wronged me. I procured them from a government auction. To the kids from the track team who glued my cheek to school bus window: you'd better watch your backs. My squirrels will gnaw holes in your boxer briefs and redirect the hands on your clocks as sleep your dreamless sleep. Together they will move your ottoman two inches to the left so that you are aware that something is different but you don't know what it is until you trip over an ottoman. You will begin to think that someone is sabotaging your life, but who would do a thing like that?

Carassius auratus auratus

First of all, everything you've ever heard about the goldfish brain is a lie. If you spent your life in a glass bowl with an eight-inch diameter, your cognitive capacities would be limited as well. We must think of the brain as a muscle. My goldfish are provided with constant stimulation in the form of Sudoku puzzles, Latin lessons, and critical reading. *Anna Karenina* is currently pressed against their bowl. They are weeping. Their expanding brains are bulging though the scales on their heads like pink cauliflower. On Thursday, they will learn neuroscience.

Homo sapiens

The woman across the street probably assumes that I'm using these binoculars to observe the desert habitat outside of my home, but I am actually watching her unclot. Her breasts are glistening – perhaps some trick of the sun's angle and her freshly applied lotion. I try to think of ways, within the bounds of legality, to persuade her into my abode. I will give her a condor, the noblest of endangered birds. I doubt her husband has ever given her a condor. From my window I fantasize apocalyptic situations that would force us to repopulate the Earth together, my favorite of which involves a storm and an ark.

Giraffa camelopardalis

Those with second story windows should never share a home with giraffes. Those with any desire for privacy should also never share a home with giraffes. Above all, I must remember

to close my blinds during intimate moments because there is nothing more jarring than seeing a smug giraffe face pressed against the window screen mid-coitus. Giraffes are judgmental and gossipy. They think they're above everyone else. They forget who cares for them and shelters them and provides them with a striking simulation of the African savannah. I will sell this giraffe to the first person who makes me an offer.

Octopus vulgaris

The woman with glistening breasts ran out wrapped in my bed sheet when she learned the octopus had escaped. I cannot tell you how frustrating it is to contain something with no rigid skeletal structure. A trail of splattered water leads from the tank to the ventilation system. Duplicitous cephalopod, it gladly organized my geodes just yesterday! The heat is turned up to one hundred degrees. I am waiting at the open vent with a harpoon and a sushi mat.

Gymogyps californianus

The condor is on my porch with a note in its beak, its cage swaddled in a sheet like an abandoned infant. I detect the citrusy scent of her lotion as well as condor urine. The note reads, *What exactly am I supposed to do with an ugly bird?* The scavenger that I am, I bring it inside and make it useful pecking up the strands of charred tentacle embedded in the carpet. I hear no shrieks of emotional trauma vibrating through its syrinx, but I know that condors are stoics. They are unlikely to wear their profound feelings on their proverbial sleeves. Nevertheless, of all the endangered birds of prey, the noble condor is the most sensitive to rejection.

Ara ararauna

The aphorisms of a parrot can only be measured by the wit of their master and these birds are a flawless mirror of my complex mental world. I hook them up to Bluetooth headsets and let them answer my phone calls. I will never have to speak to anyone again.

Lesser Known Literary Cocktails
by
Eric K. Auld

The *Waiting for Godot*: Place two ice cubes in an empty tumbler. Watch them melt as nothing else happens. Wait until morning. Repeat.

The *Wasteland*: Pour everything you have into the largest glass you've got. Hand it all over to Ezra Pound and watch him change everything. Garnish with footnotes.

The *Of Mice and Men*: Whatever you're drinking, smother it to pieces with your strong, but innocent hands. Turn to your best friend for comfort and watch as he shoots you in the head. (It's for your own good, you know.)

The *Cherry Orchard*: Serve vodka neat. Garnish with tree bark and a maraschino cherry. Tastes bitter, but so does the truth.

The Emily Dickinson: Fill your Cup with Emptiness— / And Nothing—nothing more— / Then meditate upon your Life— / This Drink's a Metaphor.

The *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night*: Pour yourself eighteen straight whiskeys. Consume and die.

The *Les Misérables*: Steal a loaf of bread. Serve nineteen years in a prison camp. Find a bar and finally enjoy a nice glass of Bordeaux as a free man.

The *Hamlet*: Enjoy a cold, refreshing Danish stout alone. When finished, make sure everyone in the bar is dead (including yourself).

The First Day of the Rest of Our Lives by **Saikat Sen**

On June 5th, 2004, at approximately 2109 hours Zulu Time, Ronald Wilson Reagan III was killed in a targeted operation conducted by United States forces. His termination with extreme prejudice was the capstone to a 9 ½-hour firefight involving multiple law enforcement, intelligence, and military agencies, including the "Night Stalkers" of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) and the "Sunshine Division" of the 40th Infantry (Mechanized).

After the initial report of his death, and after all of his Republican Guard soldiers either surrendered or were eliminated, specialists from the Central Intelligence Agency quickly moved in to confirm the kill. In accordance with U.S. Army Field Manual FM 3-0.5.130, Reagan was beheaded and his mouth was stuffed with garlic. He was then impaled with two wooden stakes. The first stake—driven into his stomach—had been made from the wood of a sacred hawthorn tree growing outside the Patriarchate of Peć (a monastery of the Serbian Orthodox Church), located in Kosovo. The second stake—plunged into his heart—had been fashioned from the True Cross itself and is presumed to be made of cedar, pine, or cypress, but has so far resisted any modern genetic analysis.

The exorcism squad of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross of the Prelature of Opus Dei thoroughly anointed the remains with consecrated oils and then burned them at temperatures exceeding 2000° Celsius in mobile furnaces provided by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The head and body were cremated in two different incinerators. The ashes—still being kept separate—were then mixed with apostolic holy water and stored in isothermal liquid nitrogen freezers. These subzero storage units comprised the sole payloads of two Titan IV-C carrier rockets which were then launched, one at a time, on flights into space. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration chose the Sun as the final resting place of the temporarily frozen slush which was once Reagan's body, while mighty Jupiter earned the privilege of receiving and containing what remained of his head.

Since that time there have been many supposed Gipper sightings, but nothing has been corroborated with verifiable evidence. The mysterious slaughter of goats and other farm animals on a ranch outside of Navojoa, Sonora, was thought to be the handiwork of a returned Reagan, but researchers from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México reassured an anxious public that it was merely the handiwork of a migrating herd of Chupacabras. Similarly, Reagan's appearance on a flour tortilla served to a British tourist in Kolkata, India was attributed to be a promotional stunt by an overzealous restaurant manager. Most of his so-called appearances can be explained away in like fashion.

His removal from this planet does not mean that the war is over. Police in Israel have been clashing daily with Neo-Reaganites since mid-April. Last Sunday, on June 9th, 2013, Romanian soldiers from the 6th Spec. Ops. Brigade ("Mihai Viteazul"), as well as United Nations peacekeepers and Interpol agents, cleared a 100-strong nest located a scant 20 kilometers north-northwest of Bucharest. And the upcoming 2014 Parliament of the World's Religions is expected to issue a strong warning about the dangerous rise in complacency, especially among today's youth.

However, for right now, it does seem that we may indeed be free from Ronnie's predations. It's morning again in America. The long nightmarish reign of Ronald Wilson Reagan III is well and truly over.

A Pintress' Someday
by
Katie Seeley

We can be modern day mannequins—
Malleable forms of constant perfection.
We are Stepford wives with a mouse's click.
Pinterest allows us to be anything.
Pinterest allows us to be everything.
Renaissance women reorganizing:
homes transformed with wine corks and mason jars.
And don't forget glitter. Always glitter.

Smell our soap handmade from lilac and rose.
See our flawless brows and smoky eyelids.
Feel our fab abs after one month of planks.
Hear the inspirational quotes transferred
from screens to psyches in affirmation.
Taste our moist apple-sauced pumpkin muffins.
Our yummo snickerdoodle pumpkin bread.
Our heart healthy pumpkin cornbread waffles.
Our whole-wheat banana pumpkin pancakes.

We blast stubborn belly fat by snacking
on dark chocolate, dried fruit, and almonds.
We kill calories drinking jugs of
sassy cayenne pepper lemon water.
We wanderlust after 2-D islands,
blurring beach umbrellas with fingerprints.
Someday, on our chalkboard-paint calendar,
Bali will span a week in cursive script
after *Our Wedding* framed in strings of pearls.

We have been planning our nuptials since
the Pinterest app hit our rhinestoned iPhones.
Boyfriend or not, a proposal will come
any day now because we found our dress:
a Marchesa mermaid cut has been pinned.

We skim *How to be your husband's best friend*.
We're ready to get excited about
all the things he gets excited about.

We measure his XL jersey to be cut,
twisted, braided, and tied into sexy.
Chop cauliflower florets to roast, crisp,
and simmer in blue cheese buffalo sauce.
Prepare skinny tofu queso dip and
garlic kale chips in a rattan-wrapped bowl.
We can even make his team's loss taste good.

We pair virtual sundresses with heels
and cardigans that cost more than our rent.
But one day our closets will be coded:
scallop cut labels hanging from yarn bows,
walls lined with a DIY shoe cubby
hammered in by our husbands as we watch
lipsticked, aproned, holding a bamboo tray
of chocolate chip bacon and home-brewed beer.

We pintresses keep our plans on display.
Today: perfect sock bun, hone yoga skills.
Next week: paint wall Tiffany blue and tessellate.
Next month: construct a potted herb garden.
Next year: take stroll under Arc de Triomphe
(in Spring, wearing beret, holding boy's hand).
Pose in kiss position while we dangle
date of wedding from the Eiffel Tower.

We read and repin squares of colored words.
One childish font haphazardly spells:
"we must be willing to let go of the
life we have planned, so as to have the life
that is waiting for us" –joseph campbell

#cryingintoourpumpkinflaxoatmeal
#whydidwenotseethisquotemonthsago
#lifeisrude #josephcampbellFTW
#wewillactuallylikeyogasomeday

New World Love by **Rory Fleming**

When the world's fuel infrastructure fully switched over from oil to "love," people who once could not afford to drive (or buy) cars were zipping along the abandoned highways. Government agents confiscated the old pollution machines from the driveways. Those who neglected their children, spouses, and friends were stuck. Applications in the mail arrived, offering bailouts. They told us that you could apply for "love stamps," suspected by skeptics to be Xanax or unfortunate tattoos. People on the outskirts that were born unloved, lived without love, and could not believe in the word to begin with were as crazy as those who once doubted the energy crisis. When I heard the news, I called my parents. They didn't answer. Then I saw them drive by my window in a Mustang convertible. I knew that thing wasn't burning any fossil fuels.

My car was stuck on the driveway for the first couple of days until the HOA complained and special agents removed it. One of the officers shouted to me through an open window.

"Hey, you in there? We're getting rid of your car. You'll be happier!"

I didn't want them to take it, but complaining was pointless. Let them do it, I thought, it was out of gas anyway. I slinked back to my desktop and typed something about the fuel mandate in the search bar. The first hit was a site titled "New World Love." It looked like a forum. I searched through different sections of the main page, like the one titled "How to survive on your government's care package," which I assumed meant the bailout. One could apparently apply for a temporary love car, but I hadn't gotten my mail for days. I hadn't even left the house.

I signed up for an account on the site. It asked for a valid email address which I had one of, then for a variety of personal minutiae I didn't feel comfortable sharing. Who cared if I liked white men or black? Before I could shame myself for subscribing, I was bombarded with messages.

The first read: *Hey listen, I see you're also from [name of city redacted], do you want to find a landmark to walk halfway to? It shouldn't take too long to meet, maybe 45 minutes if we do it this way. Please, I know you probably understand (I have to get back to work too).*

Within seconds, another seven followed. I responded only to the first: *Yeah, let's do this bullshit. I GPS-ed your location on my phone. How does Panoptix Video Café sound? We can meet up and watch a movie over lunch.*

Immediately, the guy responded, *Yes*. I forgot to ask his name but I would recognize him. I saved his profile picture on my phone and ran out the door. I didn't even have to dress up. We both wanted the same thing.

I arrived in 20 flat. He wasn't there yet. I ordered a latte and was offered the daily movie menu. I read the sticky note on the top of the laminated sheet: "To commemorate the coming of a new age, Dr. Larry Steinberg has been asked to assemble his filmic inspirations. Enjoy!" They were all obscure 90s anime titles. *Intergalactic Space Station of Funk and Love. Lovesteel. The Motor of our Hearts that Summer.* Prophecies of one man's choosing.

I found a free screening table and looked over the movie I had just chosen—*Lovesteele*. As I was loading it, I felt a tap at my shoulder.

“Ah! There you are.”

I turned around, loaded his likeness onto my phone and compared his actual face with it.

“Mark, I take it? Have a seat. The movie’s starting.”

After the opening credits, in which characters walked with determined faces toward the screen, superimposed against giant robots of all designs and colors flying through the stars, a teenage boy sat in his room fiddling with an electronic gadget. It was telling. He would be the one to save the world, but not without help. We watched him as he went to school to be made fun of, arrived at home to have his grandfather berate him over not responsibly choosing the career path of the men in the family, and went to sleep dreaming of a woman’s touch.

“So this is what he was thinking when he changed the world,” Mark mused.

I nodded in agreement. I also knew how this was going to play out. The boy would discover the girl of his dreams, who would be piloting a robot for a paramilitary organization fighting against the corrupt ruling power. He would try to win her heart, and in the process discover everything about himself he could have imagined, and even that which he couldn’t. He would, in this process, become a man.

“It is love that makes a man become a man,” I said aloud, reflecting upon the vague profundity of the film.

Mark nudged in close. I glanced at his face—a grimace—he didn’t even know me. The touch wasn’t wholly unwelcome, until I felt his fingers tug on my bra strap. I blushed.

“This is a public place, you know.”

“Shall we go home then?” He asked.

The answer was yes. We paid and departed. I led him along on the still-sunny sidewalks of our summer city, my daisy dress waving in the wind. We were without a vehicle but I knew it felt like half the time it took, walking back with a lover. We ran through the still-open door and up the stairs into the bedroom, flinging each other’s clothes off onto the floor. We made out until I glanced toward the window. There was a person rustling there, in the trees. I pushed Mark off me and put a finger to my lips. I tiptoed over to the window and kept my body out of plain view. Then I peeked my head out and searched. No sign of humans. I opened the window and I heard a thud on the ground, with the tree still swaying, back and ever forth.

I looked down. It was Dr. Steinburg. I recognized him from TV.

He brushed off his slacks with his hands and looked up. His zipper was undone. I grabbed my cell phone from the table to call the police.

“Hold the phone! I am sorry,” he said.

I placed it back on the table, but cautiously. I kept my hand on it.

"What do you want? You can get in big trouble, you know."

"I'm sorry," he panted, "It's—just—that budding love is like porn for me. I can't *not* exist in the cracks of people's most intimate moments. I am sorry," he said again.

I knew if I let him go, he would probably do it again. But some part of me felt sorry for him.

"There are movies for this. I know it's probably not enough, but just try. Statistically, the vast majority of humans on this planet are not going to become intimately involved with you. And they have a right to choose who to share with."

He was tearing up. Graciously, I hoped, or maybe just because I was freeing him. Either way, he left. Mark lied naked on my bed in wait. I returned to him for an afternoon dose of joy. A refilling of the tank, so to speak. Then he left. He messaged me, saying he would like to do this again. I called the local car dealership and scheduled a delivery for later that afternoon.

In the shower, now alone, I felt the residue of love pour over me and into the drain. It was like got a layer of oil on me at the gas station and now had to wash it off. Except it wasn't inconvenient. This, I didn't mind. The doorbell rang as I was drying off. I threw on my pink bathrobe and ran downstairs to get the door. It was a guy from the car dealership.

"We got your new Londa Starcross in the driveway. Here's the payment plan," he said, handing over a clipboard, "we need you to sign off on your relationship before we're done here."

The paper listed Mark and I as a new couple. It told of a device I would plug into the cigarette lighter to channel my feelings. I signed on all the dotted lines. The man walked away and drove in his own vehicle back to the shop. I wondered how he was generating his feelings—how consistently, how strongly. I thought of Dr. Steinburg and what he was doing felt less weird to me. There were things I wanted to know, wanted to understand, but there was no real way to ask, only a way to see. It was like gas after all, in that it will run out, until we find something sustainable. But maybe I could get to work today with just this.

The Box
by
Mikaela von Kursell

... was always there
a little box in the corner of the screen.
If you clicked it,
It beeped.
If you clicked out of it,
It beeped.
If you clicked around it,
It beeped.
If you tried to delete it,
It beeped.
If you asked it to go away nicely,
It beeped.
If you begged it,
It beeped.
If you beat your hands upon it,
It beeped.
If you licked the screen,
It beeped.
If you crawled underneath it
with your hands on your head
and the salt of tears in your eyes
and swore on your mother's grave,
It beeped.
If you gave up,
It beeped.
If you pretended to give up
but looked casually over your shoulder
It beeped.
and if you lied and told it
that you'd love it
if only it'd stop beeping—

It beeped.

Construction **by** **Kelly Kiehl**

It started with a toe. Well, the three big toes on the left foot. You see, Hadrian (pronounced Adrian, the H is silent) wanted to make a down-payment on an engagement ring for his girlfriend, Hanna. Hanna's name too possessed a silent H. She said her name like Anna, and had spent her life resenting the fact that her mother decided to spell her name with a silent H. This was the reason that Hadrian and Hanna began to date, but it was not the reason that they fell in love.

You see, Hadrian and Hanna shared many things in common. They both still lived with their parents. They both liked to eat, and to listen to music. They both enjoyed sleeping at night and sometimes during the day, too. They liked friends and family. They liked to drive, and liked to nod their heads seriously when people at a party began to talk about social issues. They liked to save money, too. Hadrian and Hanna also enjoyed being part of the United Methodist Church, though neither of them believed in God. Hadrian and Hanna were soul-mates, everyone said.

Hadrian had a job doing construction on highways. He used the job to pay for the school loans he took out the first two years of college, before he decided that he didn't like college and quit to jackhammer highways. He liked the job alright, except for that one day that his buddy, Thor, got his by a semi as he was jack hammering the road. The semi was a little too far to the left, and Thor was a little too far to the right. Hadrian thought it was okay though, because at least his family got 100,000 in compensation for Thor's death. They were rich now.

The state had begun a program to revamp all the interstates that spread through its hills like ivy covering an old house. The state did this not because the highways needed to be redone, but because it needed to look like it was giving jobs to the unemployed in order to get money from the federal government.

Hadrian looked at engagement rings, but the ones that he thought Hanna deserved were all out of his price range. They were soul mates, after all. The next day at work, Hadrian thought about Thor. He divided up his buddy's body parts and tried to calculate them all to equal 100,000 dollars. With these calculations, fueled by Hadrian's C+ in College Algebra, which was above average, Hadrian figured that his toes were worth as much as a down payment on an engagement ring. He thought, my toes will heal anyway. It's like nothing.

Hadrian waited for a real car to break his toes, not one of those hybrid, Japanese tin cans. He didn't know if those even weighed enough to break his toes. He jack hammered facing towards the oncoming traffic, craning to hear the sounds of a Ford over the redundant tongue clicking of metal on rock. Finally, Hadrian's ears picked up. A Jackrabbit anticipating his prey. His ears heard a rumble that made his heart beat a little faster. It was the rumble of an American-built engine, humming the Star Spangled banner in deep baritone revs. The red Ford approached, and, Hadrian felt like he was being overpowered by the jackhammer!

"I feel like I'm being overpowered by the jackhammer!" he said. Consequently, he stuck his left foot a little too far to the right.

When asked, before his death, whether his toes were worth it, he would say "unequivocally," which was a word he learned before he took the SATs.

"She said yes!" Hadrian told his friend Ed when he returned to work after paid medical leave.

"Nice, man!" Ed said. His real name was Edificar, which was like Latin or something for building. He got the job building roads for the state because he said his birth certificate was proof that he was born to build. Roads, that is.

"How'd you pay for that rock on her hand?" he asked. Rock was slang for diamond ring. Because Ed had become his new best friend since Thor died, Hadrian decided to tell Ed the truth. He decided to tell Ed how the idea came to him when he was thinking about how Thor died. Ed thought about it as he jack hammered. His face was screwed up in concentration, like Ed had jack hammered his face instead of the road. Nobody would notice how hard he was thinking though, because everyone's face looked like that when they were jack hammering. Finally, when Ed and Hadrian took a break for lunch, Ed said, "Dude, that's a messed up way of making money."

To which Hadrian replied, "At least I'm not a prostitute or a drug dealer or one of those guys that works in a cubicle."

Ed used his jack hammer face to think a little bit more as he ate his ham and cheese sandwich. He came to this conclusion: "I wasn't saying it was a bad way to make money, just that it was messed up."

And then Hadrian said the most profound thing he would ever live to say. "All things are sorta messed up these days." But then, Hadrian hadn't seen the half of it. Over the course of the next few years, Hadrian would need to take out a mortgage, pay his wife's credit card debt, and begin to buy diapers for his baby boy, Jack. They had named Jack after the tool that his father used at his job every day. His middle name wasn't Hammer, though, because that would be mean to the baby. His middle name was Knife, with a silent K.

Hadrian had thought that Hanna would have a problem with the way he'd decided to make money, but she didn't. She only said, "you do what you have to do to provide for our family, you know? Doesn't matter how you get money, just that you get it. Means to an end." Hadrian would lose a leg and an arm in the coming years, but at least he made money for his family.

Ed had spilled the beans to the rest of the crew that was working on Interstate 70, and had unknowingly began an epidemic. Thaddeus lost both sets of toes in order to pay his daughter's community college tuition. Formunculous sacrificed his tibia in order to buy front row seats at the Cincinnati Reds game. They lost in the 12th inning to the Cardinals. Rosie lost her right breast and half of her face to pay for her mother's cancer treatments.

"At least I won't get cancer in my right boob now," she told her mom, whose breast cancer had begun in her right breast.

So, the state had begun a road improvement project intended to bring money into the local economies, but in the end, they lost money paying for workers compensation. You see, this is why construction companies voided the workers' compensation clause in the contracts with employees. Now, you do not get money for getting hurt. Now, people are forced to

deal with whatever thoughts of hell camp out right by that part of their brain that reminds their heart to beat, without a corporate safety net.

A Letter from a Starfish by **Matt Kolbet**

Listen, I can't speak for everyone else, but it didn't make a difference to me. I want to get that out right away, and I repeat—it didn't make a difference to me.

I know you think it did, so that's why I'm saying it first. You walk along, and you see how many starfish there are scattered along the shore. Frankly, the situation looks impossible, and it is, for one person. I mean, after all, that's kind of your universal conflict: What is the meaning of *my* life? What purpose do *I* serve? And finally, is there some kind of *telos* that can be shared between me and other people?

Death looms. It would be nice to do something with your life.

But look at it from my perspective. I'm not faced with countless starfish drying out in the sand. I'm in it, or out of it, rather, separated from the waves, waiting for the inevitable flow of the tide, perhaps secretly worrying about the next ebb, wondering if it will be the big one, the ebb to end all ebbs, facing a future where some kid finds my desiccated arms and leaves me in a box in the garage, or some mother turns me into a decoration at the beach house and every time someone visits, they make an asinine exclamation about how wonderful my corpse looks hanging from that peg, how my fading color brightens up the room, or adds the perfect touch to the house. I'm part of a nautical theme. I make things homey.

It's natural to want to matter to the world. I get that.

There are lots of starfish on the beach, so unless you had an army of volunteers, it's pretty grim. And there are naysayers out there. They scoff at you as an individual. They look at the long stretches of beach and see only hopelessness and isolation as the human condition. They prompt you to tell that story *ad naseum* and reach its philosophically flimsy conclusion: "It made a difference to this one."

But I'm telling you, for me and a lot of others I know it didn't make a difference. We've actually started a support group for starfish thrown back by do-gooders.

For a lot of us, there's not much to go back to. Angry girlfriends. Multiple divorces. A mouth that's too small. Often I barely have enough energy to wage a war of attrition against an oyster, and I love oysters. There are times you just get tired of turning your stomach inside out and expelling it from your body. The gritty sand, slow drying out, even the inane comments might be preferable to going back to the drudgery of the sea.

I'm not saying you have to give up on life. You may have a purpose, possibly a great one, but what it is, I can't tell you. Maybe you'll cure cancer or be a great parent to some adorable and brilliant kids, though from what I've heard, there's no shortage of kids or any kind of person on the planet, just like there's no shortage of starfish on the beach or stars in the sky.

All I'm saying is that you can't make your life meaningful simply by chucking starfish back into the ocean. I can count on each of my arms how many starfish said it made a difference to them and still have arms left over. I think you get the picture.

And yes, we're called sea stars now, not starfish, but really, that's a secondary issue.

**What We Are
by
Jordan Moffatt**

We're all just leaves
Waiting to fall

We're all just guitars
Waiting to be played

We're all just flowers
Waiting to be picked

We're all just people
Waiting to be loved

We're also pancakes.

Surprised Baby
by
Tom Mitchell

How successful a night? Well, the first guy wasn't wearing a shirt. That's what I said: no shirt. It wasn't in the bar. It was in the function room. That's the great thing about function rooms, they'll let you in without a shirt. Pants? Pants'd be pushing it. There'd be problems if you showed up without pants. Speed dating demands pants. Hawaii shorts at the minimum.

Yeah. There's a side entrance where the smokers stand. It's cold and full of abandoned beer barrels. You don't smoke. You don't notice. His chest? I didn't really look. It seemed intrusive to look. And, I guess, he wanted you to look. OK. I did look. It was hairless. And he flexed his muscles when he spoke. As if to punctuate what he was saying about going to the gym and masturbating.

You didn't think the type of man who took off his shirt in function rooms was the type of man to speak? You'd be surprised. No. He didn't *actually* masturbate. He spoke about masturbating. They would have thrown him out for masturbating. It's on the printed rules: NO MASTURBATING. It's just not the done thing. He spoke about masturbating.

Anyhow, the second guy. I want to talk about the second guy. Ok, then. Here we go: he sat down, the second guy.

What? Will you stop interrupting with questions? Let me tell the story. Apology accepted. The guy sits down. I'm scared. Because he's wearing a balaclava. Black like oil. No, not him. The balaclava. Really. No word of a lie. What do you associate with balaclavas? Terrorists, right? So, the first thing I'm thinking is that either he's a terrorist or he's ironic. Or he's an ironic terrorist, although I'm not sure how that would play out. Would ironic terrorists bring things to life? Would they construct buildings? Anyway. The second guy. I play it cool. I don't mention the balaclava LIKE HE EXACTLY WANTS ME TO. We move through the usual questions about work and hobbies and all that and I realise I don't know his name. He's used mine enough, like they tell you to do because it 'fosters amiability', but I've not used his. I've not used it because his name-badge only has '@surprisedbaby' printed. So I ask his name and he points to his badge like this is normal. 'But what's your real name?' I ask. 'This is my real name,' he goes. No shit? Shit. We're talking diarrhoea. I didn't believe him either. I demanded his driver's license. He showed it to me, making sure his thumb was over his picture. And there, on his license, was printed @surprisedbaby. Not enough people have punctuation in their name. Yeah, OK, hyphens notwithstanding. Inverted commas too. Let's not get bogged down in this. I was pulling at his driver's license. It was kind of embarrassing. I was trying to see his picture but I upset a pint of cider. No. He was drinking cider. And you're interrupting again.

So the bell went for time up, they have bells, and another guy took his place. Looked like a Bond villain and worked in designing the sewers of the future or some shit. Literally. He had thinning hair, so I only half listened. You know what I'm like.

The evening ended and a group of us milled around the bar like flies around shit. Do I keep swearing? I spoke to another person about the balaclava. They reckoned it was to create mystery. They'd read on the web that mystery = sex. I entered five big crosses for my men and went on my way. I was thinking of home and music and the bottle of vodka I knew to be in the fridge. Only: outside stood the guy with the balaclava, sucking at a cigarette through the round 'O' of his black wool. I asked if I could borrow one. A cigarette, I mean. No, not his balaclava. 'Borrow?' he asks like a proper dick, but gave me one anyway. We stood watching cars fuzz past and it felt as if it should be drizzling rain. We nodded to those departing the function room like soldiers at a troop ship and I see that his cigarette is almost done, so I think 'fuck it' and ask: 'what's with the balaclava? Are you trying to be mysterious because you read on the internet that you're more likely to get screwed if you're mysterious?'

Even though his face was covered in fabric, you could tell that he was deciding whether to answer my question or not. He flicked the cigarette away and says 'It's to do with my name' and moves as if to leave. I pull out a hand to stop his shoulder. He spins around, obviously not a person who enjoys being touched. Like your brother. Well, there you go. 'Alright,' he says. 'You asked for it.' And he pulled off his balaclava in one go. Big hand, long fingers. He looked ... he looked normal. His hair was standing static from the balaclava. And he had a lot of it. Hair. Brown and full. OK. His face was just ... normal. Like someone you went to school with. Or their brother. The skin was a bit white from being covered up but that was about as hideous as it got. He wasn't a guy you'd stop your cab for but if he offered you a drink, you'd accept. The weird thing was- he stood there, waiting for a reaction. 'You happy?' he asked. I shrugged. I asked whether I was missing something. 'Surprised Baby ring any bells?' he goes, goofy grin, arches eyebrows. Well, does it?

Me neither. YouTube videos. Maybe twenty years ago. Exactly twenty years ago. Some years ago. YouTube. He was a surprised baby. His dad filmed him in different scenarios, being surprised. Yeah, he had a face that always looked surprised. His father has his name changed from Martin to @surprisedbaby. I remember Twitter too. It was shit. Hashtag this, fuckers.

I told him his face did look a bit surprised and he said, like he was proving a winning point or something, that I wasn't the first person to notice and he folds his arms like he's proper pissed off.

Suddenly aggressive, he spits that his dad had spent the first three years of his life filming him in every possible situation. If he knew the mail was about to be delivered, he'd thrust a camera in his son's face. If he knew the microwave was about to finish, he'd film his son. Anything that might be in the least bit surprising, he filmed his son, hoping for a reaction. If @surprisedbaby cried, that was all the better. Crying babies got the best hits. And as he was telling me all this, channelling a torrent of anger if that's possible, I studied his face and, you know what, I thought: I *do* remember the videos. They were quite funny. He was surprised at a lot of things, the baby.

What happened next? I told him how I sold my virginity on eBay and he calmed down. 'I thought I recognised you from somewhere,' he said. 'You ought to think about wearing a

balaclava. It's the only way.' Seriously, he said that. I also got his number. How did I enter his name? 'At'. I could live with a boyfriend called 'At'. And, you know, worn correctly, balaclavas can be fetching. There's a mystery to the balaclava. It reminds me of the French. Or is that a beret?

But enough about me. How's your father doing? He's still alive, right?

The end of my vampire boyfriend
by
Anna Della Zazzera

It was Monday
when you burned up,
in a swell of
fire and brimstone.
Charcoal to ashes and
rage to despair.
Now, I crawl
just to transfer your dust
to my belly.
Because
all that you left me
were dirty wood floors,
and mops maintain such an
impersonal distance.

Memories of Mr. Ed

by
Michael Andreoni

You might be wondering what became of Mr. Ed, the talking horse from the television series which ran from 1958 to 1966. Few people outside the industry know that Mr. Ed was actually a zebra. The horse originally cast for the role proved uncooperative, and, with production costs mounting, the producers were afraid the show would be dropped from the network schedule. Their inspired solution was a nearby zoo that was willing to lend a zebra. Black and white television of that era rendered the zebra's stripes invisible to viewers, and the set was reconstructed using forced perspective to make the smaller zebra version of Mr. Ed appear as large as a horse. The popular show became one of the first to be syndicated, with episodes still airing today.

Mr. Ed returned to the zoo in 1966, after the final show was filmed. He lived there until March 23, 1970, when he disappeared from the African Plains exhibit. Local police and the zoo's own investigation produced no useful leads. To this day no one knows how or why it happened.

In 1971, Mr. Ed came to stay with me in room 209 of The Cloisters, a minimum security residency located near Ann Arbor, Michigan. I returned to my room on the first morning of summer after receiving (but not swallowing) the poison which Dr. Rahjeev, a well-meaning but deluded practitioner, claimed were my daily meds. Mr. Ed was waiting outside my door. He'd done a bit of traveling since leaving the zoo, he offered, making polite conversation while I searched the cupboards for sugar cubes. I was at first skeptical when he claimed to be Mr. Ed, because of the stripes, until he explained. I said his story was believable because I'd noticed that Dr. Rahjeev had orange vertical stripes some days and purple stripes on others. This so tickled Mr. Ed that he licked my face until I was giddy. We quickly became inseparable.

In the T.V. show, only his friend, Wilbur, can hear Mr. Ed speak. Wilbur's wife and friends think Wilbur is odd, or possibly crazy, because to them Mr. Ed is simply a horse. My relationship with Mr. Ed was similar, another instance of life imitating art, for I too seemed to be the only one who could hear, or even see him. This was by design, he assured me, as I was the only human deemed of sufficient intellectual capacity by his superiors. Yes, Mr. Ed was not alone. He was the representative of a race of intelligent equines, the remnants of an elder civilization gone nearly extinct half a million years before humans evolved.

What fun we had in the boiler room, hiding from Dr. Rajeev. I showed Mr. Ed my trick of crawling underneath the fuel oil tank. We'd crouch down among the cobwebs, giggling when the doctor and his team of nut-cracking nurses and orderlies ran up and down the halls. When they found us Mr. Ed hurled insults in rhymed verse while they fastened the restraints on my arms and legs. I laughed so hard the staff probably thought they were dealing with a crazy person.

Mr. Ed revealed the deepest desire of his race to me while I was lying down, recovering from a forcibly administered injection. The doctor had said I couldn't be trusted to take my meds. Mr. Ed felt sorry for him—a very limited man, he sniffed, who wouldn't be able to handle the revelation of an older, smarter, race. The Equines were counting on me to break the news of their existence to mankind.

They were tired of hiding in plain sight. Why should those ersatz magical beings, elves and vampires, receive so much adulation when the real thing was sleeping on straw and cropping dead grass at zoos all over the world? It wasn't fair, Mr. Ed complained. His race deserved better.

I agreed the Equines deserved a chance to get ahead, but had they considered the competition? Vampires are nearly immortal, and can fly, I reminded him. Could the Equines do any magic besides talking? (And elves, in addition to their magical abilities, are house-broken, I did not mention.) We are masters of the spoken word, Mr. Ed answered. Can a dog ask you to brush his fetlocks in twenty languages? Can a horse communicate a preference for Scotch whiskey over oats? He pranced about the room as though my questions troubled him, and I quickly promised to help. An agitated zebra in a small room is no joke.

I want it known that this incident was not the reason Mr. Ed went away. The responsibility lies entirely on Dr. Rajeev. Despite his bulk, Mr. Ed was a sensitive creature, obviously distressed by the savagery the staff demonstrated in administering my "Medicine". I felt his deepening concern with each injection, a shrinking away from such barbaric ignorance. On a cold winter morning I pleaded with Dr. Rajeev to stop the injections until Mr. Ed recovered, but was too late. Mr. Ed had already gone when I got back to my room. It was February 22, 1983.

Since then, I've tried to keep my promise to Mr. Ed. Dr. Rajeev retired recently, after many years of trying to kill me. Dr. Gondapolly has so far refused my petitions to be released so I can spread the word about the Equines. She changes my medication whenever I bring up the subject. I feel sad for her. Mr. Ed would say she's limited.

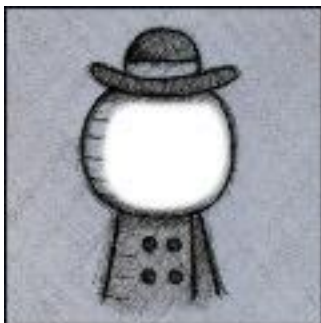
Contributor Biographies



Brittany Shutts lives in Dobbs Ferry, New York, with a pair of neurotic cats and a charming, bearded fellow. Her stories have appeared in *PANK Magazine* and *The Golden Triangle*. She also blog about adventures, chocolate, and why everyone should be wary of nematodes at ThePersonalAutopsy.blogspot.com.



Eric K. Auld is a writer, performer, and aspiring Nihilist out of Boston, MA. His work has been featured on *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *The Guardian*, *Thought Catalog*, and NPR's *Talk of the Nation*. Follow him on Twitter: @erickauld.



Saikat Sen is a door-to-door salesperson. S/he specializes in vegan leather jackets.



Katie Seeley is a student by night and a waitress by other nights. She was born and raised in Southern California but now lives in Chicago and fares very well in the winter weather. The rate of pickle consumption in her home still far exceeds that of mason jar crafting.



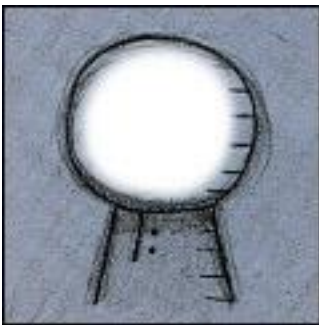
Rory Fleming is a student of law and words, floating in the contradiction between rigidity and dream worlds. He did not invent the question mark, though it would be interesting to tattoo one on his forehead. Check out more of his work at mehuggingspacecarrion.wordpress.com.



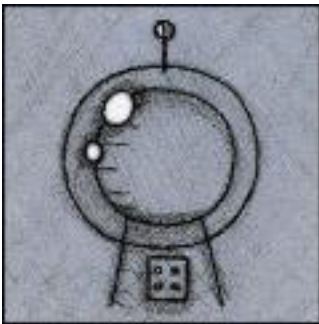
Mikaela von Kursell is currently pursuing her MFA in Fiction at Florida Atlantic University. When she's not writing, she enjoys making Claymation videos about mythical beasts and sea monsters that have <15 hits on YouTube. Her poetry, translations, and scholarly essays have previously appeared in *Coastlines*, *The Explicator*, and *The Found Poetry Review*. You can usually find her Claymation if you search for "Dobsey and the Deep-Sea Bucket."



Kelly Kiehl is a senior at the University of Missouri-Columbia and would appreciate any thoughts you may have on what she should do with her life, although she will probably never be a lumberjack, or an accountant, or a road worker that sticks her body parts into traffic to get money. Her fiction has also been in *The Devilfish Review*.



Matt Kolbet teaches and writes near Portland, Oregon. He has been published in *Defenestration* a few times before, as well as *Clockwise Cat*, *Four and Twenty*, *The Rufous City Review*, and other places.



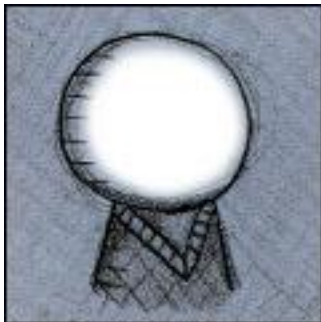
Jordan Moffatt lives, writes, and improvises in Toronto. You can follow him on twitter @jordanmoffatt.



Tom Mitchell is a London-based writer/father/waster. He tweets excessively at @tommycm to an ever-decreasing amount of followers. He has never been speed-dating, nor has he ever been an Internet meme. He doesn't even know how to pronounce 'meme'.



Anna Della Zazzera is a part-time writer and full-time narwhal enthusiast. Her poetry has appeared in the *Feathertale Review*, *Paper Crow*, and *Futuredaze: An Anthology of YA Science Fiction*. She lives in beautiful British Columbia in an ugly white house with a view of the mountains. Visit her ramblings at annadz.wordpress.com.



Michael Andreoni's stories have appeared in *U. of Chicago/Euphony*, *Pif*, *Iconoclast*, *Ducts*, *Calliope*, and other publications. He lives near Ann Arbor, Michigan.