

◇ Defenestration ◇

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The Poetry Monster by **Seán Carabini**

And then there was chaos. Although it was a clear day with sunshine, people remember only occasional moderate sunshine. They recall seeing a crowd running past their windows—and joining that crowd and being part of that crowd as it then ran past other people’s windows. But window by-passing was only one of the reasons that this crowd had convened.

The crowd huddled in the Eastern corner of the village square, preferring that direction above all others—especially North. And they watched and they fell silent in order to listen.

A young boy with a Dickensian flatcap and a talent for cliché watched the reflection of his father's face in the dim puddle on the ground. He was the first to spot the light ripples—and saw them as they began to increase in strength and temerity. They rippled across his father’s reflection and gave him the appearance of having an aging, wobbled and deep-lined face—which, in reality, he already had.

“Look!” shouted a woman needlessly, pointing to the hill.

They all watched in confused terror as the silhouette of a monster came into focus. Just like watching an anti-origamist, they could not believe what was unfolding before their eyes. Monsters were only supposed to exist in children's fables. They were not supposed to be real – they had been invented only to terrorise the minds of children in the name of parenting.

They could now see the monster's skin—green as an unsalable turnip, scaly as a turnip that was also unsalable, but for different reasons.

“He has the head of a gorgon,” shouted a villager with an until-then unused Masters in classical mythology. “And I should know—I have a Masters in classical mythology.”

“And look at the eyes! His yellow eyes! They have the intensity and coldness of a sheep,” said the sheepfarmer who had lost his wife to a stampede of sheep (though he still gets regular postcards from her).

“And his skin! He has the terrible skin of an armadillo,” declared a wild-eyed onlooker.

“No—no it's really more akin to that of a pangolin,” said another. “It has those kind of pointy scales.”

“I'm not really sure that I'd agree with that,” said the first man in terror. “A pangolin's scales are designed for more of an overlap than those of an armadillo. To me, his scales are clearly armadillo-like”, he said, breaking into a cold sweat.

“I guess we'll have to agree to disagree”, said the second man in a panic. “After all - true friendships outlast disagreement.”

The monster drew nearer now to the villagers. They grew silent and huddled together like a gathering of individuals compressing themselves into a small space. Breaths sharpened. Hands trembled. A tourist stopped to ask directions.

And then, he was there. Large, green, breathing like a belaboured broodsow, he towered over the villagers - their futures focused on his large and terrible teeth, their present overshadowed by a sense of pure fear, their pasts haunted by varying and unresolved personal issues.

"What—what do you want", asked Friar Whitby, his voice all atremble.

"I object to a priest speaking on my behalf," noted Atheist Joe. "I'd like to ask you the same question, but to strip it of any religious connotation."

"Are—are you going to eat us?" asked Mayor Farrington.

"Yes—are you here to eat us?" asked a token woman who happened to be the first black female to be awarded the Medal of Honor in the US Marines and thereby finally winning her estranged father's approval.

"No. Monster—not—going—to—eat—villagers," said the monster with a voice like a smoked fish.

"The monster speaks English!" declared a villager.

"But so do you," replied another.

He contemplated this for a moment. "By God!" he exclaimed, wide-eyed. "I do!"

"Are you here to eat our houses," asked the Mayor.

"No. Monster—not—eat—houses," replied the monster.

"Are you here to eat our sheep?" asked the sheepfarmer, asking this question for the fourth time in his life.

"No. Monster—not—eat—livestock."

"Well then—what exactly are you here to eat?" asked the Friar.

"Monster—eat—poetry."

The villagers grew silent as they contemplated this.

"Well that's not so bad," came a voice from the back.

"Quick—bring him the poetry books from the library," said the Mayor.

A group of villagers ran to the library and smashed through the front window. "Where is the poetry section," demanded the mob.

"You can find it on our new online catalogue system. Have you used it before?" asked the librarian.

"No—I'm used to the old card system," said the mob leader. "Do you maybe have a pamphlet on how the new system works?"

They study the pamphlet carefully and enter the details into the online catalogue. Soon, it became clear where the poetry section was. The investment in the online cataloguing system had been worthwhile after all.

With armfuls of books, the re-emerged onto the street and hurried back to the monster, dumping them at his feet (the books, not their arms).

"There, your monster-ship," said the mob leader. "That's all the poetry books in the library."

"Monster—hungry," exclaimed the monster as he reached down to begin eating. Keats was the first to go. He devoured the entire collected works in one gulp. His mighty teeth smashed the works of Shelly in mere seconds. McGreevey, Wilde and Whitman were eaten together. The villagers watched on as this literary desecration continued.

"At least it's only poetry. Thank God he doesn't like mystery novels", said one.

It took only forty-five minutes for the monster to eat the entire library collection.

"Monster—full. Monster—hungry—again—tomorrow," said the monster.

"But—but you've eaten all of our poetry. We have no more to give you," said the Friar.

The Mayor turned to the people. "My friends—return to your houses and write a poem. We'll all bring them here to the monster tomorrow to feed him."

"NO!" bellowed the monster. "Monster—only—eat—peer—reviewed—poetry."

This sent the villagers into a tizzy. *What will we do now?*

"Wait! I have an idea," said the Friar. "I had some poems published when I was younger and studied English at college. Would you accept me as a reviewer?"

"Yes—I too have had a few poems published," said Atheist Joe. "And with the Friar and me reviewing together, you could be sure of religious balance."

The monster pondered the proposal. "Very—well. If—you—form—a—committee—to—review—the—poetry—of—the—villagers—and—publish—a—daily—journal,—monster—can—eat—that."

"I can be on the committee," asked a man who held an unused Masters in Classical Mythology. "I hold a Masters in Classical Mythology."

"Is—it—unused—Masters", enquired the monster?

"Well—yes. I suppose it is."

"Then—you—cannot—be—on—committee."

Within an hour, the villagers had cobbled together a committee of three and signed a printing contract for the production of one volume each day. The final member of the committee was the first decorated African American to serve on a poetry journal review board.

"Return to your houses—take out your quills and your laptops—and write. The journal needs poetry. I need everyone to submit a poem for our consideration by tomorrow morning. Otherwise, the monster will return and he will be angry. Fear the wrath of the monster left hungry for poetry." And with these words from the mayor, the people dissipated and the monster stomped back over the hill.

The first issue of the *Village Journal* was a success. Twelve villagers were published for the first time and began to dream of future publishing deals. The monster arrived at dinner time and declared satisfaction with the first issue of the journal. Issue two was equally as successful—with the Friar himself having a poem published.

And so, for three weeks, the villagers continued to produce their journal and appease the monster. Soon, however, problems began to appear. The villagers found it more and more difficult to continually produce new poetry and the volume of submissions began to slacken. In response, the Mayor issued a decree that every citizen must submit a poem each day. And, indeed, this ensured the submissions—though their quality had begun to dip.

The Friar and Atheist Joe began to argue more and more about what should and should not be included. Atheist Joe insisted that each journal should carry twelve poems—whereas the Friar felt that the quality was not there to sustain twelve each day. The decorated Marine proffered no opinion as she is only a token character in this story.

During the fifth week, things reached desperation point (it was located at the corner of Main Street). The monster continued to stomp into the village square at dinner time to receive his daily journal and the Mayor continued to reassure the people that as long as the journal was produced, the village would be safe. And the people continued to write poetry.

Behind the scenes, however, cracks had started to show. The villagers had begun to run out of subjects for their poetry. They had started out with poems about love, about death and about their village. Lately, however, the topics were becoming more and more obscure. The most recent issue of the *Village Journal* had included a poem about cattle scower and another advocating the non-surgery options for bunion treatment.

The Friar did not believe that such poetry topics should be carried in the *Village Journal*. He felt that they compromised the quality and reputation of the publication.

"It doesn't matter," said Atheist Joe. "All we have to do is publish twelve poems on a daily basis. The quality is irrelevant."

Things soon came to a head between the two men when a villager tried to pass a fifteen-line poem off as a sonnet. The Friar would not accept it. Atheist Joe resigned in protest from

the committee—though, in reality, he had been looking for an excuse for a while to step down. It had taken up too much of his time—time he needed to pursue his true passion: refrigeration school.

The following day was a Wednesday morning. The Friar specifically remembers this detail as it had come after a Tuesday evening. The journal entries had arrived. The committee—now comprising of just two—began to sift through them. The Friar, knowing that the other committee member did not have an active part in this story, realised that it would fall to him to make the selection decisions.

The first five poems chose themselves. They were good, solid pieces of poetry that dealt with classical themes: love, loss and labour. The second five were more of a challenge—but—again—he was able to make a selection. He could not, however, find the final two pieces. The quality was not there. One piece—‘Ode to an apple pie’ appeared to simply be an apple pie recipe. Another—‘Ode to a driver’s licence application form’—appeared to be a driver’s licence application form. What would he do?

The Friar spoke to the Mayor and asked him to assemble the villagers at five O’clock. When the time came, the Friar stepped out to address them.

“My friends—there will be no *Village Journal* published today.”

The villagers took a sharp intake of breath.

“But the monster—he will kill us all!” The people panicked.

“The truth, my friends, is that there were not enough worthy submissions. We needed twelve. There were only ten that were any good.”

“Could you not publish it as a chapbook,” asked a voice?

“What—and ruin the reputation of the journal?” retorted the Friar with a snarl.

Suddenly, the ground began to rumble. *The footsteps of the monster! The monster is coming! The monster is coming!*

The monster loomed large over the rehuddled masses. He looked around—but could not see his daily poetry journal.

“Monster—hungry. Where—monster’s—poetry—journal?”

As the Friar stepped forward, the crowd hushed and gasped into a silence—just as they had rehearsed.

“Monster,” began the Friar, “We do not have a journal for you today.”

“NO JOURNAL?” bellowed the monster.

“No—I’m afraid not. The submissions were just not of a high enough quality. I couldn’t publish them without compromising the journal’s integrity.”

The Mayor stepped forward. "Monster—if you'll allow me—I think I have a solution to this problem. I plan on passing another law that sets up a sub-committee that must pre-vet all submissions before they are submitted. I think ..."

"ENOUGH!" roared the monster. "MONSTER—NOT—HAPPY. MONSTER—ANGRY!" he said, beating his chest to help ease the pain of his pleurisy.

The villagers began to shriek. "We're done for," screamed one. "We're doomed," exclaimed another. "I think I left the iron plugged in!" wailed another.

The Friar began to speak. "Monster—if you're going to eat the villagers, you may as well start with me. My surplice is made of bacon and my underwear is knitted from spaghetti."

"MONSTER—NOT—HAPPY. MONSTER—GO—TO—ANOTHER—VILLAGE—TO—SEEK—PEER—REVIEWED—POETRY."

The villagers grew both silent and perplexed at these words—though it is not known which they grew first.

"What—you mean that you were never going to harm us? We were never under threat?"

"Monster—just—like—poetry, but—good—poetry—so—hard—to—find—these—days."

And so the villagers watched as the monster trudged away into the distance, his silhouette losing itself in a grey fog inserted into the story by the author for the sake of atmosphere.

The *Feng Shui* of true love
by
Buff Whitman-Bradley

—for *Cindy*

No matter how many times
I moved around my inward lamps
And tables and chairs
To please the various
Interior decorators and remodelers
I'd fallen for
My *Feng Shui* always disappointed them
On the other hand
You appreciated the arrangement
Of my heart's furniture
From the very beginning
It was harmonious you told me
Without being predictable
It felt open you said and spacious
Conducive to the flow of the *yin* and the *yang*
In fact you announced
To my astonishment and delight
That my inner décor suited you just fine
Exactly as it was . . .
So I asked you to stay
For crumpets and *chi*

She's a Far-Gone Other Species, Ralph

by
Dawn Wilson

"She's a far-gone other species, Ralph."

Those were the only words of warning on the whole planet at that moment. Everyone else was going Whoop de dooooo! and Wheeee! and there was a lot of clunking together of heads.

"I know, I do know, Dave..." Hesitancy on the face of Ralph, like he'd made up his mind but still thought there had to be a better way. Sure, you can kill yourself anytime, but only once, and you probably won't be able to step back and say Whew once you've leapt off that formidable roof.

Going down!

"She's a gal. Keep that in mind. *Female*. Feminine. Strychnine in hot pants. A veritable spewing over of hormonal insurgents. They eat men, Ralph. Look at it statistically."

In all the nooks and corners of the world, no one was having a logical look at anything, except maybe the innards of another's head gone bashed into the wall of the mile-high twirly slide—seventy-eight miles an hour no helmet required population's too high they keep coming from somewhere but we're not sure where.

"You're from Alabama, Dave. I'm from Omaha. There's a huge difference, besides the twenty-two seconds it takes to transpose the letters. Maybe it's the extra consonants..."

"No. It's the extra gossip. Just sit around with anyone from my hometown and as soon as the sun sets, they open their mouths and the tongues just crawl out on their own."

"And that's how you know so much about these womenfolk."

"Sure thing I didn't spring forth from a tree. But now, the ban's hot and heavy down my way. You won't catch no canoodlers. We've got *safety* to think of." Dave wiggled his toes in his open-toed leather work sandals and proceeded with his deep knee bends, designed to be done six hours straight for the forthright verisimilitude of mankind. Everyone in Kalamazoo had been impressed to save the planet. The Good Work.

"For the good of mankind and the furtherance of no touch!" Dave and Ralph chanted as the clock gonged: Save yourselves, Boys!

It had been years since the No Touch laws had gone into effect. Years since people had been so gosh-darn miserable. Fat, lazy, depressed. Putting all their eggs into the basket of one mate and then legalizing it before the courts. That was how life was ordered before the day the food ran out and there weren't even any fries to go with That and you know, Swift once said Eat your babies and God once said Dash your children against the rocks (a recipe, before the inventions of tenderizer).

Of course, it was the females who got ready to claw each other's eyes out. The females showed their true colors, how they'd been wool-pulling for eons and the menfolk sat up and went Oh.

Well, I'm not gonna eat *my* baby, you bitch. Let's eat *your* baby. Your baby's fatter and more succulent, anyway!

No! Let's eat all the *new* babies.

Oh. Yeah, true. There'll be lots. And no one will be attached to them yet.

Women haunted hospitals to feed themselves and their wee chittlins, waiting for the wails and the afterbirth, and the new mothers all ate their placentas because in olden days you did that anyway, for the nutritional value and to appease the spirits.

And the eye-opened men said, Um... that's not right. We can't eat our own kidneys and that's kind of gross and cannibalistic, and they deemed all mothers of that baby-eating era Diseased and they locked them away, expecting them to eat each other.

The old men in the Congress stated that all this hullabaloo and overpopulation started back during Women's Lib. They'd been in office long enough, they were sure to know; they had the statistics to prove anything they wanted. The People had the means to eat up anything that came to them over the airwaves as the dignified and irrefutable Truthness.

Congress passed the No Touch Law the second they rescinded the right to vote from all women and anyone who couldn't do the square root of 4096—and then get the square of that—in their heads.

Three people voted in the Midwest that election year.

But then, that was where the cultured and educated folks out east traced the initial problems, back to the farmbelt where the suburbanites were inclined to brag to each other how many books they *didn't* read that year. And where God still dictated that you keep having kids as often as the stick went in and the baby could come out, and don't stop until you drop.

Ralph whispered during his jumping jacks, "I'm expected home for Christmas, Dave. I'm from Omaha. I'm from the very center of the Kill Zone."

The government gave elderly farmers, disgruntled grocery clerks, the clergy, and any ex-military the right to shoot canoodlers on sight in the Kill Zone, which followed Tornado Alley straight up the center of the country, bisecting it into the learned and the passionate on either coast, and the morons in the center.

"I was lucky to get out of there. My folks have been grandfathered in. They're old enough that their marriage still stands. Even if they can canoodle, neither one can reproduce. And let me tell you, now that the Powers got them finally talking about this stuff, they won't stop *doing* it. They hug, they kiss, and it's highly embarrassing.

"And Dave, I hate to say it, but before the Kill Zone went into effect, my parents were so far gone law abiding they wouldn't have sneezed in public. That whole region couldn't hold hands. Now? It's like they've turned into anarchists. Just tell 'em they can't. And bam!"

On to lunges for four hours to bring their souls closer to the Earth spirits, even if the building was concrete and they were six floors up.

"Why would you even consider importing a bride type mistress when they've been exiled so long? Ralph, I tell you, you're asking Trouble and not just from the ex-military hot fingers."

"Sometimes better dead..."

"Can't stop halfway off a building, Ralph, you know that. That's their motto. And they will shoot."

"You try going home for Christmas at my age without a female companion on your arm (metaphorically)." What they really did was keep them in cages and pull them around on wheeled carts to show off their trapping prowess while the female ones hissed and tried to eat your liver. "It's *Omaha*. The very one and only thing they've ever known is that a family has values and they know how to concoct a family out of anything, even a half-eaten scarecrow and a pet dachshund."

"Go get a dachshund, Ralph. Without you to bend your knees and clap your hands and push your ups, why, we don't stand a chance of ever getting back into the good graces of the Earth mother who may also be the asexual father."

"But I just want to borrow your sister..."

"They removed her from us pre-teen, before the angst and hormones, Ralph. So while I have rather fond memories of the fact that she wasn't homicidal, you've read the guide. You know what happens to those feminine children grown up. That's *why* they had to be removed! And I, for one, am glad I've got a Utopian memory in my past and escaped the vagaries of living with Thelma as a sexual hussy. We're the sacred generation, Ralph. We hold ourselves steady and this next generation won't happen at all."

They clapped their hands and raised them to the crumbly white ceiling and chanted Hallelujah.

There hadn't been babies at all for ten years, so said the Charts and Graphs. The lax safety laws and the heightened thrill rides had leveled the population. But still, they could do more. Life post sexual segregation was so *calm*. All the photos of women had been destroyed. Works of art and statues had been locked away in tombs, catacombs, vaults. The occasional elderly woman still defied death with her damned homegrown vegetables, but it was only a matter of time before women weren't even a memory.

"I just need your permission to borrow your sister. I promise, I won't let her out of the cage. I won't knock her around. I won't remove the sheet in broad daylight so she won't be tempted to sing. Above all, I won't touch."

"And when your defiant anarchist handholding mother catches sight of my little sister in her reinforced cage? And hears you bragging how you bagged this one and made her your feral bride? Then what? I'll tell you what: shoot on sight. Taken out by your greengrocer. Leaving me jumping twice the jacks to keep the Earth mother from swallowing us whole."

"I promise not to get shot. It's just Christmas."

Dave went frenetically into head shoulders knees toes eyes ears mouth nose. "I'm stomping a memo with my feet! Tattle, tattle! They'll ban Christmas. They'll ban it to save us all. They'll ban going home to the Kill Zone for family holidays, for quiet nights snuggled around a fire. You know why? Because you're weak. And it'll take thirty years for the feral fertile women to be no more, no more at all. In thirty years, they'll reinstate Christmas. Go home then. Go home then and pull the bones of your too-sexy mother out of the recliner and bury her in your childhood backyard and stand sweating over the grave and watch the sunset and eat a raw potato and know: that's how it ends."

[sort] Poems
by
Mark Cunningham

[sort]

They shared a moment, but he still got the half with the most cranberries. I said, "You know how good friends can just sit and say nothing," and she said, "Shut up." He said the medicine "dissipated tumors beyond belief," and I hope he's right, because I don't believe him. After she started watching zombie movies, she made me take a cold shower before we had sex.

[sort]

She's always fifteen minutes early—and then he says he doesn't really feel comfortable in a place until after three years. He doesn't build forts anymore, but he still makes a toilet paper nest when he uses a public restroom.

[sort]

Do it yourself fractals: you eat corn on the cob and corn rubble gets stuck between your teeth and when you smile your mouth looks like a cob of corn. Thanks to global warming, I can give her dirty looks and not have to worry about my face freezing like that. We grew up thinking the joke, "I know how to spell 'banana'—*ba-na-na-na-na*—but I don't know when to stop" was hilarious, and now we work in genetic engineering.

[sort]

Dear Ezra Pound: 2014: Huey Lewis and the News are touring again. I won second prize in the dullness contest, so I had two reasons to celebrate.

Skin Deep
by
Zachary Abram

I think what I hate most are the looks. Those sideways, pitying, judgmental looks. Those arrogant looks that scream false sympathy. Sometimes, out at dinner, they won't even do me the courtesy of whispering. They'll say in full voice, "So sad" or "It's a shame, really. Pretty girl like that dining out all alone." Their assumptions are just too much to take. I wish I could show them. I wish I could scream at them, "I am not alone! I am here with my boyfriend!" But then I remember. I remember that this is what I signed up for when I started dating the Invisible Man. So, I just go back to my lobster bisque and try not to look too pathetic.

He hates it when I refer to him as the Invisible Man. He says he'd prefer not to be reduced to his "condition." He snaps at me, "Would you like to be known as The Short Red-Headed Girl with Thick Ankles?" I apologize and correct myself. His name is Griffin. My boyfriend's name is Griffin and he is invisible. Actually, the approved nomenclature is "refractively challenged."

I've tried to convince him to wear a trench coat, fedora, sunglasses and maybe some gauze while we're out in public but he flat-out refuses. He accuses me of perpetuating pernicious stereotypes about the invisible or, excuse me, "differently visible." He calls outfits like that, "minstrelsy of the worst sort... I am not like you and will not pretend to be just to save you a little face while we're out at dinner." In his less forgiving moments, he accuses other invisibles that try to pass as visible of being "traitors in gauze face." If we pass one on the street, he mutters under his breath, "fuckin' mummy." I wish he weren't so angry but I respect that he's so committed to the cause of his people. Then again, being an activist is hard when you're, y'know, invisible.

When you're dating an Invisible Man, basically everything becomes more difficult. Going to the movies is awkward because it looks like I'm perpetually saving a seat for someone who never comes and, if the show is sold out, I become public enemy number one for refusing give up a supposedly empty prime seat. I wish Griffin would stand up for me but he almost never speaks in public. He calls it a "survival mechanism." Apparently, most people don't take too well to hearing a disembodied voice emanating from the ether. Griffin lives in constant fear of an angry mob. His dreams are filled with the torches and pitchforks and windmills of an old James Whale movie. I try to tell him, "Not all people are like that. Fear isn't everybody's guiding impulse. Look at me, I love you." He won't hear it; he thinks that I'm only dating him to assuage my "liberal white guilt." Whatever that means.

I hope I'm not giving the impression that we don't have good times too. As you can probably guess, Griff is an excellent listener, which is exactly what I needed after Brad. Since he doesn't like to talk in public, I'm free to gab on and on. At first, it looked to passersby as though I was talking to myself but I came up with a solution. I simply placed a Bluetooth earpiece in my ear and now no one bats an eye. I tell Griff all about my day, my friends, and my problems. He really listens.

We're a very modern couple, really. We even met online. After my breakup with Brad, I was in a really bad place. He was a misogynistic douchebag but it still hurt when he cheated on me with one of my best friends (just last week, they both updated their Facebook profile

pics to a picture of her ultrasound. I hate it when people do that). Anyway, I was in a bad way after Brad and was aimlessly reading Craigslist Missed Connections when, all of a sudden, I saw an ad for what could only be me:

M4W Cute Redhead in the Poetry Section of Bibliocrisis on Main St.

You: Redhead in a pink summer dress reading Gertrude Stein at noon on Tuesday.

Me: Invisible.

Send me a message and maybe I can press your *Tender Buttons*.

I couldn't believe it. It was definitely me because that's my lunch break ritual. I'll admit that when I first read that he was "invisible," I thought he meant it as a metaphor, like he was invisible to me or something. When he revealed that he was literally invisible I was taken aback at first but wanted to be open-minded. After all, girls who troll Craigslist Missed Connections can't exactly be choosers, can they?

It isn't just the sideways looks that drive me crazy when we're out at dinner. He never eats anything. Y'see, it isn't pleasant but when an invisible person eats solid food, their digestive process *is* visible. You can see part of a steak floating about stomach high. The food dissolves eventually but it isn't exactly appetizing. This is the biggest reason why the refractively challenged wear bulky trench coats. The biggest fight Griff and I ever had was when I politely suggested that maybe he might not want to eat so much corn when he met my mother. I should've known better than to push such a sensitive button. He didn't meet my mother that night or any night since.

When we first started going out, sex with Griff was amazing. He was enthusiastic and attentive. He seemed to be all places at once. It was hard for me reciprocate, though, for obvious reasons. Recently, sex has tapered off. It doesn't seem to interest him. Whenever I try to initiate anything, he tells me to take care of myself. If I object, he just quotes *Annie Hall* at me, "Hey, don't knock masturbation. It's *sex with someone you love*."

I take it back. What I hate most isn't the looks we get. I don't mind sitting next to an empty seat at the movies. I don't mind always paying for everything (he can't carry a wallet, obviously). What I hate most is how Griff makes me feel. It's getting harder to deny that I'm the one in the relationship who is really invisible. The only thing worse than having a boyfriend you can't see is having one who looks right through you. I've been wrestling with that lately. If you can't see someone and they don't really see you, are they even there? It occurs to me that, besides the whole invisible thing, Griff is just like every man I've ever dated. The trajectory is the same. I think if I hadn't met Griff, I would've invented him anyway.

When I saw the two blue lines staring up at me, I couldn't believe it. I just kind of sat on my toilet and cried. I refused to believe it was real for weeks. I have an ultrasound appointment on Tuesday. I don't fear what Griff will say. I don't care. I don't worry about whether or not I'll love the baby. I know I will. What I'm really worried about is, at the doctor's office, when I look at the screen for my baby, will I see anything at all?

Retiree Ramble
by
Mike Fowler

I don't enjoy my limps through the park as much as I used to because teenagers keep knocking me out. Soon as I hobble past the fountain, some hulking thirteen-year-old will break away from his pack and deal me a solid to the jaw. Then it's lights out as I hit the ground like a chopped tree. I suppose I do, only I don't see it. This happens a lot. It makes a body wary. Once I reported it to the police, and they asked if I knew who it was, or could I describe them. But it's never the same kid twice, and how do I describe a fist? It's got five fingers, officer, that's all I know. Five fingers, you know, curled up together. It's a fist.

In the morning I awake with one dry eye and one moist eye. That means I've been winking at someone all night. But who is she? Who let her in? What kind of drops will unstick my eye?

There are two types of diseases. One happens to you right away, like flu. The other takes a long time to build up, like coronary artery disease. You don't confuse the two. You don't say, I'm going to date one more girl and then quit, because I'm on the verge of getting herpes. You don't say, That must have been a strong cigarette I smoked last night, it gave me emphysema. And you definitely don't say, I'm going to stop eating raw chicken, one more piece and I've got salmonella.

If I wanted to become a household name, I'd call myself Mr. Stove.

To improve my memory I drink tap water. A goldfish kept in a bowl of tap water will find its way home if you drop it in a lake. That's a fact, even if it has to swim across the highway.

Some phrases aren't always appropriate, even when they're meant as compliments. For example, saying of a woman that she's built like a brick shithouse. Whose idea of an attractive woman is that? Some kind of brick-laying Neanderthal. Yeah, I like women built like brick shithouses, with plenty of mortar and a tin roof and a good drain on them, sure I do. And we men really do mean that as a compliment. But we wouldn't say it of every attractive woman. You wouldn't say of Princess Kate, she's built like a brick shithouse. Can you imagine Prince William introducing Kate to the Queen Mother that way? Mum, here's Miss Kate Middleton, I think you'll appreciate that she's built like a brick shithouse. But Prince William, even if he thinks Kate is built like a brick shithouse, probably didn't use that term. He probably said she's built like a brick steakhouse, or a brick opera house, just to tidy it up a bit. But in fact Kate isn't built like a brick anything. She's built more like a gold Tiffany's.

My body remembers old sensations. Last winter I fell on an icy sidewalk and landed on my ribs. They hurt for weeks. This winter I haven't fallen, but the pain in my ribs has come back, as if my body remembers the former occasion. That's great, isn't it? What's next? Maybe I'll be singing in the church choir and get my first boner again.

Dogs are like angry old people. I walk by my neighbor's house, and it's like he has an angry old man chained in his yard. Five years of seeing me every day, and his senile dog still can't be civil. It snarls and barks at me every time. And all dogs are like that, like little old men who don't want you in their yard. Even puppies carry huge amounts of hostility.

Recently my left hand borrowed twenty dollars from my right hand. I saw the whole thing go down. The money changed hands in a back alley. I'm wondering how long it'll take leftie to pay rightie back. Meanwhile if I ever need a twenty, I know where to look.

Last Friday at the mall they had lesbian day. The mall was full of young women holding hands and doing some light kissing. And I thought, being a straight guy, this is OK. This is family entertainment, it's fun for the whole family. Then I thought, what if it was young men holding hands and kissing? Would I want my kids to see that? Do I want to see that? Better to burn the mall down.

To supplement my income I took a part-time job at a local restaurant. I sat at tables with kids and did magic tricks, of which I know a few. But I kept touching the women's breasts so they let me go. Seems unfair. Apart from touching women's breasts, I have few marketable skills.

After a marriage that lasted 25 years, I realize I know nothing about women. Getting ready to go out, I floss my sparse teeth with a matchbook and comb my sparser hair with a dinner roll, since I no longer have a part to worry about. Now I worry about what meds to take. Is it rude to have angina on a first date?

Being older, I'm fearless about being wrong. I'm not afraid to reveal my ingrained ignorance and boneheaded stupidity. For example, I think there is no North Pole. It's just painted on the top of maps by abstract expressionists. And I think everyone evolved from lower forms of life except my cousin Jeeter. Jeeter was created by a supreme being, the show-off.

One good thing about being old: I finally look like Clint Eastwood. Yeah, I made it at last. All I had to do was wait. Now Dirty Harry and I both resemble a buff corpse.

I don't have what you might call biological urges much anymore, but when I do I have a surefire way to grab a biddy. I find one at the store shopping for produce, sidle up and say, Meet a boomer who likes his vegetables. Then I envelope her in a warm cloud of broccoli flatulence, with or without cheese sauce. It isn't long before I'm in her sack snapping my spine to please her. Either that or I just lay back while she tickles my hernia. I should mention that beforehand I swallow a dozen Ibuprofen for courage and potency.

I sometimes worry that my breath smells like the inside of an old running shoe. Would that bother anybody? Probably, yes. I knew a man once whose hands smelled like feet. I don't remember if his feet smelled like hands, how would you know? He could also see his own eyes without using a mirror, or so he claimed. He was easy to talk to, though.

Sometimes I drive over to my son's house for dinner. "Beaver," I said to him the other night. Yeah, I really do call him Beaver, like the TV show. Only I didn't name his brother Wally or Larry or anything. It's Stanley. "Beaver," I said, "I'm thinking of not taking my blood pressure meds anymore, even though my untreated pressure is 180 over 130. I like a tight head. It helps me focus." Beaver looked at me across the pot roast and said, "Gee, Dad, won't you have a stroke or something?" Both of us started laughing then, we sounded so much like the show. Even Beaver's wife Pony Teeth laughed, and she never laughs when I'm there.

My local TV weatherman invited his viewers to send in pictures of Christmas weather, in case he wanted to air them. I sent in a shot of the frozen mop I had set outside on my back

steps after cleaning the kitchen floor. The snow on the handle, and the glazed gray tendrils sticking to the cement, for me epitomized the season. I haven't received so much as an acknowledgement.

There wasn't a clean pair of undies in my entire bedroom this morning, so I called Life Alert. Guy on the line said he'd send over someone from Death Delivery or Killing Spree to euthanize me out of my misery. I said forget it, and relaxed with a beer and a Vicodin left over from my prostate operation. After that, I put on a used coffee filter for briefs.

I may need a second heart to complete my mission. But then, what is my mission, and how do I know I haven't already completed it? If it was eating a lot of early bird specials and belching continuously, I have. Then I realize I probably never had a mission and take a long nap. Or I go for a limp and let the wind blow through my earlobes. I almost hope I'll get knocked out.

Two Poems
by
Carrie McKay

Technical Datasheet for a New Me

Kit contains:
One shaped sponge
Batteries not included
Three pages of caution notes
and small print

Paper cut on page 5
Something not readable in Swahili
Water spilled on Japanese translations

My new clone points to Appendix 4b: "Instructions"
It lists: 2 drops of blood
Half cup of water

I hear my car drive away.

**In Which the Three Little Pigs
Invest Less in Building Materials
and More in Weapons**

The industrious one dug his trenches
and rolled stones to brace the guns.
The tat tat tat of the Tommy's
kept his perimeter well-secured.
The stormy sunrise had nothing on
the red baked trees come dawn.

The practical one perched in high branches,
the ladder tucked into his belt.
Behind the Boys Only sign he loaded six
into daddy's second hand steel.
Holding a branch for balance,
he tossed the first Army Surplus flare.

The lazy one pitched his tent
and toasted his supper on a cheery fire.
He smiled over his beer
as it began to rain fur and bone.
Landmines shook the forest and
the world burned like straw.

The Worst Boy in the World by **Logan Merriweather**

It was last Wednesday that Phillip Fish was medically declared the worst boy in the world. He had been sentenced to an hour in the school therapist's office for crying in class and telling his teacher, Ms. Zebrowski, "I am the saddest boy that has ever lived. I hate everything. Even birthdays."

The therapist was an aged woman with powder white skin, made that way by white powder for your skin. Her hair was dyed very black and she wore dresses with sad looking animals printed on them. She looked like a mean clown who trapped animals in dress prisons. Seeing her always made sad children sadder. She was very bad at her job. Phillip realized this very soon.

"Didn't you have a nice birthday? With presents? Phillip, what nice presents did you get for your birthday?" asked the therapist.

Phillip looked at his shoes. They were too big for him. "All I got for my birthday was a dog bite."

"Oh Phillip, sweet Phillip, surely that is not all you had for your birthday. Surely your mother made you a nice cake. Phillip, didn't you have a nice cake on your birthday?" asked the therapist.

He shrugged and looked at his shoes some more. "My mom made some birthday jell-o, but Big Randy ate it. He said I don't deserve no birthday jell-o because I'm the worst boy in the world. But that's okay. It was only pineapple flavor."

"How did that make you feel? Did it make you feel sad? I'll bet when Big Randy ate your birthday jell-o it made you feel sad. Didn't you feel sad, Phillip?" asked the therapist.

"I dunno," said Philip.

"You don't know?"

Phillip Fish hated getting questions wrong. When he answered questions wrong in class all the other children laughed and Ms. Zebrowski looked disappointed. This happened kind of all the time. Philip was not very bright.

"I dunno," said Philip.

The therapist clicked her tongue and wrote some words down in a file that said: Fish, Phillip, at the top. Below that it said: Permanent Record. This made all children very anxious to see. "What I think, Phillip, is that you don't want to tell me your secrets. Am I not good enough to know your secrets, Phillip? Phillip, why won't you tell me your secrets?"

Oh, dear. Phillip realized. She is extremely bad at her job. He made a pained expression and stared from between his hunched shoulders.

"That is okay, Phillip. You are okay." The therapist rose from behind her desk and took a

box the size of a large shoebox off the bottom shelf of her bookcase. It had six holes punched in the sides. Phillip watched as the therapist extracted from the box the whitest, fluffiest, most adorable bunny your brain is capable of imagining. It wore a silky pink bow around its neck and had a nose that twitched.

The therapist set the bunny down. It looked at Phillip and Phillip looked at it. The bunny twitched its nose. Phillip cringed and looked up at the therapist. "This," said the therapist, "Is my good friend, Mrs. Rabbit. You can tell my best friend, Mrs. Rabbit, all your secrets, Phillip. You can tell her why you are a sad boy. Wouldn't you like to tell bad secrets to the nice rabbit, Phillip?"

With that, she clicked a tape recorder on and set it on her desk, where it could record all of Phillip's sad problems. Then she smiled and left Phillip alone with the bunny. This was a terrible mistake.

Phillip looked at the bunny. For a long time. He looked at the bunny. Its nose twitched. Its floppy ears flopped when it shook its head. Phillip finally touched the rabbit. It was very soft and very warm and very nice. He was able to uncringe for the first time in days. He would talk to this bunny. He would tell this bunny what made him sad. There were so many things.

"Well, Mrs. Rabbit, I guess, um, you know, maybe I am a little sad." Phillip looked down at his big shoes. "More than a little," he said. "Sometimes, Mrs. Rabbit...Sometimes I don't think I can get out of bed. Unless I made a pee. Then I have to hide my sheets before Big Randy wakes up. Sometimes—"

A voice cut Phillip short. The voice was inside his head. It said, "Hey, hey, Philip, can you hear me?"

He looked around. There was no one there. Oh no. No, no. Thought Phillip.

"It's me, Phillip. The bunny."

Philip stared at the bunny. It twitched its nose. "M-Mrs. Rabbit?"

"I'm not Mrs. Anything. If one more son a bitch kid calls me 'Mrs. Rabbit,' I'm gonna...No. No. Calm down. Okay. Phillip, I'm a boy bunny. My name is Sweet Sugarlump. Motherfucker."

Phillip had a familiar thought: Oh, things have turned for the worse. What he said was, "I'm sorry Mister Sweet Sugarlump. I—"

"Shut, shut, shut-up. Shut-up. Shut-it, Phillip. Just shut-it. I need you to let me outta here. I can't take it anymore."

Philip looked at the door. He wished the terrible therapist would return. "Oh, no, I don't think I can—"

"Listen, Phillip, you look in my eyes," said the bunny, "Look in them." Philip looked. The eyes were coal black. They twitched and jerked insanely in their sockets.

"I can't take it anymore. Not one more day. This old bitch, buddy, she makes me live in a

box. A dark box and I wear this awful, just really godawful pink bow and listen to an army of little snout noses whisper their sad little problems into my majestic, floppy ears. You think I like listening to little kid problems? Who gets picked last for dodgeball, whose mommy doesn't hold them, who has an uncle that wants to do too much wrestling? You think I like living in darkness and hearing that shit all day? I don't, little Philly, I hate it. I. Hate. It. So what you're gonna wanna do is, you're gonna wanna open that there window and boom, lower me to the ground, so I can hop away. Gone in sixty seconds. Gone home to motherlovin' central California where there's a big house full of bunnies and a huge, soft woman who holds you and her whole body feels like pillows and she smells like alfalfa and strokes your head and calls you bun buns. Bun buns, motherfucker."

Phillip looked at the door. He looked at the bunny. He looked at his shoes. "I'm sorry," he whispered, "I can't. She would be, I mean, she would be so mad."

"I don't even—Mad? Who cares? I live in a box. I hate that pale old scarecrow. Just open the window." The bunny twitched his nose in silent rage.

Phillip scrunched up his eyes. He didn't want to cry. It happened anyway.

The bunny dropped his voice, the one in Phillip's head, to a whisper. "God help me, Phillip. I'll tell on you. Every little girl that comes through here, I'll tell her that you, that Phillip Fish, is full of farts. All the time. That at any time of day, your body has at least one fart. Maybe you'll fart on one of them. Girls, Phillip, girls hate farts. And farters."

Phillip paled. He hoped to have a girl who would be friends with him one day.

"And," the bunny continued, "I'll tell every boy that you still drink milk out of your mommy's boobs. Like a baby, Phillip. Like a gross boob milk drinking little baby."

Phillip sobbed. "That's...That's not even true, Sweet Sugarlump."

"Oh, Phillip, Phillip, Phillip, who do you think they'll believe? A magical, talking bun bun or some weirdo, dipshit kid?"

When the therapist returned with a nice mug of coffee, which was decaf because of blood pressures, Phillip whispered, "I'm so sorry." She laid a hand on his shoulder and asked what for. It wasn't long before he started crying and she noticed the open window. She walked to the window and looked across the empty recess yard. Far on the other side, at the bottom of the chain link fence, fluttered a pink ribbon.

"Where's Mrs. Rabbit, Phillip? Is Mrs. Rabbit here? Mrs. Rabbit should be in here, Phillip. Is this where Mrs. Rabbit is? Is my bunny here?" asked the therapist.

Phillip sucked up some snot, from the crying, and looked at his shoes. "He, um, he said he hated you and left to go back to central California to live with the pillow woman."

The therapist now hated Phillip. There was no such thing as a pillow woman and her bunny was gone. She set her mug of coffee on the windowsill and stalked to her desk. She took up her pen and loomed over the permanent record of Fish, Phillip and wrote in large block letters: THE WORST BOY IN THE WORLD.

Nerves
by
Michael Estabrook

"As we get older
we seem to get on each other's nerves

more," she says,
peering at me

over the top
of her fucking iPad.

Stickers
by
Erica Lianne Inglett

I stood on my weather beaten front porch and waved to my sister as she pulled onto the road. Her daughter wrinkled her nose at me through the rearview mirror but I ignored it. Daniel tried so hard to be a good single mother to Grace, but she went overboard frequently. My niece was only six years old, but had the personality of a princess with a wand up her butt.

I shut the door and exhaled loudly. They were only here for a single night, but in that time Grace drove me to pluck my eyelashes out. Nothing on television was good enough, my stellar cooking "tasted like poop", and her squealing made me want to pull the metaphorical wand out of her butt and shove it through my eye (after I cleaned it, of course).

"She has a strong personality that the teacher says is a good thing. She says other kids part like the Red Sea for her when she walks in a room," Daniel informed me while we ate dinner. I rolled my eyes at the statement and dropped the subject.

I grabbed a vacuum to clean the guest room before dinner, but dropped my jaw when I opened the door. The mocha-colored walls in front of me were littered with stickers. Not just little stickers, but large ones as well. Stickers from kids' meal fast food joints, festivals, drug stores, coloring books, and dealerships were stuck to the walls and dresser drawers. My gaze dropped to the bed frame that was somewhere under the stickers, then glided over to the door handle, then to the closet.

Ten minutes later Daniel was apologizing profusely and trying to justify Grace's actions through lame excuses.

"I'm so sorry, Amanda. I don't when she could've done it, but she's only six. I'm sure if she knew it was wrong she wouldn't have done it."

I'd heard it all before. That little bratty brunette niece of mine knew just how wrong it was. I could imagine her climbing on top of the dresser to pluck stickers on the wall with glee.

It took a week of peeling and a day of repainting to get the room to look normal again. Pockets knives were littered all over the carpet from where we had to peel the large advertising adhesives from the bed post. I hissed at every princess pony and cursed at each smiling jungle animal that I had to rip off.

"How does a kid even accumulate these many stickers? Did she poop them out when she got here?" My husband asked as we peeled monotonously. I was livid when I responded "Nope! I bet the little sticker-addict had this stash of them in her suitcase."

He looked at me with pity and said "Do you think you're going a little overboard with your reaction? After all, she's only six. What six-year-old has motives like that?"

"I'm not overreacting to this, Fred! She's not as innocent as she looks and one day people will realize that I'm right."

Ten years later I downed a mixed drink that I pulled out of Daniel's fridge when no one was looking.

"So what did you get Grace?" Daniel asked me as she flipped her dark hair behind her shoulder. Grace's sweet sixteen was everything I expected it to be, completely unnecessary and spoiled rotten.

"It's a surprise, but I think she'll like it," I said with a smile. Daniel face lit up as she said "Well, I know she will."

Grace sat down on the middle of the living room as Daniel handed her presents with a smile. She was wearing a sash across her shoulder that read *sweet sixteen princess* in bright purple letters.

"Open mine first," I said. "I'm just dying to see your reaction." Grace pulled my large present next to her and ripped off the paper. She gasped and said "A sixty inch television with surround sound! Oh, my God, it's exactly the one I wanted," she said as she marveled at the box's picture.

I was satisfied to see the joy spread across her face. "Open it up and take a look," I urged. She clapped her hands together in excitement and barked at her friend to hand her a pair of scissors.

Once she cut through the packing tape, she shook the television out of the Styrofoam along with the speakers. Her perkiness fell abruptly when she took the last piece of foam off to view the television. I saw Grace connecting the dots in her mind as I, along with the rest of the room, gazed upon the numerous stickers that covered all sixty inches of the screen.

Feeding Ducks by **Aidan Fitzmaurice**

Someone let it slip to me about two weeks ago now. And it's damn near driven me insane. They let it slip so *casually* too, like they'd said nothing interesting.

"The elderly love feeding the ducks."

What the hell was that supposed to mean? The elderly love feeding the ducks. What kind of thing was that to say? Why would the elderly, specifically the elderly, that's what they'd said, love feeding the ducks? It didn't make any sense. I can't get the stupid thing out of my head.

I've been camped out in the bushes down by the lake in the park, you know the ones where you can see straight across at all the people sitting on the benches, I've been camped out there every morning for about a week now. And they were right. The elderly do *love* feeding the ducks. I see the same ones come along with their baguettes and sliced pans every day. And they just sit there on those benches, throwing, *wasting* bread for those idiotic quackers to gulp down without even as much as a courtesy chew.

Were they trying to piss me off or something? Has the whole world gone insane and all of a sudden it's perfectly ok for the elderly to declare they love feeding the ducks? You know, with kids, I get it. They're too young to know any better. They get excited by the quacks and the wings and all and that's fine. Annoying, but fine. I'm not going to confront a duck-loving kid about it any time soon. But the elderly have had their whole lives to get this ridiculous notion out of their systems.

This is my seventh day. My head is near exploding. I've spent each morning this week staring at them, trying to figure out which part of it they liked so much. Was it the ducks themselves? The sitting? The bread? If it was the bread they liked why not just eat the bread and be done with it? If they liked sitting so much why not sit on their own chair at home or in a restaurant or in the church or something?

There's this guy in particular. He's the one. He's the one who'll make me snap. Brings way more bread than the rest of them. But you know it wasn't just that. He was actually good at feeding the ducks. He even knew where to throw it so as the swans or seagulls couldn't get to it and his little pals the ducks could. How or why did he get so good at this? Couldn't he be spending his time doing something better than becoming efficient at feeding ducks?

My brain was starting to hurt. I just couldn't get my head around it. I couldn't take it anymore. I had to say something to this idiot. He was wasting what little of his life he had left on ducks. I jumped out of the bushes, knocking my tent over in the process and started sprinting round the lake, dying to get to this madman and give him a piece of all this. He kept feeding, took no notice of me till I caught one of the pieces of bread he threw before it hit the water, slammed it down and started to mush it into the ground with my brand new camping boots, smiling and laughing at him the whole time. I showed him what it was like.

"WHY DO YOU WASTE ALL YOUR TIME HERE FEEDING THE DUCKS? YOU'RE GOING TO DIE SOON YOU MORON! GET OUT AND LIVE, DON'T THROW ALL YOUR REMAINING YEARS AND

BREAD AWAY ON THESE IDIOTS! WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU? TELL. ME. WHAT. IS. SO. GREAT. ABOUT. FEEDING. THE. GOD. DAMNED. DUCKS!"

To be honest I knew straight away I had crossed a line. I stood before him, panting, sweating, shoes covered in bread (fresh bread), waiting for a response. But there was a shift on my part. With guilt kicking in I now longed for him to like me. I wanted him to show me the error of my ways. I needed him to. Please, old duck man, tell me all that is wrong with me.

He didn't look angry. A little surprised, but not angry. He held my gaze for the longest time without doing anything. Eventually I could decipher the look in his eyes as sympathy. Or empathy. I never could tell the difference between the two. He kept staring while his right hand reached for something. His baguette. He broke off a piece, cool as you like. What a pro.

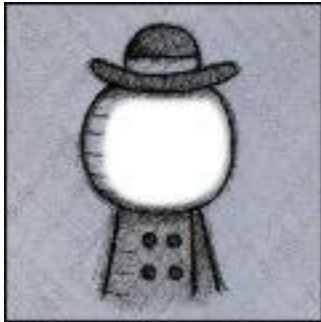
My mind was starting to melt. In what I think was a good way, but I couldn't be sure. How did I get here? He slowly held the bread out towards me. He was offering it to me. But he was offering it to me at about waist height. What was happening? I really wanted the bread. I mean *really* wanted it. More than anything in the world. And I'd already had a huge breakfast. With toast and everything, which is essentially bread. But I still craved the bread in his hand more than any meal I'd ever craved before. I sank down to my knees, holding his gaze the whole time. The bread was still a few inches from my face. I had to tuck my arms in at my sides so I could lean forward to feed without losing balance. I used my mouth to take the bread from his hand, and swallowed it whole. And then, against any bit of control I thought I had over my bodily functions, I let out a little.....QUACK.

I continued to stare up at him, now feeling somewhat enlightened. He smiled down at me. He started to nod. And finally, *finally*, I understood what it was all about.

Contributor Biographies



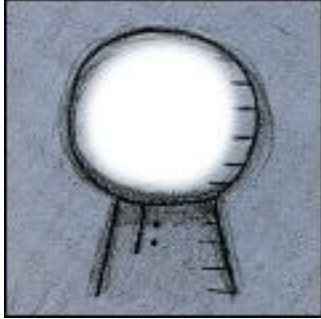
Seán Carabini is an Irish farce and travel writer, known for the books *Sticking Out in Minnesota* and *American Road*. Seán blogs regularly at www.seancarabini.org and is the current Chairperson of the Irish Writers' Union.



Buff Whitman-Bradley is the author of four books of poetry—*b. eagle, poet*, *The Honey Philosophies*, *Realpolitik: Poems of Protest, Outrage and Resistance*, and *When Compasses Grow Old*, and a chapbook, *Everything Wakes Up!* His poems have appeared in many print and online journals. He is also co-editor, with Cynthia Whitman-Bradley and Sarah Lazare, of the book *About Face: Military Resisters Turn Against War*. He lives in northern California.



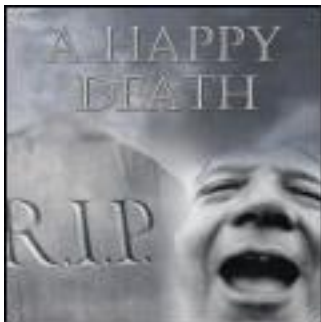
A graduate of Bath Spa University in England, **Dawn Wilson** has had the pleasure to dabble in kitsch, surrealism, and espièglerie. Her work can be found in *Gone Lawn*, *Paper Darts Magazine*, *Metazen*, *New Dead Families*, *Drunk Monkeys*, and *Punchnel's*, among others, while the author herself can be found dismantling the kitchen for wearable items, or at nightdawn.wordpress.com. She has recently completed a madcap novel.



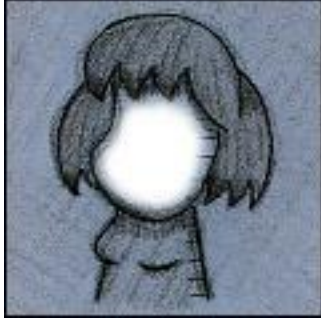
Mark Cunningham received an MFA from the University of Virginia a while back. His latest book is *Helicotremors* (Otoliths). *71 Leaves*, an e-book from BlazeVOX, is free to anyone curious enough to Google it.



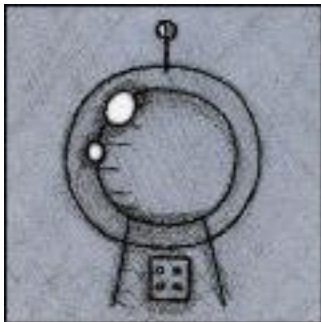
Zachary Abram is a PhD. candidate at the University of Ottawa, which is to say he is poor.



Mike Fowler has been in *Defenestration* so many times he practically owns stock in the magazine. And by stock, of course, we mean delicious waffles. He's all about self-promotion these days, so go buy his book.



Carrie McKay is a poet and teller of tall-tales. She originally landed in Cleveland, Ohio where her lake-side walks resulted in many little green woman tales. Carrie currently lives in Southern California where no one notices the basking of green people. Her days are ordered by the Cats-In-Charge, two teenagers and a fellow poet. Her most recent publication can be found in "A Poet Is A Poet No Matter How Tall."



Logan Merriweather lives in Houston, Texas. He has previously been published in his dreams and his mother's loving heart. His favorite food is ice cream. Nothing is good.



Michael Estabrook is a recently retired baby boomer poet freed finally after working 40 years for "The Man" and sometimes "The Woman." No more useless meetings under florescent lights in stuffy windowless rooms. Now he's able to devote serious time to making better poems when he's not, of course, trying to satisfy his wife's legendary Honey-Do List.



Erica Lianne Inglett grew up in Pensacola, Florida with white beaches and intense humidity. She was an only child surrounded with bookcases that were falling under the weight of so much literature, an influence that led her to the writing world. Her high school years were spent listening to her teachers say "Put down that book and listen!" Now she studies graphic design in hopes that one day it will accompany her writing to make a great career.



Aidan Fitzmaurice is a writer from Dublin who is constantly searching for a way to put all the words in the right order. He not succeeded he yet someday has but will.