

◇ Defenestration ◇

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Table of Contents

Kate LaDew, "The Man with Sock for Hands"	2
Neil Fulwood, "X-Men Epilogues: Days of Past Forgotten"	11
Daniel Clausen, "Timmy on the Other Side of the Universe"	12
Michelle Hartman, "Dragons are Democrats"	14
Beth McCabe, "The Audition"	15
Zain Saeed, "Sirlon"	17
Carolyn Smuts, "Denomination"	18
Nick Bertelson, "Fashion Police"	20
Jack Bedrosian, "The Parable of The Goldfish and The Celebrity"	21
Aidan Fitzmaurice, "The Write Way to Speak"	22
Connor Harrison, "V Past II at Mussolini's"	26
Brian Cox, "The Art of Being and Branding"	27
Contributor Biographies	29

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The Man With Socks for Hands
by
Kate LaDew

"You know what would be great?" Spector spread a smile over his face. "If we took this here," he held up the severed foot. "And put it here," he pointed at where the man's hand used to be. "I think that would be great."

Clark frowned. "You want to put his foot where his hand was?"

Spector rolled his eyes. "I don't want to just put it there. I want to sew it there. Like, with surgery."

"You want to put a foot where a hand's supposed to go?"

"Sew. I want to sew it there."

"Where a hand's supposed to go."

"Yeah. With surgery."

"So you want to take this severed foot," Clark took the foot from Spector and held it up, little chunks of ice dripping. "And put it here," he pointed at where the man's hand used to be. "Where the man's hand used to be?"

"That's exactly what I just said. You literally said the exact same thing I just said, like, five seconds ago."

"That's because you literally want to sew a foot where--"

"It would be great! Let's go get Wilhelmina!"

"Are you drunk?"

"He's already got no foot. We don't do this, he got no hand."

"How did you become a doctor talking that way?"

"Wilhelmina," Spector said. "This is doctoring not talkering."

She looked at Clark. "Is he drunk?"

"Maybe so, maybe no."

"And you're a doctor too?" Wilhelmina frowned, looking down at the foot. "What even happened here?"

"Lawnmower. Mangled his hand. Cut off his foot." Spector shrugged. "It happens."

Wilhelmina nodded. "And you want to do what to this man?"

"Only everything awesome! Come on people," Spector looked at Clark now. "Don't you wanna' be somebodies?"

"I am somebody."

Wilhelmina's frown deepened. "So am I."

"But you will be more than just Clark, Clark." Spector held up his hands and spread them, tracing a movie marquee.

"People will call you an innovator, a pioneer, a trailblazer. A vanguard, a groundbreaker, a trendsetter. A man who knows a thing or two about somethin'."

"That's a lot of words."

"Yep, and they'll say every one of 'em!"

Clark blinked once. "If I put a foot where a guy's hand was, they'll say every one of 'em?"

"Sure. Because it will all be true! Who would ever think of doing it?"

"Maybe we need to focus a little more on that," Wilhelmina said.

"Just you Clark. Only you."

Clark blinked twice. "Only me?"

"You will be an innovator, a pioneer, a trailblazer, a vanguard—"

"That's enough," Wilhelmina said.

"A groundbreaker, a trendsetter. A man who knows a thing or two about somethin'!"

Clark looked into the distance at nothing in particular. "They will say 'em, won't they."

"Sure."

"No one will say any of those things," Wilhelmina shook her head. "Not one."

"An innovator," Clark repeated.

"A pioneer," Spector said.

"A trailblazer."

"A vanguard."

"A groundbreaker."

"A trendsetter."

"A man who knows a thing or two about somethin'!" They yelled in unison.

"Dear Lord," Wilhelmina breathed in and out. "I do not like where this is going."

"I love it!" Spector slapped Clark across the face. "Let's jump in this rocket ship and ride it to the moon!"

"Alright!"

Spector slapped Clark across the face with the foot. "Make this foot into a hand!"

"Alright!"

Wilhelmina sighed and walked out of the operating room.

"It doesn't look quite like I was expecting."

"It looks exactly like I was expecting."

"Yeah?" Clark looked at Spector.

"Yeah. It looks like you turned a foot upside down and sewed it onto this dude's wrist."

"Well. That's what I did."

"I know. I was here the whole time."

"That's what you told me to do. Turn it upside down so it looks more like a hand."

"The whole time," Spector reminded.

"It doesn't look like a hand."

"No, it does not."

"It looks like a foot."

"Sho'nuff."

"It was your idea, Spector."

"I say all kinds of things all the time, Clark."

"But you said I was an innovator. A pioneer. A trailblazer."

"I will refer you to my previous statement."

"A vanguard. A groundbreaker. A trendsetter." He grabbed Spector by the collar. "A man who knows a thing or two about somethin'!"

"All kinds of things all the time."

Clark shook Spector back and forth. "I got on your rocket ship."

"And rode it to the moon," Spector looked down at the hand/foot. "Or at least in the general vicinity."

"This is all your doing!"

"Be a lot more comfortable if you'd stop shaking me, Clark. And the yelling. Be a lot more comfortable if you'd stop yelling at me, Clark."

"What have we done?! What in God's name have we done?!"

"Be a lot more comfortable if you'd stop using the collective we."

"Not only does this man have no foot, he's got no hand!"

Spector pointed. "Does so."

"One. He has one hand!"

"One and a half, I'd say. This hybrid hand/foot mutant monstrosity of an appendage you sewed on him counts as at least half a hand. If not half a foot."

"You are a horrible person!"

"I am only a man."

"Not even half of one!"

Spector gasped. "You go too far."

"What's everyone yelling about?"

Clark stopped mid-shake. Spector looked towards the recovery room bed. They both looked at the patient looking back at them.

Spector said, after a pause, "Hey, buddy."

"Hey," the patient's eyes opened and closed woozily. "Why are you yelling?"

"I'm not yelling. Nobody's yelling." Spector removed his collar from Clark's hands. "Not a single person is yelling here, bud. Everybody's happy in this room. We're all doin' just fine."

"I thought I heard yelling."

"Just talkin' 'bout you and how great you are. Just talkin' 'bout that."

"Am I great?"

"Just great."

"Don't look at your hand," Clark said.

"Hey," Spector smacked Clark on the arm.

"Don't look at my hand?" The patient repeated.

"I wouldn't," Clark said.

"What's wrong with my hand?"

"Not a thing, not a thing, Mr.—" Spector looked at the clipboard on the bed. "Charlemagne. Not a thing, Mr. Charlemagne. Your hand is a hand and is exactly where a hand should be."

"Don't look at your foot either."

"Clark, I swear to God."

"Don't look at my foot either?"

"I wouldn't."

"Because there's nothing to see, Charlemagne," Spector said. "There's nothing to see there, buddy."

"You got that right."

"Clark, I mean it—"

"What are you—" Charlemagne's eyes squinted down at the empty space of sheet below his ankle. "Where's my foot?"

"Where your hand's supposed to be."

"Clark, as God is my witness—"

"What are you talking about?"

Clark looked at Spector. Spector looked at Clark. Spector shook his head. Clark bit his lip. Spector shook his head again. Clark looked at Charlemagne. "We sewed your severed foot where your hand's supposed to be! You cut it off with a lawnmower and then we sewed it where your hand used to be before you cut *it* off with a lawnmower! Your foot is now your hand!"

"My foot is now—"

"Your hand! We flipped your foot upside down and sewed it where your hand was! Now you have to use your foot as your hand! And it looks nothing like a hand! It looks like a foot!" Clark's breath came in bursts, hands clenched at his sides. Spector rubbed his temples and

looked at the ceiling.

Charlemagne was still. He blinked his eyes once, twice. Thrice. He wobbled his leg back and forth. He looked at his bandaged hand. He looked at Spector. He looked at Clark. "Why didn't you wake me up?"

"Dunno."

"Didn't think it was necessary."

"You looked pretty tired," Spector added.

"You didn't think it was necessary to wake me up and ask me if I wanted you to glue my severed foot where my severed hand used to be?"

"We didn't glue it."

"You didn't think it was necessary?"

"It didn't seem so."

"It didn't seem so?"

Spector shrugged. "At the time."

"It didn't seem so. It didn't seem necessary. You know what? You know what?"

Charlemagne hit the bed with his remaining hand. "It wasn't necessary! It wasn't necessary at all! What kind of a crazy person would say 'yes'? If you woke up any sane individual in this whole entire world and asked them 'Hey, you want we should glue your foot where your hand's supposed to be, you know what they'd say?'"

Clark looked down. Spector shrugged.

"No! They would say no! They would say 'Of course not now leave me alone and let me go back to sleep and not another inane question out of you! Not one! That's what they would say.'"

"We didn't glue it."

"What did you say to me?"

"Spector," Clark whispered.

"We didn't glue it."

Charlemagne narrowed his eyes. "Oh, no?"

"We did doctor things. We did doctor things and now you have a perfectly okay foo—hand. Hand."

"Did you just say foot?"

Spector paused. "No."

"You did! You said foot!"

"Didn't."

"Did."

"Didn't."

"Spector, just stop," Clark said.

"But he has a hand now. Two. In a way. And that's something."

"That's something?" Charlemagne said.

"It's not nothin'."

Charlemagne grimaced as he picked up his bandage. "What am I supposed to do with this?"

"Wear socks."

Charlemagne grimaced again. "Is that supposed to be a joke?"

"Wear two. Wear two to match." Spector nodded. "If you wear two socks no one will much wonder."

"No one will much wonder why I'm wearing socks on my hands? Is this what you are trying to convince me of?"

"If you saw a guy wearing one sock wouldn't you wonder where the other sock was?"

"If the sock was on his foot, maybe."

"One sock is a mistake, two looks like a statement."

"I'm fairly sure your reasoning is unsound."

"No one likes asking crazy people things. You walk around with socks on your hands, everybody looks away on general principle."

"Because they think I'm crazy."

"I would think you were crazy," Clark said. "But I would rather you be a crazy man with socks on his hands than a sane man with that foot where your hand's supposed to be."

"*You* put this foot where my hand's supposed to be!"

"View remains the same."

"What on earth has happened here?" Dr. Jefferson suddenly walked in, Wilhelmina trailing behind. "Let me see that!" He grabbed at Charlemagne's bandage, unwrapping it. "Good God in heaven above! Why is this on this man's hand?"

"This *is* this man's hand," Clark said.

"This?"

Spector shrugged. "It was his foot. Now it's his hand."

"This?"

"We just thought," Spector said. "Since he didn't have a foot it would be too bad if he didn't have a hand either. Since we still had the foot, I mean..." Spector cocked his head.

"I mean what?"

"Lemonade out of lemons."

"Lemonade out of lemons?"

"And, for the record," Spector looked pointedly at Charlemagne. "I would like to say that we did not glue this man's foot to his wrist. We sewed it. Like a doctor."

"I think they were drunk," Wilhelmina whispered.

"I hope they were!" Charlemagne yelled. "How else do you explain it?"

"Genius. Absolute genius."

Everyone stopped and stared at Dr. Jefferson.

"Genius?" Wilhelmina said.

"Genius?" Clark said.

"Genius?!" Charlemagne yelled.

Spector shrugged.

Dr. Jefferson turned the un-bandaged hand over, bending it at the wrist. "So you just flipped it upside down?"

"Sure thing my man," Spector smiled. "Flipped it like a pancake."

"And this was your idea?"

Spector looked at Clark. "Yep. My idea."

"Genius. I never would have thought of it!"

Charlemagne sighed, leaning back in his bed. "You're telling' me."

"You know what this is," Dr. Jefferson narrowed his eyes at Spector. "I'm sorry, what's you—?"

"Spector."

"You know what this is, Spector?"

"What?"

"Innovating, pioneering, trailblazing." Dr. Jefferson clapped him on the back. "You are a vanguard, a groundbreaker, a trendsetter, Spector. A man who knows a thing or two about somethin'!"

"I've always thought so," Spector said, and shrugged.

X-Men Epilogues: Days of Past Forgotten
by
Neil Fulwood

Charles Xavier's sulked in his room
since matron said Cerebro was banned:
why triple the leccy bill when there's
a copy of the Yellow Pages to hand?

Magneto misses manipulating metals.
Fuck aluminium and his inability
to summon the pitiful zimmerframe
in time enough to go for a pee.

Storm falls asleep before the telly
as bad weather strafes the building.
Now and then she comes awake
and grins at the thunder and lightning.

Wolverine makes some extra cash
pruning the flowerbeds, trimming
the hedges. Garden waste, piled
high; a spent cigar, smouldering.

Timmy on the Other Side of the Universe

by
Daniel Clausen

It finally happened. Somehow he knew it was only a matter of time before he said something so utterly offensive to his teacher that it ripped a hole in the space-time continuum.

Timmy knew his mouth was impressive. As a 4th grader, his peers had told him that he knew how to swear at at least a 7th-grade level (if not higher!).

On the particular day in question, his swearing had involved something to do with his "hairy balls." Actually, Timmy wasn't sure exactly what he had meant to say. He was just repeating what he had heard one of the middle school kids say at one of the bus stops. But as soon as he had said it, he knew he had crossed a line because Ms. Tanninghide's eyes bulged and her yelling could be heard all the way in the kindergarten section of the elementary school.

He opened the door to the principal's office wide to report for his punishment. And where he expected to see the homely school secretary Ellen Kushner waiting for him, he instead saw vast plains of red sand.

The door closed behind him and then disappeared altogether.

Air was different on this world. Walking was difficult. And he soon found that the planet's dominant life forms were long wooden creatures. Whenever he approached these wooden creatures they would attack his behind with their long wood-planked arms. For the entire time he lived on the planet he would have trouble sitting down. For some reason, too, the word "balls" made the planet's atmosphere turn rancid. The wooden natives would go wild, chasing another tribe of butt-shaped creatures out of bushes.

The two words "hairy balls" combined in any form would automatically cut off his air supply for a span of minutes. He found this out one day in a friendly conversation with the buttshaped creatures. He felt compelled to talk to these butt-shaped creatures out of acute boredom. But given that all the sounds these creatures made were emitted in the form of noxious gas, there was little pleasure to be had, and Timmy spent most of his days crying, trying to stop himself from saying "balls" and especially "hairy balls," even when it would rain big bouncy ones with hair growing out of them. (Unfortunately, these were the only edible substance on this planet. Their tastes was, well, less than pleasant).

Timmy would cry and tell himself, "I hate it. I hate it when it rains great big round things with fur growing out of them."

Then, one day, while the wooden natives were running around wild and the butt-shaped creatures couldn't stop shouting about something, and it was raining big furry round things in great droves, Timmy finally said, "I'm sorry!"

And then he was sitting in the principal's office in front of Principal Thwackerson who replied, "Apology accepted."

Oh, and what a wonderful end that would be to the tale of Timmy and his foul mouth! To stop the tale at this moment of his redemption would be marvelous indeed. But, of course, reality is never so neat and cheerful, for as soon as Timmy realized what had happened, he contrived another insult, this one involving the principal performing a certain act with a thick juicy rooster of some sort.

Timmy immediately found himself on the same planet with the foul-smelling butts and the wooden natives—now with big, thick, juicy roosters chasing him as well. And though life wasn't perfect, for Timmy it beat the hairy rooster-sucking balls off of an apology.

Dragons are Democrats
by
Michelle Hartman

Two dragons took their waking slow
lazily slithering into sunshine, draping
themselves on rust colored mesas
yawning, they waited, not knowing
how much the world had changed
and not changed during their big dirt nap.
Twelve minutes into sunbathing
drones picking up heat imaging alerts
passed location to NASA, who beamed
all available satellite cameras directly
onto coordinates. Jets scrambled
dropping Kevlar nets; two stunned dragons
were swiftly carried deep into the desert.
Thirty minutes awake, the dragons
found themselves peering through small holes
at row of silk-suited Halliburton Executives;
and when I say Halliburton, read military cronyism.
In quick time dragons and high functioning sharks
established communications, offers of limited
mutual benefit, and more offers benefiting
only the execs; then the dragons were released.
Two prolonged streams of flame swung in a birthday
candle extinguishing manner and all humans
were reduced, by way of voided contract,
to smoldering charcoal.
The dragons dined on least burnt, picked
their teeth with discarded bayonets and returned
to their caves sealing them from within.
Now the upper Echelon
may not be believers of science or magic,
but they need to realize
that a creature who dines on Princesses
has an appetite for the 1%.

The Audition
by
Beth McCabe

When Peg walked into the Recreation Center, Leila McCoy was standing by the old upright, eyes squeezed shut, warbling "Holy God We Praise Thy Name" like some hip hopper on *American Idol*. Peg waited until Leila finished and James Hickey, the choirmaster, spotted her.

"Hello, Peg," he said. "Are you here to audition?"

"I am." Peg felt the heat come to her face. James was bald now, and his belly hung over his belt, but he'd once been the sharpest boy at Our Lady of the Blessed Sorrows.

"Your mother must be pleased, what with her being the soloist back in the day." Mam didn't even know Peg was there, but it hardly mattered; she hadn't been pleased about anything since Vatican II. Peg walked to the front of the room. Behind the piano, grinning, sat Colleen Finch, her nemesis from Sister Charlotte's ninth grade class.

"Peggy Riley, what a surprise," said Colleen. She raised her brows archly at the choirmaster. People had been whispering about the two of them ever since the Finch's husband had gotten hurt on the tunnel construction downtown. Mam said she'd heard his leg wasn't all he'd lost the use of.

"Let the lady sing, Col," said James.

"Have you ever heard Peg sing a note?" the Finch demanded.

"No..."

"She has never once opened her mouth in song. When we go caroling for the orphans, she lip syncs."

"I'm ready to try," Peg said stoutly.

The Finch rolled her eyes heavenward. "Where's your music?"

"I imagine you know the 'Ave Maria'". The "Ave" was Mam's go-to song when she was in her cups and yearning for her glory days, familiar to Peg as the Rosary.

"That's not exactly a beginner's ditty."

"Hit it."

Later, people claimed that the birds in the trees went silent. Teenagers plucked out their earbuds and cried for their mothers. A homeless woman on the church steps swore that the sky parted and angels sang harmony. When the last perfect note died away, the Finch looked as though her winning lottery ticket had just fallen through the sewer grate. James hugged Peg, and the choir members gathered round, patting her and smoothing her cardigan.

"We practice Thursdays," said James.

"Oh, I'm not joining," said Peg airily. "I just wanted to give it a go." She walked out, her hips still swinging to the celestial rhythm.

Back at the apartment Mam was studying the Kardashians. "Can you believe what those whores spend on a handbag?" she said. "I fed a family of eight for three months on less." Peg walked past her and into the kitchen to fix supper. Mam muted the sound and twisted around in the La-Z-Boy.

"Say, James Hickey just called to ask if you'd think again about joining the choir. What's that about? You can't sing."

"I suppose not."

"Let's not forget who has the talent in this family."

"Not a chance of that, Mam," said Peg, and she whacked the head off a codfish.

Sirloin
by
Zain Saeed

If I were a cow, which I am, moo, sup? From now on I'd think twice about oncoming cars, especially the ones with their lights on full moo, blindin' my eyes, makin' my tail go all wonky and clenched sphincters. I hadn't seen one before, no siree, it was my first, damn moo. Mamoo and Pamoo had said somethin' about these things called "naaaivsss son naaaivsss" which could kill me but I hadn' seen any of those moos and Mamoo and Pamoo didn' do English moo that well anyways cuz they spent their lives across the border speakin' some other kind of moo don' ask me I dunno. But yeah moo so there weren' no knives but this car, you know? I was crossin the stra I mean street moo and it was dark and I was hungry and lookin' for some chew time but here comes this light. Two lights. And I was like Mamoo is that a naaaivvv but cuz Mamoo wasn' there she couldn' tell me. But I turned my neck and looked straight at it and it kept on gettin' bigger and bigger and bigger and soon my eyes were hurtin' but I didn' move because moo it was my land bitch. Who the moo? But then it hit me, literally and figurativistically. Figurativistically it didn' hurt, I realized that I should probably move but yeah it was too late to do that. I'm kinda lyin on the floor now. Somebody pick..aah, so that's a naaaivv.

Denomination
by
Carolyn Smuts

"What religion is this again?"

"Lutheran, I think."

We sat there, Claudia and me, watching the activity on the altar. I could tell the guy doing the talking was cool because he wore a short-sleeved black shirt with his clerical collar. He was animated and funny. He held up a gold coin like the ones I got at Circus Circus in Vegas when I was 10; either that or he had the waxy chocolate ones with Menorahs on them we got in our Christmas stockings.

"See this? This is a Round Tuit. You get this when you take ACTION! You want a Round Tuit of your own? I'll give you one! I just have to catch you doing something ACTIVE to show God's love! On the playground, in your class, in the church parking lot... You know why? Because when it comes to showing love to one another, you should hurry up and get *around to it*. Get it? Around to it? A Round Tuit?"

Prepubescent laughter erupted in the pews.

"The priest is pretty funny." I commented.

"You're such a dumbass, Lauren. He's not a priest. He's a minister." Claudia said in a way that made me want answers and feel like a class-A moron at the same time.

"What's the difference?"

"Check it out." She said, nodding toward a group of 14-year-old boys on the opposite side of the aisle. "That's his son. Blue shirt."

"Shut the hell up." I replied. "They're allowed to have kids? Oh my God, he is totally hot!"

"I know! His name is Matt. I met him on the way in. He's cool, but he's like, the preacher's son. No thanks. Too weird."

Despite average looks, Claudia managed to meet the coolest guys wherever we went—Disneyland, the beach, church camp—I was never jealous because she was smart as hell, funny as shit, and could handle herself like a fucking pro. I was happy just to be part of her universe.

It wasn't easy, but we made it through the week at Lutheran Vacation Bible School. Claudia hooked up with Matt at least three times on the playground and I never got the damn gold coin I wanted. The music was tolerable and the people were really nice.

The following week was Methodist week. We lived in Southern California and most of the characters at the Methodist place were similar to the kids at the Lutheran camp, just more socioeconomically challenged. Attendees were surfers, skaters, and mall walkers. All in all, it was a good time. Except for the music.

Dear God, the music hurt.

"This is what's really cool about Vacation Bible School camp; we practice all week then on the final day we put on a choir show just for the parents! It is super fun and a great way to show how much you learned about Jesus this week!"

Clearly Jill, the perky college student in charge of my group, didn't know my mom—or me—very well.

She turned her attention to the dusty cassette player on the Formica wood-grained table around which we were gathered. Claudia kicked me in the shin underneath the table and glared with eyes that said, "Kill me."

The lyrics that spilled forth from Jill's contraption were the most painful pabulum I've ever experienced. The saccharin white bread bible tunes made my teeth ache like a dental drill. In fact, the Methodist camp was the first place I ever actually sat around a fire while somebody strummed Kumbaya on an acoustic guitar, the soft voices of the campers singing reluctantly along.

Friday, the final day of Methodist VBS, Mom dutifully attended the big "show." It was awkward as hell but we enjoyed our mother-daughter doughnut and punch after the caterwauling, and then we escaped out a side door and made a break for the car.

The following week was Baptist week and Holy Mary, Mother-of-God, was that some fun stuff.

The junior high kids like Claudia and me were lumped in with the high school types. The entire week was basically a chaste, adult-sanctioned orgy. Don't get me wrong, I don't think there was any actual sex in public areas, but it was eye-opening for an innocent observer like me.

We went to the beach and amusement parks; we sat in a darkened room and listened to Christian rock bands while 8th grade girls were felt up for the first time by high school guys. The sexual tension was heady and intense.

I'll always have a special place in my heart for those Baptists.

I think the following week was a Buddhist-inspired ceramics class where I met my life-long friend Christine.

Each summer, I was farmed out to as many different religious camps as possible so Mom could work and I was not left to my own devices at home. Still, by the next year, she decided it was too much of a pain driving me hither and yon and she was fine leaving me home. That was fine; I was able to entertain myself. As it turns out, my denomination was more MTV than Methodist. Besides, we only got a four-week break from our classes at the Catholic high school.

Fashion Police
by
Nick Bertelson

She bought a pair of New Balances
to get the old frame from high school.
She prodded her skin like an experiment,
exfoliated, put polymers in her hair,
and trusted soaps made from animals
she'd never heard of.
Her purse was a maraca of vitamins.
She ate flax. She took yoga classes,
stole catnaps, and coaxed her dog on long walks.
But one day she saw the mask of makeup
for the farce it was. Her mascara sticks
turned to crayons. She scrubbed her cheeks
and purged the paint from her nails.
She baptized herself in the bathtub.
While a pile of sweatpants burned the backyard,
her exercise ball deflated, and the Shake-Weight
shook it way out the door like a palsied dog.
It was on that day the men came,
those from the TV and magazines,
the writers of fashion blogs and self-help books.
They ripped her from the tub by her hair,
and made her kneel along a brick wall naked.
They put a gun to her head
and listened while she laughed.

The Parable of The Goldfish and The Celebrity

by
Jack Bedrosian

On a day there was a man. And on that day that man had an idea...a rotten idea. It involved taking a goldfish—a live one, not the snack—and placing it in his bottom. And not just one. As many as he could muster.

That day a movement was born. Or not so much a movement as a pretty taboo hobby. So many goldfish were placed in so many bottoms across so many states by so many people. It was called, or at least rumored to be called, Fishpacking.

On another day there was a celebrity. A very famous celebrity who had heard of this very underground thing, and let's just say for the sake of argument his name was Robin Thicke.

One evening this celebrity (Robin Thicke, for our intents and purposes) emerged from a fancy restaurant with an attractive young lady. As he and the young lady walked out into the public world, all of the sudden a small, lifeless little goldfish was caught protruding from the singer's—Robin Thicke's—pant leg. Then another, and another, and still another, until a small pile of little fishes had accumulated around Mr. Thicke's feet.

People stopped and stared, murmuring and texting. Thicke broke down - exclaiming that he "needs help."

After being rushed to the emergency room the local news station reported that approximately 67 small-to-average sized goldfish had been extracted from his anal cavity. A world record...at least as far as anyone knows.

But why? Because Robin Thicke is a Fishpacker.

And has been for years.

After the scandal people started coming forward - men, women, children, senior citizens—everyone. Things had gotten so bad that it had even spread to the suburbs. Rebecca S. Lipdisch, the sole, hardworking, no-shit-taking, tight-ponytailed marine biologist who'd dedicated her career to tracking the recent nosedive in the goldfish population gave a 25 minute interview on CNN. Later we find that goldfish hold a biological importance equivalent to that of honeybees, promptly winning Rebecca a well-deserved Nobel Prize, and narrowly avoiding an environmental catastrophe ten times greater than fossil fuel induced global warming.

And now, when people look back at that near cataclysmic event, they raise a glass to Robin Thicke. The famous man who did the bad thing that made the world a better place.

The Write Way to Speak
by
Aidan Fitzmaurice

"I'm so proud to stand before you after yet another year of increased profits. At this rate there is not a single competitor who can claim any more than 6% of the market share. The team that sits before me is the sole reason for this. It is your hard work, your extreme dedication, your attention to detail and inability to let anything, regardless of how small it may be, slide that allows us to grow while the rest of the market slows. With this team in place, there is no way we can fail. Now, do we have any... ah yes I can see a hand raised already, that's what I like to see. You have a question?"

"Just a small point; a minute ago you said '*their*' when you really should have said '*there*.'"

"Excuse me?"

"Well... you said '*their*' is no way we can fail,' with their spelt t-h-e-i-r. You should have said '*there*' is no way we can fail."

"Oh...I see. You say I said 'their'?"

"Yes, 'their'."

"When I should have said....'their.'"

"No sir, 'there.'"

"Their."

"There."

"There."

"That's it!"

"Excellent. Well allow me to correct myself; with this team in place, *there* is no way we can fail. You see this is what I was talking about. Its this kind of attention to detail, this attitude of perfectionism that allows us to—"

"Sorry sir, if I may?"

"If you may? Yes of course you may."

"It's just a second ago you said '*its*' when you really should have said '*it's*.'"

"Really? I was sure I said it's."

"I'm afraid not sir, you said 'its.'"

"You're positive I said it incorrectly?"

"Positive sure. Unless you want to claim 'this kind of attention to detail' should be preceded by the possessive form?"

"Ha ha, very good young man. No, obviously I wouldn't do such a thing. Thank you for once again correcting me. It seems I've left my language hat at home, we'll be here all knight at this stage!"

"All night sir."

"Pardon?"

"We'll be here all night sir, not all knight. These are hardly medieval times."

"No, no there not are they."

"They're not."

"Their not."

"They're."

"There."

"They're."

"They're."

"That's right sir."

"They're not medieval times which is why I shouldn't have said we'll be here all night."

"No you should have said that sir."

"Right. Because there not... oh I'll just say because *they are* not medieval times, I should have said *night* instead of *knight*."

"Excellent sir!"

"Well, I'm glad we got threw that one. I was afraid—WHAT? Whats wrong? Why are you all grimacing?"

"It's 'through' sir, not 'threw.' And you need to pop an apostrophe before the s if you're going to say 'what's.'"

"Write."

"Do you mean 'right' sir?"

"Yes."

"Are you ok sir?"

"Yes. May i continue?"

"Don't forget to capitalise the 'i' sir."

"FINE. May I continue?"

"Of course sir."

"Ok. Id... I would like two... to say what a privilege it is too... to have had you driving this company foreword... forward. For the last 6 years youve... you have bean... been the reason fore... for every success weave... we've had,"

"Em... sir?"

"WHAT? What could it be this time? I caught myself on every single verbal mistake I could have made! What did I do wrong this time? WHAT?"

"Well sir you did catch yourself on all the verbal mistakes you made, but you did make a numerical one."

"A numerical one."

"Yes sir."

"And what might that have been?"

"Well sir, it's commonly agreed you should spell the number out if the number is between one and nine. So you really should have said 'six' instead of '6.' Also you finished the sentence with a comma. That's why I assumed you had more to say."

"You know, oph all the petty little things you could call—"

"'Of' sir."

"What?"

"It's spelt 'of' sir."

"I know it's—Ha! See I can do it!—I know its spelt... I know it's spelt 'of,' what other way is there to spell it?"

"I'm afraid you said 'oph' sir."

"Why on earth would I say—"

"Capitalise it sir if you're referring to the planet—"

"SHUT UP! SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP! That's it, I'm finished with this nonsense and so are you! Your...you are all fired, every single last one of you. Out! Now! Yes you, what do you want, you heard me didn't you? Every single one of you is fired!"

"But there is only one of me sir."

"Only... only 1? How could there be only 1?"

"One sir. That's ok, don't worry about it. You never were great with numbers were you? Oh and while we're on the subject of numbers, we're not in profit, we're completely bankrupt. Have been for 4, excuse me, for *four* years now. That's why they put you in this ward."

"P-p-p-prophet?"

"No sir, profit."

"Prophet?"

"Profit."

"Prophet?"

"Profit."

"Prophet! Prophet prophet prophet!"

"Profit."

"Prophet....."

V Past II at Mussolini's
by
Connor Harrison

That cat is looking
at me funny, I've seen it
talking to the cook, licking
its sly little claws
and whispering, 'What
is the man doing to
Rome? I've seen him
swinging that gun around,
quoting Augustus.'

Well, that was true,
but what does a cat know?
What do any of them know?
Russia's empire is nought but ice,
Germany is a grey abyss,
and Britain's is bleeding out
to the American cafes
and Uncle Sam.
Italy is Virgil. Italy is
legionnaires and Caesar,
and Julius never took criticism
from bastard cats.

The Art of Being and Branding by **Brian Cox**

Lincoln—that cocky bastard, he thought. Look at him. Sitting there. So sure of himself. Long legs crossed confidently, black stovepipe hat in his lap. Lean angular head slightly bent, tilted to one side. As if pondering some great thought when really he's just trying to catch the conversation going on behind the door.

It was so convenient being Lincoln, thought William. So... unoriginal. Like a still life of a fruit basket.

Lincoln sighed. Pulled out his pocket watch, flipped it open to check the time.

William detailed the face. Sandpaper skin appropriately worn. Heavy brows and deep-set eyes. Creases like eroded canyon rivulets running from the nose to the corner of the mouth. The mole expertly placed. Concave cheeks. Coarse beard.

Damn, he was spot on.

Wait—the shoes. Were they period? William stared hard. Black leather ankle boots, creased across the toes. Yes, he supposed so. There didn't even appear to be lifts. Lincoln was perfect. Of course.

"Lincoln," said Lincoln.

William looked up. "I'm sorry?" he said.

"I said I'm Lincoln."

"Oh. Yes, I gathered," said William.

"And you are ...?"

"Taft."

"Riiight, Taft. Sure. The moustache and the..." Spreading his hands. "Right, gotcha. Good." Lincoln nodded his head. "Taft... Taft... Taft—wasn't he buried in a piano box?"

"He was, in fact, buried at Arlington Cemetery. The first of only two presidents to be buried there, I might add."

"But in a piano box, right?" pressed Lincoln.

William ran his tongue across his top teeth. Patted at his moustache. "...Yes," he said.

"That's what I thought," said Lincoln. He looked at the closed door. "You here for the commercial?"

William nodded.

"You get much work as Taft?"

"Some," said William.

"Because I'd think being Taft is tough."

"It's very rewarding."

"Oh, yeah, sure, no, I mean marketing-wise. Marketing-wise, it's gotta be tough."

William blinked. Of course. Slick—that's what Lincoln was. A poser. Just in it for what he could get out of it. The beard. The hat. The mole. All a façade. An image. Just like the others. Why should he be surprised?

"I don't market myself," said William.

"Oh, you got to," said Lincoln, suddenly excited, leaning forward. "Are you kidding me? You gotta brand yourself you wanna really make it work." He sat back. "Some advice? Taft isn't much of a brand. You got no props—" lifting the stovepipe "—no taglines. Nothing you can put on a t-shirt. You got a website?"

William shook his head.

"You know," said Lincoln, wagging his finger at William, "I've been looking at you and I bet—listen to this—you've already got the moustache—you drop a few pounds, get the right glasses, you know, with the cord or whatever it is, and the hat that folds up on one side and you could be Teddy Roosevelt. I'm telling ya, it's perfect. You got props. Even a tagline. Say 'Bully.'"

"I'm Taft," said William.

"Go on, just once. Say, 'Bully.' Try it. Waggle your cheeks a bit. 'Bully.'"

"I'm Taft."

"I'm just saying," said Lincoln. "You could turn that into a real brand." He leaned forward. "A bit healthier, too, you know what I'm saying?"

The door opened and the casting director stepped out. Lincoln and William looked at him.

"Thanks for coming by," he said, "but we've cast the role. Sorry."

William looked past the director. In the room, shaking hands with people was a tall man in a white wig.

Washington, thought William. Of course. That bastard.

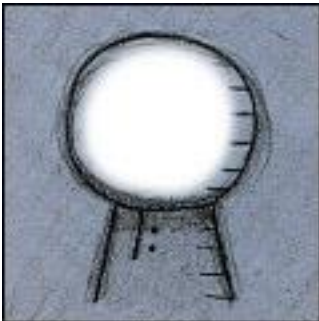
Contributor Biographies



Kate LaDew is a graduate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a BA in Studio Art. So, she starves.



Neil Fulwood was born in 1972, the son of a truck driver, the grandson of a miner. He decided to be awkward and write poetry. Forty years and numerous warnings later some of it's actually been published in places like *The Morning Star*, *Butcher's Dog*, *The Black Light Engine Room*, *London Grip*, and *Ink Sweat & Tears*. Neil lives in Nottingham where he subsidizes several real ale pubs, holds down a day job and someone manages to avoid getting the sack.



Daniel Clausen eats his greens and stays in school. That's why he write so good. His work has been published in *Slipstream Magazine*, *Leading Edge Science Fiction*, and *Black Petals*. He pity the fool who don't like his writing. He also has a free short story collection entitled "Reejection" that anyone can check out right [here](#).



Michelle Hartman is a multiple Pushcart Nominee. Her new poetry book, *Irony and Irrelevance*, was just released from Lamar University Press in early 2015 and is available on Amazon. Her first book, *Disenchanted and Disgruntled* was published by Lamar University in 2013. She is the editor for the online journal *Red River Review* and holds a BS in Political Science-Pre Law and a Certificate in Paralegal studies.



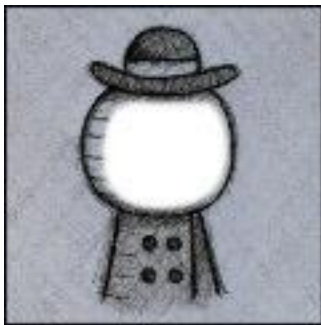
Beth McCabe is often geographically confused as she is based in New Hampshire with roots in New York City and ties to the San Francisco Bay Area. She is a graduate of the Barnard College Creative Writing Program, where she placed second in the Elizabeth Janeway Fiction Prize. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Black Denim Lit*, *Blue Monday Review*, *Brilliant Flash Fiction*, *Highlights for Children*, *Latchkey Tales*, the *LinkedIn Short Story Anthology*, and other journals. Other than bragging about her writing, she is much too shy to talk about herself.



Zain Saeed was born and raised in Pakistan and is currently studying linguistics in Freiburg, Germany. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Glimmer Train*, *The Freiburg Review*, *Bird's Thumb*, *FLAPPERHOUSE*, *Gravel*, *Cease*, *Cows*, *Third Point Press*, *Bahamut Journal*, and others. He tweets at @linguistictrain.



Freelance writer **Carolyn Smuts** taught history at the college level before fleeing academic life to write. Her work has been featured in *SELF*, *Glamour*, *Creative Living*, *Ultimate Motorcycling*, and *Business Week*. Her most recent work was published by Akashic Books, Jitter Press, and Omnific Publishing. She lives in Southern California.



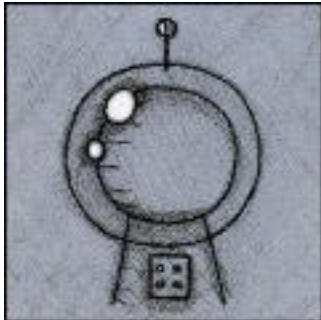
Nick Bertelson's other work has appeared in *Hobart*, *The New Plains Review*, *Bull Magazine*, *The Cortland Review*, *Foliage Oak*, *The Coe Review*, and elsewhere. His story "Blind Buzz" will be appearing in *Split Lip's* "Best Literary Humor 2015."



Jack Bedrosian is a writer who was born in North Carolina.



Aidan Fitzmaurice is a writer from Dublin who also lives in Dublin and is based in Dublin. Sometime he wonders if there is anything outside Dublin which is why he started making up stories.



Connor Harrison is a student at the University of Chester, studying Creative Writing and English. He has had short stories and poetry published online and in print, and spends his free time writing, reading, and arranging his bookshelf alphabetically. He also brings Kurt Vonnegut up in conversation more than is socially acceptable.



Brian Cox is a newspaper editor in Detroit. He's received a variety of journalism awards and has published a handful of short stories, mostly mysteries. He's recently taken up playwriting. He's got two great kids and a wife, who is also great. He can be reached at bcox1001@gmail.com.