

◇ Defenestration ◇

Volume XIV, Issue II

August 2017

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All Star
by
Luka Watts

The only thing to have survived the apocalypse is a recording of *All Star* by Smash Mouth. And language and grammar, because the man transcribing my story couldn't be bothered to think of new grammatical and linguistic rules for a story he isn't interested in. I imagine he listened to *All Star* and figured out the old ones or something. It upset me to hear he wasn't interested in my story, because I think it's quite good.

I was handing out a panini—paninis were the only other thing to survive the apocalypse- to a customer but she wouldn't give me the full payment. She was supposed to say *hey now, you're an all star* but she thought the panini was partially alive so she should be refunded the *star*. You can imagine the surprise of someone expecting to hear *hey now, you're an all star* but instead hearing *hey now, you're an all*. I was truly shocked. I said to myself *Macaulay, you cannot settle for this*. And then I said it to her. She said *I'm not called Macaulay*. I said *fair point*, and then *how can you expect someone to feel like they've been rewarded for their services without being told they're an all star? I don't just sit in random fields offering paninis to whoever happens to pass by out of the goodness of my heart, I do it to be told I'm an all star. I need the harmonization such positive affirmations bring to my soul. Without All Star I cannot connect to a world that once was. My heaving hordes of other customers comply so why can't you?* She said *only shooting stars break the mould*. I screamed *you can't use Smash Mouth to justify this disgraceful behaviour* with every air of my being. She ran.

I chased after her through boggy marshes and along rubbly roads and in other stereotypical post-apocalyptic landscapes. I was faster and would have caught her quickly but I tripped over the abstract concept of childhood and cut my knee when I fell. Blood was everywhere. By the time I had recovered enough to stand up she had disappeared into the fog. I stood up and carried on running in the first direction I could think of, which was vertically, but it was no use. She had disappeared. I whispered *all I wanted was for you to say hey now, you're an all star* but she didn't reply, which was probably because she wasn't there.

Then in an incredibly convenient plot twist I saw her again. I ran up to her and begged her to tell me I'm an all star. She said *no, that would not be the appropriate payment bearing in mind the quality of the panini you offered me*. I hit her over the entire body with a massive rock. Then I hit her with an even bigger rock, but this rock was made of justice. Which is to say she died instantly.

I asked the storyteller *why did you say you weren't interested in my story?* He said *I didn't say I wasn't interested, I said I wasn't impressed*. I said *why?* He said *well first you don't live in a post-apocalyptic world where all currency has been replaced by quotations from All Star by Smash Mouth, you live with your mother in a semi-detached house in the outskirts of South London. Secondly the person you killed wasn't a grill- sorry, predictive text, it wasn't a girl you killed, it was Steve Harwell, the singer from Smash Mouth. Our intelligence has told us you travelled to his home in California and begged him to sing All Star to you. He refused because he gets that shit all the time from the legions of obsessive Smash Mouth fans and he just wants to get on with his day without being hassled, it's his mother-in-law's birthday tomorrow and he hasn't got her a card yet so he needs to find something on funkypigeon.com, which he can't do if he's being harassed by strangers. Then you*

attacked him with a chainsaw and decapitated him. I said d'you want to go for a drink? He said you what mate? I said you are the most beautiful being I have ever encountered. We could be the greatest pairing since towels and aubergine. He said I think we're gonna have to keep you in the cells overnight and refuse you bail.

-141
after Shakespeare's Sonnet 141
by
Natalie De Paz

His faithless cock wants to feel her sigh:
tender, deliberate, slow—
He could never love her like he wants her thighs,
her sleepy bending legs, vulgar phrases she borrows.
Yes, her moans taste like she loves him, crying,
"Yes!" She is putty, she is honey, she is a drone,
yes, she is this moment, undying,
she is a feast, she tears off her gown.
A sensory overload comes,
persuading him to shout something lewd.
His face contorts, his passion numbs.
Her face is frozen in servitude.
Next minute, their tryst is just a stain
and a mental note to download her again.

Jillian Michaels Joins My Writing Group
by
Nicola Davison

We are settled on our chairs, laptops atop laps, mugs of tea in hand, ready to hear the first short story when the buzzer buzzes. "Hang on. I thought we were all here," says Darlene. We have our meetings in a small living room on the fourth floor of a downtown apartment building. We are only five, so we don't need much space. "Someone named Jillian. Says you invited her," she looks at me. "Sounds quite bossy."

My tea leaps up and my laptop slides to the floor. *Carpet, phew*. I barely have time to explain the why, let alone the who, before she strides into the room. She's taken the stairs instead of waiting for an elevator. Names are offered. The atmosphere is sweaty, smiles are stretched over twitching cheeks. I feel assessed.

I didn't mention it to my writers' group. Truth be told, the night I hit send I'd had more than one glass of wine. Okay, more than a bottle, and I'd nibbled everything crunchy in the kitchen cupboard, not one stale cracker remained. I was operating under the triple influence of mass dehydration, inebriation, and remorse. It was a confession that meandered into a manifesto with every third line rhyming.

I didn't mean to hit send. When your vision is blurred, those little tabs are awfully close. Save. Send. Four letter words. But then, shit, I heard it, the computer made that whooshing noise; so much like the sound of a flushing toilet. Aghast, I was. *Noooo. Come back. Undo.*

Surely, she doesn't read her own emails? Her assistant will pop it in the trash can. I imagined this person; spandexed (from a recent butt-kicking workout), and sneering at my poetry. So I sent another missive, which made our writing group sound slightly more prestigious than it is, and breezily invited her to *join us some time*. I typed out the where and the when and went off to bed to endure the spinning bedroom, without even flossing.

Jillian perches on the edge of a dining room chair, pulled up just for her. Nine years, I've spent with her in my living room. She knows when to yell and when to encourage. I can quote some of her spiels about the deeper meaning behind burpees and ab crunches. She has always been approximately twelve inches tall and stretched wide, by my unkind TV screen. But here she is as if she's always been here. I admire her posture from the corner of my eye.

I picture her reading my email, then picking up her phone to book a flight; California to Nova Scotia. Did she know we existed before this? Yes, of course she did. *It was mentioned on an episode of Six Feet Under*. I remember that. It was a line of dialogue, spat from one character to another in a very derisive tone. Even so, I pumped my fist in the air. Nova Scotia (!) mentioned on an American show,

"Shall we?" Throats are cleared. "Did you bring something to read Jillian?"

Oh yes, but she won't go first.

Stuart reads eighteen pages of poetry; a meditation on a single flower in a garden from his childhood that really represents South American politics. Jillian claps after the first page.

Kristy has a story set entirely in the storage room of a Walmart that contains a racy sex scene involving the utility sink. Jillian doesn't clap this time. Everyone looks a bit flushed.

Warren has an essay about his take on the growing popularity of roundabouts in Canada. Takeaway: Warren is fond of roundabouts.

Darlene—whose apartment we occupy—gets up and makes herself busy in the kitchen when her turn comes around. I have yet to hear her read anything, aside from the description on the tea packets on offer in her kitchen.

All eyes turn to me. My voice is a strangled squeak. I'm reading the fifth draft of a short story I've been reworking for three years. It does not have an ending. Instead of an ending, I always finish off by saying, "It doesn't have an ending just yet." At this point, my writers' circle usually prompts me with helpful questions about the twelve characters in the two-page story.

Jillian takes a different approach. She hasn't spoken after anyone else's piece but mine seems to incite a simmering rage. "Finishing is everything," she says in a voice that seems to ricochet off the beige walls.

"Right," I say, "I heard you mention that in Killer Buns and Thighs."

"Get a little farther out on the skinny branch," she says, using her toned arms to emphasize her point. Darlene reappears and nods sagely. "Get comfortable with being uncomfortable," Jillian tacks on.

I smile a bit. It's just so Jillian to say that, and as it happens, I am extremely uncomfortable.

"I'll find an ending."

"Do it now," she says. "What are you waiting for? Change is not a future result but a present action."

Warren pipes up. "It's not easy to wrap things up for twelve major characters in just two pages, maybe you could cut it back to say, two characters."

I stare at him. "Nothing roundabout about that, Warren. Sheesh."

"Or," offers Darlene, "it should be a novel, then you could spend more time finding your ending. A trilogy ..."

"Or a poem," booms Stuart.

"No. No. No." Jillian is on her feet, pacing. Her shirt lifts a bit in the breeze of her apparent wind and I can see ab muscles. "You people are enabling her. She must take what she has and sculpt it. Tell me why all the characters are rodents."

"Because they're an intelligent but persecuted animal. People make fun of their teeth. I'm of British descent so..."

"It's a distraction. It's not important to the overall theme."

"Isn't it?" I appeal to my four but they're either refusing eye contact or have their lips drawn tight.

Stuart, the poet, confesses to a patch of Berber carpet, that he's never been sure what the story is about but that he's always enjoyed the dialogue.

"Exactly," says Jillian, "you lose your reader on the second sentence. It's good to start out strong but you need strength in your core or the whole thing is weak." She halts her pacing and bends forward at the waist in front of me, keeping her back flat and her abs pulled in. "Intensity, intensity, intensity. You want to be a writer? Write faster."

Darlene must feel the need to give me a breather. "How many books have you written Jillian?"

She seems to deflate when Jillian tosses the number six over her shoulder without breaking eye contact with me.

"I'm all about goals. That's how you get better. It doesn't have to be perfect. Perfect is boring. You show up, you do the work because that's how you get better. And it's not just about words. It's not just about writing. It's about your whole goddamn life. Every day you do it and it will permeate every other aspect of your life."

I lip-sync the last bit with her. She seems a little taken aback.

"It's from Yoga Inferno," I say.

She straightens up into mountain pose and regards me through hooded eyes. I've always thought her very feline. I'd like to write a short story featuring her as a tabby cat living in an alley.

She's saying something. "Sorry?"

"I said, we're going to make you stronger."

"Up. Stand up. Everyone."

No one stands up.

She claps her hands. "Chop chop. We haven't got all day."

No one looks at her. Everyone looks at me, The Instigator.

"It's evening," I say.

Computers and mugs are gingerly placed on the carpet and we reluctantly leave the coziness of our wooden chairs. Darlene is spared the appearance of subservience, already being on her feet but Jillian waves her in.

No one seems to know what to do with their arms. We are accustomed to a certain distance from one another and the miniature wall of a laptop screen. Jillian seems to enjoy this. She's in the middle, turning slowly, taking us in. I've seen this look before. Here it comes.

"What are you in this for? Do you want to be published? You want someone to read your work outside of this living room? The time is now. Not another writing circle." And here, she flexes her index and middle fingers around the term writing circle, as if we're imaginary. "Not another workshop or weekend retreat." More air quotes, alongside a mocking tilt of her head. "That's phoning it in, and you know it. Stick with me and we'll build your writing into lean muscle."

"Oh," offers Warren, his mouth in a perfect circle.

"You," she spins to face me and her ponytail snaps her cheek, "will finish. You don't come this far to peter out in the end. Exterminate some characters. Cut it down to three."

I gasp.

"But it has to be twelve, like The Last Supper..."

"Nobody got that reference," she gives the others a moment to speak up. "See? Try six characters in three pages."

"... and that's why he can float into the sky after—"

"Six, no more." She glances at me then turns to the others. "For the next thirty days, you'll write, and work out with me in this living room."

"But," says Darlene.

"No one leaves. At the end of that time, your work will either be lean or ripped and shredded. Either way, your butt will be so toned, you'll be able to bounce a quarter off of it."

She stands at ease, hands on hips, shoulders back, feet a little wider than hip-width apart. This is her domain, surrounded by soft, sweaty people reeking of fear. What have I done? No more drinking and writing for me.

"I'll tighten up your end for you," she says winking at me, then she reaches around and gives me a saucy slap.

"Stuart," she barks. "Read us your first six pages, but this time you'll do it on one leg, holding Warrior Three."

"Is this the end?" I say to the room of slack faces. "This seems like a good spot to end."

Odysseus, Retired to Florida, at the Mall
by
Marc DeSantis

Odysseus stood before the food court, flummoxed, bewildered, confused,
bereft of all ideas, no clever scheme could he devise,
None of his considerable craft was of use,
Nothing he knew had prepared him for this, no experience,
Not all of his wanderings in search of his beloved Ithaca had readied him,
he was lost, adrift, as surely as if he had been storm-tossed, alone, on the wine-dark sea.

Super-size a meal? Certainly such a thing is meant for the tall Ajax, or Diomedes,
not the short Odysseus, who lives by his wits,
Value meal? A notion foreign to rugged, simple Ithaca, where all meals, regardless,
are savored and enjoyed with friends, not on account of their cost, but their quality,
The Starbucks coffee, at least, is good, and Odysseus drains his cup,
a small wispy thing made of paper, neither humble pottery nor shining bronze.

What use is mortal guile in this place, where the pace of things is so alien,
uninviting, cold, and swift,
Odysseus knows of nowhere else like this, not even the gods, he thinks, would care,
to visit this strange agora, though it still be in realm of Zeus,
under his wide sky, and subject to the justice of his laws,
No, that is not right, the only law of this realm is coin, and here justice rides a Segway.

Odysseus could survive this oil-fried Tartarus, he had escaped before, from the cave of the
Cyclops,
and from the island of Circe, the beautiful witch,
then too from the lure of the Sirens, and heck, he had even survived the great war itself,
ten years before the lofty walls of Troy, where the plain of Ilion had run slick,
with the blood of noble Argives and Trojans, cut down in their prime, like fresh hay,
What was a credit card or expired coupon to him, the inventor of the ruin of King Priam's
city?

Oh, if only he had brought his bow with him, of wood and sinew and horn, which only he
could string,
that rude, mocking youth, who slouched behind the register,
he would treat harshly, just as he had the suitors, who had sought to supplant him in fair
Ithaca,
But Penelope had forbade it, she said there was no room for the weapon in the minivan,
It was not appropriate for a Saturday at the mall, he would look silly,
people would laugh at him, worse than death was an insult to the honor of a Hellene.

Lunch should never be so hard, it was not meant to be a chore,
But he is yet hungry, and again approaches, warily,
a different counter this time, well away from the pimply, smirking youngster, who knows
nothing,
who had never gone in a black ship to Troy, and there fought for lovely Helen's return,
She had never been worth the trouble, Odysseus thinks, not at all, the spilled blood was for
naught,

How many valiant Achaeans and Danaans fell there, never to see their own Ithacas again?

A polite woman places spoonfuls of chicken onto his plate, and vegetables too,
Odysseus sits amidst the multitude, and eats, recalling more exciting days.

Monster of the Week
by
Fred Coppersmith

They say the camera adds ten or even fifteen pounds. Maybe that's why Harvey didn't notice the dragon was quite so big until the darn thing actually ate him.

More likely he just wasn't paying attention. I'm just the on-air talent so what the heck do I know, right? But that green, scaly beastie sure seemed plenty big enough for me.

It's not like we'd never had weirder booked on *Get Up! Good Morning!*, though. We've had weirder and wilder just this season alone, and that was without hardly trying.

But that's also kind of our show's calling card, right? A little light chat and spontaneity straight after the morning news, some Hollywood gossip mixed with a bubbly splash or two of the supernatural.

You count yourself lucky most days if you can even tell those things apart.

Less than a month back, for instance, we'd booked a local hunter who claimed he'd shot a werewolf. Followed directly by a celebrity chef who claimed that he was a werewolf. The two of them got into fisticuffs on air, tumbling into the audience while the chef's summer casserole burned and the network phones lit up with other sightings of culinary lycanthropes. The tabloids and trades argued that drugs or dark magic had been involved. Maybe even both. It was positively scandalous.

The truth was, Harvey liked stirring up controversy. "Go big or go home shopping network," he liked to say. Maybe a little more often than that joke deserved, but his can-do attitude usually made him a pretty good producer for daytime television.

Don't get me wrong, we never expected to win an Emmy or anything. But ratings were good, and I'd never had any real complaints. At least nothing I couldn't get my agent or an exorcist to quietly resolve.

But Harvey had been nothing but distracted lately. I'd heard somebody in hair and makeup suggest he was going through a messy divorce, that he'd lost half the house, his car, even the new boat that last year's sweeps week had paid for. I couldn't remember if I'd ever even met his wife, much less been invited on that boat. But I couldn't help but think old Harv was being just a little bit unprofessional about all of this, you know?

His attitude wasn't healthy for behind-the-scenes morale, is the thing. It was bad energy, and a live audience eats up bad energy just as easily as good.

A dragon, as it turns out, eats up just about anything.

Maybe I should have known something was up when I first smelled the smoke and brimstone. The smell wasn't overbearing when the local zookeeper first wheeled the cage out, but it was worse than burnt casserole and matted wolfman fur, I can tell you that. You could feel the heat coming off the enormous cage even through the deep velvet cloth somebody had draped over it backstage, and there were these little wisps of smoke

escaping from underneath its fringe. You couldn't actually see the beast, except for a couple of clawed toes sticking out near the edge of the cage, but I knew the darn thing had to be huge.

I remember glancing over where Harvey was standing, just behind camera one, as if to ask, "going big enough for you yet?" I thought maybe I could raise a smile or something, at least. But the man never even looked up at me from his cell phone.

I wouldn't say that made me angry, exactly, but I do know this: I was a pussycat compared to the dragon. The great lizard absolutely *lost it* when the zookeeper whisked the cloth away and it laid its fiery yellow eyes on old Harv. I'm still not sure what he did to upset the beast so much. But when I saw the way it looked at him, I thought, oh right, I had met Harvey's ex-wife!

Which is why I have to accept some small amount of blame for what happened next. I don't know if unlocking the cage was the best decision I could have made under the circumstances. The zookeeper certainly didn't want me to do it, and if I'm being honest even the dragon seemed a little bit surprised. But I also don't think any of us can deny that what happened then made for very good television.

Because, surprised or not, the dragon burst from that cage with the mightiest roar I'd ever heard. There were shrieks from the studio audience, as the dragon's leathery wings lifted it above them, into the air, and it spat out a bright ribbon of flame. But we'd trained them well, oh yes, and I'm delighted to say not a single one of them ran.

Neither did Harvey, of course, although in hindsight he probably should have.

It was altogether strange, seeing our producer get gobbled up by a mythical creature on live television. But I guess I don't have to tell any of *you* that. You just saw the clip from that show for yourself.

After that, the dragon was surprisingly easy to corral, just a few magic hexes and a couple of shots from the zookeeper's tranquilizer gun. I guess the old girl was just full. I didn't catch the name of the production assistant who grabbed a fire extinguisher, but that was quick thinking, and it should save us some money next season when we rebuild the set.

Well, now, I do have to apologize, folks. This acceptance speech has more than just a little gotten away from me. But like I said, none of us were expecting to win this evening.

So let me just wrap this up by saying, on behalf of everyone at *Get Up! Good Morning!*, we're honored and humbled by the Emmy voters' decision tonight.

And...um...well I guess we're hiring for a new producer, if anybody's interested.

For the Girls
by
Penny Peyser

Putting on thy bra is not an option
When getting dressed to act'ally start the day.
Not doing so will trash a plan's adoption
And leave one's girls so aimlessly to sway.
To lift and separate promotes a mental
Alertness, as my mother always said.
Avoiding sagging thoughts is elemental
And will keep progress pointing straight ahead.
'T is tempting not to fasten hooks and eyes
When lounging in one's robe seems more ideal
But thwarting gravity always relies
On good support. Ma Nature keeps it real.
I'm all for hanging loose, but let's be clear—
If thou means business, put on thy brassiere.

Auntie Barb Saves the World
by
Christina Scott

Diary of Auntie Barb, March 27th, 2042

(Written in pigeon blood, on the inside of four dried and stretched scalps)

Scalp 1: (Brunette male, crew cut) I'm leaving this note for my progeny. In the future, I will be known as the Savior of the World. You're probably reading this from behind a glass box in some overrated museum where you have to eat Triscuits and sip apple juice while looking really constipated. Congratulations on finding the only cool thing on display. The scalp I'm writing on was from a guy you would have liked. Running out of room. I'll switch to the redhead.

Scalp 2 (Red-headed female, shoulder length hair) In the Fall of 2013 I discovered my breast cancer had metastasized. I was given six months to live, so I made a will and endowed all my belongings on my niece, Amber. I hadn't seen her in several years, but I remembered her as a child. When she lost her stuffed squirrel Theodore at age five and walked around the house and told me in a matter-of-fact voice that she needed Theodore to sleep, I decided she was good people. When she told me that Theodore was dead, and then killed a real squirrel to bury in the yard as substitute, I knew that she was after my own heart. Perhaps literally. The Apocalypse broke out a month and two days after my diagnosis (asteroids, demons, zombies, giant pits to hell) and I had nothing better to do, so I decided to find my niece.

Scalp 3: (Brown-haired male, Buzz-cut) I stopped taking my chemo, since I was about to run out anyway. (My own scalp would never grow hair again, even after stopping chemo.) I packed a bag of essentials (hunting knife, spelunking gear, can of beans, flash light) and started toward Nebraska, where my niece lived. After a day or so I began to vomit and became dizzy often. I thought maybe I would die in the first few days, and if so, at least I had tried. But then I was staying in an abandoned house, its windows shattered and most of the food already picked over. I woke up in the middle of the night and discovered I was levitating above the bed. It was then I understood that the Apocalypse had cured me of my cancer.

Scalp 4: (Punk-esque green Mohawk, gender unknown) I decided that I was sick of being bald. I levitated back down to the floor and found a cleaver in the kitchen. I then wandered outside and walked through the wreckage of the neighborhood looking for a corpse. I found one in the middle of the street by a burning red Ford Fusion. The man was in his late thirties and had a crew cut. I hacked his hair off and put his scalp on my head, and for the first time in years felt strong.

List of Bands That Must Stop Making Music and Why
by
John Meyers

KISS

I think it was a Halloween concert
in the nineties, when they were already old
TV cameras picked up a slice of
Gene Simmons' ass cheek
visible though a stylish hole in his leather pants
It looked like what you see when
you first open a can of spam

COLDPLAY

His voice sounds more and more
like a toddler in pain

ROLLING STONES

crusty skeletons

WHITESNAKE

Post facelift David Coverdale
looks like a woman in my office
she is fifty-four years old
and just had a facelift

U2

I've given it all I've got
overcome the white man's burden
bled Irish green all over the wailing world
whose environment I must protect, U2 like
stop it already

AEROSMITH

dried out witchy woman-esque narcissist
torched vocal chords and enough
rock anthems to kill us several times over

BEACH BOYS

surfside bartenders slinging margaritas
wait he's in the band, that grandpa

QUEEN

this one is tough for me
but you look like Christopher Lloyd
in Back to the Future
Freddy is long gone
do you understand?

STING

wait didn't you already
do the sloppy guitar thing
in the nineties

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

at some point
things should be placed
in a time capsule
there is no longer a need
to pretend thirty years haven't passed
mary's dress will always wave
we understand that
go build a cabin in the woods

Fresh Seawater Lobster

by
Wendy Garnier

Perfectly cooked lobster is surely one of life's pleasures. Making lobster on your holiday may seem like a lavish affair, but we've put together an easy recipe anyone can make – spectacular succulent lobster in sea salted water.

Ingredients:

1 large human, 65-90 kilograms, pale skin complexion, vitamin D deficient
1 handful of pre-heated sunscreen, SPF 6 to 10, expired
1 artisan inflatable toy
Fresh local seawater

Directions:

1. Grab the human. Remove daywear by firmly grasping the meat and easing the clothes off. Put on bathing clothes.
2. Roughly brush the human with thin strokes of sunscreen. Marinate for about fifteen minutes.
3. Commit the human to the water. Use clean sea water if available or add a ratio of a half cup of salt for every gallon of water. Quickly grasp the human by the body and submerge it upside down in the water, headfirst, then release.
4. Throw in one inflatable toy, set timer, and let the human simmer in the water for about thirty minutes to an hour, depending on size and tenacity.
5. Fish out the human and let it rest on its back. Place in direct sun, in relatively high humidity, raised from the ground. Bring to a simmer.
6. After about half an hour of sizzling, turn the human over, facedown, to expose the back-side to the sun.

How to tell when they're done? Be aware that not all humans will roast at the same rate. The amount of time it takes depends on the human's complexion, melanin production, and how well the air can circulate around them. Repeat step one to six to taste. When done the human should be dry, but still pliable; flexible, not brittle. Texture is about that of a dried apricot, best described as leathery. Aim for a vivid, deep, red colour.

Ham of Destiny
by
Laura Garrison

One warm spring night on a tiny farm in Whistle County, Tennessee, eleven piglets slipped from a sow like marbles from a silk purse, ten boys and one girl. The boys were fine, sturdy specimens, if perhaps a shade dull—more bacon than brains, as the saying goes—but the girl was a wonder, clever and strong and pink as a sunrise.

From an early age, she sensed there was a wide world beyond the borders of the farm and longed to be a part of it. One corner of the pig pen provided a view of the black-and-white television on the farmhouse kitchen counter, and while her brothers were snuffling slop and wallowing in mud hollows, the girl would study the glamorous actresses in the old movies the farmer's wife liked to watch as she baked pies.

On clear days, the pig would gaze at her reflection in the water trough and practice batting her eyelashes. She longed for an exotic lover, someone with an artist's soul and wiry angles to complement her plush curves. A musician, perhaps.

During the summer when the farmer's daughter had a French tutor on Thursday evenings, the young pig would stand under the window and whisper the lessons along with her, *je vole, tu voles, elle vole*, dreaming of Paris fashions and fine chocolates while the fireflies flickered around her like flashbulbs.

When she sashayed out of the barn one afternoon wearing a wig of straw and lipstick made from blackberries crushed into a glob of shortening, her brothers squealed with laughter. Hot tears glistened in her violet eyes, but she blinked them back, gave a ladylike snort, and charged.

Later, chastened and limping, her brothers apologized, laying bouquets of wildflowers at her hoofs and praising her superior intelligence, strength, and good looks. She forgave them, for although she had a quick temper, she was easily mollified with compliments, and it was not in her nature to hold grudges.

Her brothers built a stage for her in the barn, with horse-blanket curtains and a pair of antique lanterns for footlights. After the farmer and his family went to bed, the young pig would belt out songs she had learned from the movies: "Moon River," "Que Sera, Sera," and her favorite, "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." The audience went wild, stamping and neighing and bellowing and flapping, but no one cheered louder than her ten dim but loyal brothers, who now believed with all their hearts she was going to be famous someday.

Time passed, and the little pigs grew into large pigs. As harvest time drew near, a tall man with a long coat and bloodstained trouser cuffs swept into the barnyard and had a hushed conversation with the farmer, during which they both cast dark glances toward the pig pen. The farmer frowned and shook his head. Then the tall man said something else, and the farmer nodded grimly. With the air of having settled something, the two men shook hands, and the tall one went away.

That night, the boys were frantic, running in circles, trampling their dinner, bumping into the walls and each other. The girl watched them and sighed. Finally, just before dawn, she

wiggled herself into position, and, with a huff and a puff, she kicked the gate down with her hind legs. Startled, her brothers stopped and gaped at her. She ushered them over the splintered wood and nudged them toward the forest beyond the edge of the vegetable garden. Things would be tough for them in the wild, she knew, but they had numbers in their favor, and an uncertain future was still better than a guaranteed trip to the slaughterhouse.

When the last curly tail had disappeared into the trees, she turned and walked out to the dirt road. She followed it for a mile or two, until she felt she was in the right place, then sat down in the grass on the shoulder and waited. Sure enough, an orange Volkswagen van came chugging along a few moments later and rolled to a stop. The driver, whose gentle smile was nestled in a full beard, leaned over to open the passenger-side door. Someone waved at her from the backseat—a bear in a polka-dot tie and a battered pork pie hat. Beside him sat a handsome frog with a banjo on his lap.

The driver patted the empty front seat. "Hop in, miss," he said. "I'm going to make you a star."

Tinged
by
Alison McBain

I hate to argue with you,
but I must say the sky is not blue.
It is studded by blemishes—
clouds smeared by the oily effervescence
of sunrises, sunsets,
bisected by rainbows,
vivisected by the worm-trails of airplanes.
Half the time
it is blackish,
covered with shining whiteheads
popping and reforming
like the face of a teenage chocoholic.
No, the sky is not blue
nor black
nor grey when rain threatens
(don't let me say shades of grey, for it is far too tame for *that*).

If marketing the sky, I'd call it a feature,
but I'm afraid no one would buy
an unnamable product,
so it would sit on the shelf
gathering dust
until the next new thing breezed in
and someone dumped it in the dustbin
or sold it to the discount store
down the street
and an old lady bought it for 99 cents
even though she didn't know quite what to do with it,
a slightly shabby,
not quite new
puzzle of a thing.
Her cat would sleep on it
(cats, perhaps—or maybe a small Pomeranian)
and it would get covered in fur,
rolled up in a corner
and forgotten.

Immortal
by
Rachel Cassidy

When Eddie electrocuted himself dead leaving a burnt image of Jesus on his left hand, it was faintly ironic for two reasons: one, he was doing something nice for somebody else at the time, which was out of character to start with; two, nobody had expected him to live long enough to do something nice for somebody else and subsequently electrocute himself.

When he came back to life two hours later, it was a downright miracle.

Nobody witnessed the miracle, the onlookers having left his smoking body there in Orest's yard and gone about their business. Orest himself had taken off for parts unknown in case the authorities came around and took issue with the power lines spliced off the transformer at the street corner. And the smoking body in his yard.

The reason why nobody expected Eddie to be around long enough to do either of these things was this: since he had taken up with the barmaid, his wife had kicked him out, at which point he had taken to hitting the bottle earlier and earlier in the day. And as his work was servicing the swimming pools of rich people and he was generally blind drunk when he arrived, they had expected him to drown some time ago.

But he hadn't, and now he wasn't on the roof of his neighbor's house with a screwdriver and an audience but laid out alone in the dirt with the stink of singed flesh up his nose.

The burn on his right hand was unexceptional. But the burn on his left hand was quite another matter.

It was an epiphany.

He had been chosen, and people needed to know about it.

His wife was uninterested and slammed the door in his face. The barmaid said it looked more like a buzzard than Jesus, and he should really see a doctor about those burns, and besides which she had lunch customers. One of the drunks at the bar squinted at the Jesus burn and said jeez, maybe, if you look at it crossways, and another beer would surely help his vision. Eddie bought a round and explained the situation as he saw it. He bought a couple more rounds and rounded out his theory, and by late afternoon it was clear to him - he simply couldn't die.

He needed a larger audience.

When the word got around that Eddie was not only alive and well but up the water tower prancing around like a fool hollering some craziness about being immortal, well, that was a spectacle not to be missed. Even his wife showed up to see, though she was shooting daggers from her eyes at the barmaid the whole time.

When he spread his arms wide and dove off the tower to prove the point, the crowd gasped as one and parted, and Eddie piled headfirst right back into the dirt.

A few people waited around a while to see if he was going to resurrect.

Eventually they got bored and left. It was another day or two before the buzzards started picking at him.

Light Fuse And Retire Quickly
by
Patrick Ritter

All pyros know
the instructions on Black Cat firecrackers:
Light fuse and retire quickly.
I should have lived my life like that.

Light the fuse in adolescence.
Live a wild and reckless adventure.
Explode as many myths as legally possible.
Push the envelope, and more.
Hit all the highs and the lows.

Settle into normalcy
for a while.
Play your part.
Pay the mortgage.

But then
when you finally do retire,
light that fuse one more time.

Do it in the middle of an important meeting,
while your control-freak boss
demands, blames, self-justifies,
the pompous ass he is.
Time the explosion just right,
while he's in mid pontification:

You arrogant and insignificant loser, I am done.
I am retiring from your tyranny.

Then pull out your roll of Black Cat firecrackers,
the one you've saved for this,
the five hundred fingered roll
of red tissue, silver dust and hope.

Brandish it.
See the moment turn
from surprise to confusion to terror.

Light it, and quickly retire
to the elevator.
Laughing all the way down,
where security police are waiting.

They will understand.
They will form an escort.

The Registry of Intangibles
by
P.K. Read

August 3, 2015 9:23 a.m.

Dear Applicant,

We have taken your application to register yourself as the sole owner and proprietor of a portion of Hungarian history, specifically 1820-1849, under consideration for inclusion in the Registry of Intangibles.

You claim that your "unique affinity, understanding and kinship due to an immigrant great-great-great-grandfather who spread Hungarian culture from Budapest to the Italian shores prior to his emigration to the United States" as justification for your engagement in widespread demands made of educational institutions, media outlets and sitting Hungarian representatives to pay you a usage fee for any mention of this historical period, as well as using the word 'Hungarian' to define goulash or rhapsodies.

The Registry acknowledges the appeal of claiming a section of historical experience to an individual or group. The Registry notes that the Applicant illustrated cultural knowledge via the inclusion of several dishes with the application, but recommends for future reference that sending goulash in zip-lock bags is risks leakage, a sodden application form, and a Registry official with stains on a freshly ironed shirt.

Decision:
Denied.

Please see also attached notifications of denied applications for:

Ownership of Croatia history (1849-1851)

Ownership of Italian history (1851-1852)

Ownership of Cleveland, Ohio history (1853-onwards)

August 3, 2015 9:47 a.m.

Dear Applicant,

The Registry of Intangibles has reviewed your application to list yourself as the 'Secret Keeper' in all matters concerning the 'Reptilian Elite,' which you state comprises all persons in positions of power, past and present.

It is beyond the mandate of the Registry to appoint an individual to a given position, regardless of the intangibility of the item at hand, if said applicant clearly considers the item to be tangible.

The napkins, paper towels, receipts and envelopes upon which the application was submitted, however, proved mildly effective in the tidying of spills precipitated by previous application packages, and for that, the Registry offers its appreciation.

Decision:
Denied

Please see also attached notifications of denied 'Secret Keeper' applications for:

Paul Is Dead

Moon Landing

9/11

Grand Unified Conspiracy Theory

August 3, 2015 11:09 a.m.

Dear Applicant,

The Registry of Intangibles has reviewed your application to have Mongolian knuckle-bone shooting reclassified as the 'certified historical local pastime' of West Thumb, Wyoming.

We note the lack of any direct Mongolian affiliation between West Thumb, WY and Mongolia itself, nor between yourself and any direct Mongolian descendant and acknowledge your claim of being 'as wild as Genghis Khan' as stated grounds for instituting the annual West Thumb Knuckle-Bone Shooting Mongolian Rodeo.

You assert that Mongolian knuckle-bone shooting, a ritualized team game that encourages interaction across Mongolian groups, involves using specialized firearms to shoot small bones of ovine origin from atop a moving horse at targets bearing the likenesses of various political figures.

Your application failed to include reference to the embossed costumes or any knowledge of the traditional knuckle-bone shooting songs. It is this base form of misappropriation and its avoidance that renders Registry work so simultaneously frustrating and yet satisfying.

Decision:
Denied.

Note: The Registry notes that it can not provide any form of restraining order against the "Mongolian elders" the applicant claims are "threatening to play knucklebones with his thumb metacarpals" in retribution for online advertising that depicts Mongolian nomads engaged in the above-mentioned West Thumb Rodeo. Similar threats made by the Applicant to the Registry officer charged with the application assessment only incline this officer to provide tangible evidence of the Applicant's address to aforesaid Mongolian elders.

Please desist.

August 3, 2015 2:37 p.m.

Dear Registrant,

On October 30, 1992 your application to the Registry for ownership of so-called Dark Matter was provisionally approved due to its intangibility.

In the interim, the Registry notes that you have been selling sealed receptacles labelled "Dark Matter, open at own risk," through various commercial distribution outlets at prices between US\$ 7-12 per can.

While the Registry marvels at your entrepreneurial undertaking, as well as human gullibility, we herewith inform you that the Registry has reconsidered its approval based on the changing understanding of Dark Matter. Together with recent revelations regarding Dark Energy, these hypothetical elements have been outlined and can no longer be considered 'intangible.'

With the advent of aforesaid tangibility, it is with regret that we must inform you that the approval of ownership by this Registry is rendered null and void.

On a personal note, this Registry officer offers thanks for the can of Dark Matter which perched on an office shelf for the past several years and which remained sealed as per instructions that once opened, the Dark Matter contained within would become 'light' and escape. This gift represented one of the few tangibly kind acts of gratitude experienced in this office. Registry guidelines regarding the retraction of Intangibility status dictated that the can be confiscated and destroyed. The confiscation was carried out with concurrent mockery of certain goulash stains as well as the presence of dried goulash at the neck and ear of a Registry officer. Such is the harshness of the tangible world.

August 3, 2015 4:37 p.m.

Dear Non-Registrant,

We herewith issue our third and final cease-and-desist order and request that you no longer lay claim to and attempt to levy fees upon the "Joy felt upon catching the first snowflake of winter on one's tongue," as well as the "Bliss arising from the first breeze of spring after winter," and the "Intoxicating fear of change."

The Registry has neither tolerance nor appreciation for attempts to exploit intangible emotions for profit, and suggests the Non-Registrant explore these interests through more legitimized avenues of exploitation, such as advertising, entertainment or politics.

We will not countenance another image of money being demanded from children in the snow, couples on park benches, or Rick Santorum.

It's been a long day, shirts have been ruined, loyal Registry officers threatened and mocked, valuable items destroyed, and no lunch except for dried goulash on a necktie and a couple of sodden kifli.

Signed in Tangibility,
Registry Officer 431

Contributor Biographies



Luka Watts is a student from England. He is sunburnt. He thinks he contains multitudes, but isn't entirely sure what multitudes are. He hasn't wet himself since he was ten. He tells his mother he shouldn't have to get a job because he is a creative person and can't be constrained by society's boxes. He is nineteen years old and lives in a small town called Falmouth, where he eats pasta and feels what he needs to. He has work in *WITH* and *Zoo Zine*.



Natalie De Paz is a writer of Cuban descent who was born and raised in South Florida. She currently resides on the East End of Long Island with her two awesome housemates and the world's cutest cat, Gracie. Lately, she's been working on learning all the sub-genres of metal, and has successfully distinguished thrash metal, heavy metal, and death metal from each other.



Nicola Davison lives in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, where she delights in the sound of the daily noon cannon, announcing that it's time to eat again. When not typing, or wiping dog hair from her pants, she shoots people from behind shrubs (with a camera) and (sometimes) gets paid for it. Her first novel is being published by Vagrant Press in the Fall of 2018; its working title is *Dead Reckoning*. Find more of her words on [Medium](#).



Military historian **Marc DeSantis** is the author of the Punic Wars naval history *Rome Seizes the Trident* and *A Naval History of the Peloponnesian War*. His articles have appeared in a wide range of international publications including *MHQ*, *Military History*, *Ancient Warfare*, *Military History Monthly*, *History of War*, *Medieval Warfare*, *All About History*, and *Ancient History Magazine*. In addition to his historical writings, Marc is the author of the science fiction novel *The Memnon Incident* and several short stories, including *Across Alien Seas*, *A Knight of Mars*, *Imperial Colleague*, and *By the Blade*.

Marc also thinks he has a sense of humor.



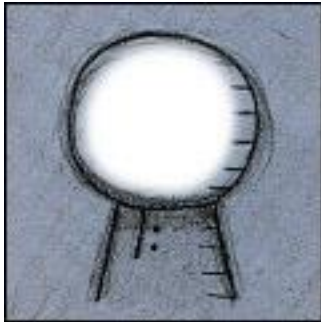
Fred Coppersmith is a writer and editor from the mean suburban streets of New York. His fiction has appeared in *Andromeda Spaceway's Inflight Magazine*, *Mythic Delirium*, and *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, among others. He publishes the quarterly zine *Kaleidotrope* and can usually be found nattering about something or other on Twitter @unrealfred.



Penny Peyser is a writer/actress/documentary filmmaker living in Los Angeles. She's been going steady with iambic pentameter for some time now and is showing no signs of straying. She recently began a video series called "Sonnets from Suburbia" on YouTube and hopes you'll check it out. She's been published in *Lighten Up Online*, *Chantwood Magazine*, *Rats Ass Review*, *Blessed Creation*, and *White Ash Literary Magazine*. Follow her if you desire @penpeyser.



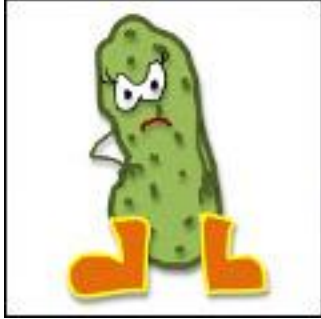
Christina Scott is a graduate of the MFA writing program at Sarah Lawrence College. Her work has appeared in *Spry Literary Magazine*, *Maudlin House*, *The Quotable*, *Animal Literary Magazine*, and *Riding Light*. "Inhuman" was nominated for Best of the Net 2016.



John Meyers' poems, stories, and essays have appeared in a wide variety of publications. Over the past year his work has been featured in *The Louisville Review*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Fiction Southeast*, and *Thrice Fiction*, among others. He has work forthcoming in *Misfit Magazine*, *Hoot Review*, and *The Jellyfish Review*. John lives in Maryland and can be found online at <http://www.johnmeyersauthor.com>



Wendy Garnier is a writer and humorist. During her college-days she studied psychology by day and performed improvisational, sketch, and stand-up comedy at shows and festivals by night. In 2015, she thought: "I should quit my job as a psychologist and write funny stories instead." That was a terrible idea, but increased her life happiness with approximately 26.3%. Follow Wendy on [Facebook](#) or visit her [website](#).



Laura Garrison is creeping slowly southward like a fungus that subsists on caffeine and gummy bears. She wrote a dissertation on spiders in American literature and is the online editor of *Jersey Devil Press*.



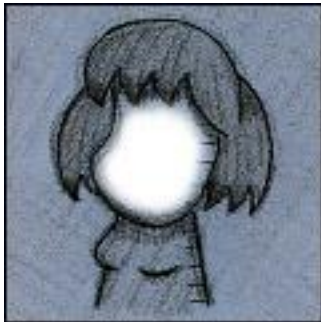
After her nomadic twenties, **Alison McBain** settled in Connecticut, where she is raising three girls and her husband. She is an award-winning author with more than sixty short stories and poems published, including work in *Litro*, *The Aironaut*, and *FLAPPERHOUSE*. When not writing, she practices origami meditation and draws all over the walls of her house with the enthusiastic help of her kids.



Rachel Cassidy was raised semi-feral on the back of a horse in the Rocky Mountains and now writes from Salt Spring Island, BC. Her short fiction has appeared (or will be appearing soon) in *Pseudopod*, *The Molotov Cocktail*, *Jersey Devil Press*, *Cat on a Leash Review*, and others. She is online at www.facebook.com/readrachelcassidy.



Patrick Ritter grew up on a small lake in Wisconsin. On the Fourth of July, fireworks were not only allowed, but encouraged. This was obviously fantastic for young boys, but also great for fire departments around the state that drew holiday pay for various conflagrations. In 1974 he went to California for the summer and never left. Because of the dry summers, fireworks are, unfortunately, left to the municipalities. Patrick wants to give special thanks to his brother Jack and his great poem *Blowing Up Things*, which gave Patrick the inspiration for "Light Fuse And Retire Quickly."



P.K. Read's work has appeared in *Necessary Fiction*, *Bartleby Snopes*, *Jersey Devil Press*, *The Feminist Wire*, and elsewhere. She writes on www.champagnewhisky.com from a remote corner of France, where she is trying to get to the end of all the cheese.