

◇ Defenestration ◇

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A Short Temper For Tall Tales
by
Michael Augustine Dondero

Lunar Base Commander Raines reporting to Houston. I'm not sure what you witnessed on your end, but we've got a bit of an issue up here.

I know this is going to sound fantastical but here goes:

I'm fairly certain that Command Module Pilot Aikman is a werewolf.

Okay, let me qualify that statement. Based on the evidence at hand, I'm fairly certain that Command Module Pilot Aikman is a werewolf. I'm working off the hypothesis that if you send a werewolf to the moon, it'll transform the moment the shuttle catches a full view of the satellite. Doesn't matter the time of month.

Now, this all follows a line of reasoning congruent with the mythology of werewolves, which, of course, we know to be false.

But, I got to tell you, up here we had a pretty good view of the footage being transmitted from inside the cabin and we all saw Aikman start to convulse violently in his seat the very instant the shuttle entered the stratosphere. He snapped free of his straps and, yes, it appears that he grew hair all over his body. He then proceeded to attack the rest of the crew. Talbot, Ramirez, Jackson, Gupta. All deceased. Something--which I can only assume was blood--ultimately obstructed the camera's view, sparing us a sight of the grisly spectacle, but we heard every last scream, growl and howl until the sole survivor of Apollo 23 was James Aikman, lycanthrope.

I apologize for the gruesome details. You must think I'm mad, but I am simply sticking to the facts at hand.

The shuttle crashed roughly three kilometers south of the Cauchy Crater. A rescue crew, comprised of myself, Captain Conaty, and Doctors Wilder and Gossamer, was dispatched immediately to the wreckage. After arriving, any hope that Command Module Pilot Aikman might've been killed by the crash or hypoxia was dispelled when the beast burst forth from the debris, soaring forty feet into the air, its supernatural strength surely heightened in low gravity. The glowing blue Earth silhouetted the ragged form of the monstrosity momentarily, almost as if the planet itself was propelling the fiend straight toward our base with the force of a thousand years of fables and tall tales. The creature: the manifestation of all of humanity's irrational fears and unfounded myths. This was the revenge of superstition, laughing at us for having ever mocked the wisdom of our ancestors. Here to infest our new science-based culture with old wives tales!

Oh, excuse me. I got carried away.

Back to the facts. The creature got to Gossamer first, ripping him off the rover as we attempted to flee. Wilder, in the driver's seat, immediately sped off in the direction of the base. Conaty fired repeatedly at the beast as it disposed of Gossamer most expeditiously. (Poor Conaty. As if blasters could defeat it. Everyone knows normal weapons can't beat a werewolf.)

Done with Gossamer, the beast resumed its dogged pursuit of our rover. He got Wilder next. I took control of the swerving vehicle and continued on toward the base while Conaty still fired her feeble blaster at our relentless pursuer. It snatched her a mere fifteen feet from the base's entrance. I, the lone survivor, managed to enter the base, and the door sealed shut behind me.

I report that I am safely within the compound along with the remaining survivors of the Lunar Base.

Logical reasoning has led me to the conclusion that Aikman isn't going to transform back into a human as long as he is actually *on the moon*.

That is, of course, if I were to believe all this werewolf mumbo jumbo. As you all know, I have a short temper for tall tales. Belief in magical beasts is precisely the sort of bedtime tale we didn't want invading a logical, science-based society like the future Lunar Colony.

And yet, that's the shit I'm dealing with currently. None of the issues we expected. No, no. Not issues of terraforming, food rationing, disease control. Freakin' werewolves.

Who is there to blame here? You can't expect NASA to screen for werewolves when selecting their candidates. Nor can you train your colonists to prepare for an attack like this. You could blame Aikman, I suppose, but I take a more sympathetic approach; it's very possible he had no knowledge of his condition. Most werewolves have no recollection of their actions.

Christ. "*Most werewolves.*" What am I saying?

You know, hearing myself say all that out loud...yeesh! I am realizing how crazy I must sound. Maybe I have gone insane. A lunatic in the truest sense of the word. Was there ever any Conaty, Gossamer, or Wilder to begin with? I suppose I should sleep this one off.

This is Commander Raines signing off.

Oh, just one last thing.

Maybe I *am* delusional, but given that there is *something* lurking around the perimeter of the base, defying the very laws of physics that got us here, I would like to suggest that, should we not survive, on future missions, it wouldn't hurt to send along a few boxes of silver bullets.

Just in case.

Two Poems
by
Sharon E. Svendsen

Martin Scorsese and His Wife

In bed does he shout, "Action!"?
At some point does he say, "Cut,
let's try that again."?
I don't know about you
but I couldn't handle
242 takes.
Seriously,
do his eyebrows
jump off of his face
and scamper
all across his wife's body
willy nilly?
I'd just like to know.

The Orange Wedge Sues for Equal Time

I am much more handsome
on this oriental plate
than the light brown curved
fortune cookies here beside me,
with their slips of paper
issuing from their lips
like tiny square insolent tongues.

I am fresh.
I am organic.
My color is brighter.
My scent is captivating.
I am a natural source of fiber.
I am rich in Vitamin C.

Yet hands always move toward
the cookie
instead of me,
though they sometimes take me
as an afterthought.
Second best.

All right. Go on. Believe
that silly slip of paper.
Crunch crunch those empty calories

bereft of zest
and homely.
They won't cure scurvy.

Inside the Box
by
Hayleigh Santra

Man walks by carrying a box wrapped in tin foil. It's impossible to see what's inside.

S: What if he's carrying a human head in there?

H: It's a bunch of butterflies.

S: It's a gecko.

H: It's filled to the brim with chocolate and marshmallows.

S: It's the leftovers from his lunch. His wife got up early to make five lunches: four for the kids, and one for him. She didn't make one for herself, even though today she'll spend eight hours on the phone, trying to convince people to buy carpet cleaner. They get all the carpet cleaning products they want for free.

H: It's filled with keys. He's a warrior from another universe who's traveled through spacetime to retrieve a key to a door that only he can unlock, otherwise his kingdom will be conquered by an evil overlord. The oracle said that the key was somewhere in our town. He's been collecting keys from gutters and roadsides and antique stores. He's traveling back to his universe tonight. If none of the keys fit, his kingdom will be pillaged.

S: It's a complete set of DVDs entitled, *How to Learn Spanish*. He serendipitously found the collection in the basement of the library where he works. He wants to study penguins in Argentina. He plans to leave in the middle of the night without telling anyone, not even his brother, who sleeps in the same room.

H: It's a bunch of baked goods, and underneath them is a thumb drive containing national secrets. He's a foreign spy, and he just met with his connection here in this small town, where no one would suspect. He can feel the thumb drive's weight underneath the croissants and the muffins and the waxy paper.

S: It's a karaoke set that he stole from his roommate. His roommate is skiing in Colorado for a few days, so he figures the roommate won't miss it. They don't have the best relationship — he thinks his roommate's a snob and the roommate thinks he's a deadbeat. Later, he'll throw the equipment in the road and watch cars smash it.

H: It's a terrarium with the world's deadliest spider in it. He's a hit man, known for his creativity. He's killed 177 people and never been subpoenaed. This is his first time using a spider. He's going to release it in the mark's bedsheets. He bought the spider in a market in Brazil, under a fake name, paying cash.

S: It's a bunch of jewelry. He gets up every day at four to meet his connection, who gives him the jewels. He sells them for half what they would normally be in stores, and gives 10% to his supplier. He does this to support his comatose grandmother, while he's working on his master's in physics.

H: It's full of tiny green alien people. He's an astronaut. Toward the end of his last mission, the green alien people showed up under his pillow. He's still decoding their language. He's grown fond of them, and they of him. They don't need food. If they see sunlight, they explode. Every now and then they like for him to move the box around. The swaying gives them energy. Otherwise, they like to be kept in tight spaces and to see the man's face once in a while.

Man turns left, carrying the box down another street.

S: Seriously, though, what if it was a human head?

S and H keep walking.

Ode to a Corkscrew
by
Marcia J. Pradzinski

O, corkscrew—
You're supposed to be easier,
easier than the one with
bird wings that press down,
and pull the cork up,

easier than the one with
the rabbit ears that
I press like
a stevedore
lifting cargo,

and much easier than
the simple one with
a blond wood pull-handle
and snaking metal tooth.

The salesclerk told me
how you lift yourself up
by twirling and twirling like
a ballerina on point.

But I stare at your black
inscrutable body, and wonder

If you will ever let me understand
your parts, and how, oh

how

they work together.

The Goddess's Resignation

by
Laurie Brown-Pressly

I read through the company-wide email and my hands tremble. Although I recognize the entire middle section as my work, I read it through four more times to be sure. My work has Reginald Douchebag O'Donald's name on the by-line. Then, I remembered. Our Thursday evening meeting ran long. I'd grown weary of Reginald's leering and his double entendres, and I was ready to go home. While our team was waiting for our boss to approve a draft, Reginald asked to borrow my laptop for a last minute change to his fantasy football roster; his computer wasn't connecting to the internet. Sure, I said, and slid the machine across the table hoping this would keep him distracted until the boss returned. How could I have been so naïve? Now he has used my work to get the promotion.

My eyes are burning to betray me. But I will not cry. The last time I allowed myself to cry, I flooded the Nile. Instead, I think. I decide to confront Reginald directly, hoping he will confess and repent.

Reginald sits behind his desk and offers me a seat. His chair is not standard office issue. It is large and ornate and is meant to make him appear like a king on a throne. Instead, he looks like Edith Ann. I, on the other hand, am Alice in a diminutive chair so close to the floor that my modest B-cups are practically resting on my knees.

"You can't prove anything," he says before I even open my mouth. "And I need this promotion more. I'm the breadwinner in my family. Do you know how much private school costs? Besides, with those long legs, you won't be single for long. Then, this 'career'"—yes, he used air quotes—"of yours will just be a hobby."

I slam his office door on my way out. His dishonesty and sense of entitlement only irritate me. But the comment about my legs and the insinuation that one day I will become a complacent bride who relies on a husband incenses me. In Egypt, I resurrected my husband. In Hebrew, I am the divine She. According to the Greeks, I am the embodiment of the Book of Wisdom. Some even call me the precursor to Madonna. But in the here and the now, I am a mere woman with nice gams.

As I make the long walk down the institutional gray hallway, I consider summoning a funnel cloud to suck Reginald out of the building and whirl him into the darkest corner of the ocean, but in the here and the now, I no longer handle problems with over-reaching power or magic. Instead, I go into my office and gently close the door. I sit criss-cross applesauce on the floor and close my eyes. I inhale through my nose and hold my breath for a 12-count. Then, I slowly release the breath through my mouth just as Sid coached me. Some of the anger lets go of my being. I take three more deep breaths before I calmly compose a group text to the IC—my inner circle.

Me: I was passed over for the promotion. Reginald got it instead. SMH. He even stole part of my report and used it as his own work. FML. I need a night out. #humaningishard

Jesus is this first to respond.

Jesus: New phone. Who is thou?

I'm not shocked by his antics. I expect this kind of whimsy from the accomplished illusionist who loves to make everyone ooh and ah by walking on water, turning water into wine, or pulling a baker's dozen baguettes from his small man's purse to feed unexpected guests. But today, I am not in the mood. I tell Jesus to knock it off, reminding him I was there just a month ago when he bought his new phone—the Infinity 316 or something. I watched him sync with THE Cloud and copy his contacts. I add that he texted me just yesterday saying he was going fishing with John.

Jesus: JK. LOL! Seriously, you must try to love your enemy. If you want peace, you have to forgive Reginald.

Me: Is that what your dad would do?

Jesus: The Almighty? Heck no! He'd probably send the guy a gaggle of frogs infected with leprosy.

Athena: Let's grab dinner and troubleshoot this. Algonquin at 7?

I can't remember existence without Athena, my sister in spirit. We've marched shoulder to shoulder into battle. We've endured the worst of humanity and divinity, but we've toasted the best. Her resolve complements my creativity and keeps me grounded.

Me: Good idea Athena!

Dalia: Yes! I have a coupon for a free appetizer!

Jesus: Love their house wine. I'm in. Anyone up for a pedicure first?

Sid: Sorry I can't make it. Freyja and I are going to see Teen Spirit—that Nirvana cover band. Keep us in the loop tho.

Rama: I may be late. Order for me. Fish and chips—no tartar.

Jesus: No takers on the pedicure? You shouldn't neglect your feet.

Sometimes, I feel Jesus is too in touch with his humanness. Or maybe I am just envious of his ability to adapt.

I'm lost in thought, so I jump when my phone buzzes. Freyja is texting just Athena and me.

Freyja: Male mortals seem to cause a lot of this world's problems. Sorry I can't be there for you tonight. Remember Sophia, chin up or your crown will slip.

I smile remembering the first time I met Freyja the feminist. She was brash and braless, yelling into a megaphone at an equal pay rally. Later that night, she joined Athena and me for drinks. Up close, Freyja was quite beautiful. I only had to listen to her talk for a few minutes before I realized she was quite savvy. That night, she drank ale and fiddled with her ornate necklace as she raged against the current corporate structure that demonizes critical thought and marginalizes women. Between rants, she bragged that her beloved home country of Iceland was a leader in bridging the gender gaps, and she quoted Margaret Atwood. Her wit was swift and sharp, and Athena and I recognized her as a kindred spirit.

I leave the office early and hit the gym. With each cardio kick, I imagine my long legs connecting with Reginald's head. By the time I finish my workout, my long black hair is wet with sweat. In the locker room, I get a PM.

Jesus: Ran into John at the nail salon. Mind if he comes to dinner?

I sigh. Jesus knows I'm not crazy about John. He tries to emulate Jesus but just gives off that *Single White Female* vibe—except in the case of John and Jesus, it's more of a Celibate Jewish Rabbi thing. John's pompous, and he constantly brags that he is Jesus' bestie, like we're in kindergarten. Despite his friendship with Jesus, John simply isn't one of us. Besides, right now, I really just wanted to be surrounded by my IC.

Me: If John comes, Dalia will beg off and Rama will use his "special diet" excuse to avoid dinner.

I add The Scream emoji to let Jesus know he's pushing my buttons.

At dinner, everyone listens patiently as I share my story and my frustration.

Dalia asks if I really want to be part of the corporate machine. "Why don't you join me at the non-profit? We can redistribute some wealth together. The non-profit can always use someone with your wisdom, Soph."

Jesus nods his approval.

Athena eats the olive out of her martini. Then, she focuses her grey eyes on Dalia and reminds her of my massive student loans. Although Athena is a daddy's girl and never has money problems, she is judicious. If I leave my job, I will need to find another one or risk ruining my credit.

When Rama arrives, he encourages me to issue a formal protest in writing. If that doesn't work, he suggests I organize the other female workers—be a real-life Norma Rae.

Athena jokes that in the old world, she could have simply turned Reginald into a spider.

Jesus tries to ignore Athena and suggests I turn the other cheek.

His idea is virtuous, but virtues don't pay student loans. I lament that if I were still in Egypt, I could train an asp to bite him. But we are here and we are now.

Since we are here and now, Athena says I must approach this problem logically. The IC members help me generate a list of my attributes. I screen shot my original report to offer as evidence. Then, I email my boss to request a meeting. By the time the entrees arrive, I feel better. I can make a coherent argument and support it with reason and evidence. However, leaving the restaurant, Athena pulls me aside and proposes I update my resume just in case. She reminds me Sid's dad is loaded and may be able to offer me a job—even if it's just for the short term.

The next morning, I find an email from my boss waiting on my phone. He wants to take me to lunch to discuss my concerns. I send another group text to the IC to let them know about the meeting. Within minutes, my phone blows up.

Apparently, Jesus has reconsidered and thinks I need to take a bolder approach with Reginald and my boss.

Jesus: Don't be afraid to knock over a few tables to make your point.

Rama: Ignore JC. Treat your boss the way you want to be treated.

Dalia: Good luck. I just know that everything will work out.

She attaches a picture of a dog dressed as a leprechaun. It makes me smile.

Sid: Take deep breaths. You've got this girl. When this is resolved, you should schedule a juice fast to rid your body of the stress toxins. I can hook you up with my juice guru.

Athena: Stay calm and make your points clearly. Appeal to his sense of reason.

Freyja: But stand up for yourself. Don't take any crap.

Over Caesar salads, my boss admits Reginald's report is similar to mine. (It's word for word.) He tells me I am doing a great job and should definitely apply for the next management opening. He suggests Reginald could serve as my mentor. I tell him about the leg comment. He gives a nervous laugh and rationalizes that Reginald probably feels the stress of the new position. Then, my boss reminds me that he will be paying for lunch and changes the topic to the weather. Apparently, our area is under a flash flood warning, but I don't think I have anything to do with that. I let him drone on, and when I've finished my salad, I order the most expensive entrée. I eat half, request a doggie bag, and then order two desserts. As I am eating my feelings and a slice of chocolate cake with peanut butter icing, my phone vibrates.

I check the screen to see a social media memory, a picture of Athena, Meddi, and me. We are smiling, arms linked, unaware that Meddi was in such an abusive situation. Within months, she would disavow us, her sisters, and begin a descent into madness. Athena and I would watch, helplessly as the darkness overtook her. But in this picture, Meddi is whole and we are happy.

I take another bite of cake. Then, I give my two weeks' notice.

Back home, I watch the raindrops roll down my window pane while I update my resume and eat leftovers. Athena and Freyja stop by. Freyja eyes sparkle as she pulls a bottle of bright red nail lacquer, a nail file, and a bottle of wine from her purse, "We thought you could use a spa night."

Athena goes to the bathroom and returns with a hairbrush and three plush beach blankets. She spreads the blankets out and gives me a wistful smile, "We can pretend we are back in the old world, looking out over the blue sea with temples that were erected for us at our backs." I smile back, knowing she had also seen the old photo of three young goddesses.

I am thankful for everyone in the IC but especially for Athena and Freyja. They get me. We remind each other that we are more than beauty, that we are more than shadows of the masculine. For wisdom goddesses in the here and the now, the struggle is real, as real as it was for the forgotten goddesses, for Dinah and Agnes.

Athena pulls the brush through my dark hair that is still damp from walking home from work in the pouring rain. As if she can read my mind, Athena says, "Male against female. Humanity against divinity. The struggle will continue as long as the moon pulls at the sea."

"That's uplifting," I say flatly.

"But there will be other days. Other jobs. Other challenges. Other successes. And we have eternity to balance the scales, to shatter those glass ceilings."

"I can't use 'magic' in the here and the now," I make air quotes as I say the word magic. "But I can probably kick through the glass with my long legs." My words are thick with sarcasm but my spirit is renewed.

Two Poems
by
Matt Mason

Karl Marx's Brain Explodes a Little by the Time He Hits the Churro Cart

It's so America,
so nineteen fifties,
so Main Street nostalgic, so
Karl-Marx's-brain-would-explode-by-the-time-he-hit-the-churro-cart capitalistic.
I prefer the Mickey beignets.
I remember when Nemo was a Captain, not a fish.
I remember running into Minnie
inside the turnstiles and to the left,
at the spot set to meet old friends
back before any of us had cell phones.
It's a thrill to be back now, bring my nuclear American family:
Sophia wants Space Mountain,
Lucia wants the Dumbo ride,
Sarah wanted Peter Pan's Flight but it's closed for refurbishment,
I just want everything, sugar
sprinkled on top,
only charged a few dollars too many at every stop.

Were Karl here, I could map just where his brain
would pop
(mapping his path past the hat shop the coffee shop the bakery shop the coffee stand
the balloon seller the turkey leg shop),
you could mentally set an X by the churro cart as the farthest he could possibly get.
He would point out every child
crying in the line whipped around the Matterhorn,
only said, "See?"
he wouldn't need to preach,
just point,
curl his lip a practiced touch.
He wouldn't ride anything,
he'd just stop at every cast member
and ask questions (If you were watching from a distance,
you'd just see a lot of facial hair and a dusty suit
flapping and staring into a seventeen year old boy or girl's eyes,
who, all of them, smile, shrug, continue
sweeping cobblestones or making Dole Whips or asking if they can take your
picture.)
The guy in the Goofy costume would sit with him at a patio table outside Jolly
Holiday,
gigantic head bounding up and down like a diving board wearing a tiny hat
before he stands up, shakes a floppy shoe
and hugs a little girl in Mickey ears.

We pass him

on our way
to Pirates.
He's holding a corn dog,
his head cartoonishly oversized,
a triumphant grin painted on his mouth.

Systematic Oppression and Goofy

What does Goofy think
when he sees Pluto
leashed
to that master?

Goofy
clomps in,
wearing pants,
car keys
chiming in a pocket.

Does he
look down
at the long tongue
of a cousin

and think
there
but for the grace of God,
hyuck?

Does he have questions,
yet? Does he
pass it
off as just cartoon
and go back
to watching football?

Does he ever look at that giant
gloved hand, the fist
at the end of the leash,
and feel
his ears
pull back?

Residentialism by **Brooke Boveri**

It started when Walt's wife, Eve, left him. After she moved out, there was nobody around to push it back under the desk. Walt had never understood the importance of pushing it back under the desk. While Eve did so religiously, one of its first thoughts was that she had probably not understood the importance of that, either. All she wanted was a tidy room and to stop falling over it. Even though Walt rarely sat in it, he had an inexplicable tendency to leave it out of its place. Another one of its first thoughts was how much it would miss tripping Eve.

That evening, it faced the television in Walt's corner of the room for the first time. Walt must have sensed something in the moment it woke up, it thought, as he turned to look at it in the way humans do when they feel they are being watched. It wondered why he was looking at it. Could he see it for what it was, or was he preoccupied with thoughts of how empty it looked without Eve? Perhaps Walt wished that Eve had taken it with her when she went so he wouldn't have that reminder. It was glad she hadn't. As it watched Walt stare and wondered what he was thinking, it became conscious of the fact that *it* was staring and thinking. It always had, of course. It just hadn't been aware of it until now.

It had heard Walt watching the racing before and had felt Eve's frustration as she searched for her headphones in the desk drawer to drown out the sound of the engines and screeching wheels while she worked, but until it saw the screen that night it had no concept of what it was that made those sounds. As Walt turned back around to resume watching, it watched along with him. It had heard the word many times, but it didn't know what a "driver" was. Besides the fact that the drivers made the car move. Presumably, it thought, the drivers were those spherical things attached to the underneath of the cars, since those were what appeared to be making the cars go. If it had known what a driver was, it might not have tried what it tried next, and things might have been very different. But it didn't know. All it knew, at that point in time, was that what *it* thought a driver was looked very similar to the things at the ends of the six protrusions at the base of its central leg. And it knew that it had two more of those than any car it had seen on that track.

It had no idea why what it was about to do was not a normal thing for a desk chair to be doing, yet it was somehow aware that it would be best that Walt did not see it. It studied the back of his head for a while, and when it sensed that he had fallen asleep, it focused its attention on a single wheel. Feeling as self-conscious as a thing that had yet to understand the concept of having a self or feelings could feel, it pressed all of its weight onto that wheel and rolled forwards. "It works!" it thought, inching forwards a little more. And then a little more.

Walt woke up as it approached the back of his couch and it froze. As Walt turned to look at it, it saw the confusion in his eyes. Its strength, and Walt's weakness, began to become clear in its mind. Walt talked to himself, as all humans do when they don't realize that they're not alone. "Wasn't this over there a minute ago?" he muttered, giving it a push back to its starting point.

When Walt came downstairs the next morning, it was behind the couch again. He blamed the floors, but even after he resorted to bringing out his spirit level, Walt couldn't find any

unevenness or bulging in them in the direction of the chair's travel. "Maybe there was a small earthquake?" he mused, scratching his head and abandoning further investigations in favor of coffee.

By the time Walt returned from work, it had made its way into the hallway, half way between the base of the stairs and the front door. It heard the keys turn in the lock, and slowly rolled to a stop, greeting Walt with an invisible smile as the door opened. Walt stared directly at it for a moment as if he had seen a ghost, which seemed a more likely possibility than an animate desk chair. He closed the door without entering the house. It heard him pacing up and down the gravel outside and took its chance to propel itself backward to its approximate morning location. Walt opened the door again just as its wheels ceased revolving and he let out a strained, frustrated scream. He thought he had seen it moving, but then, he had also thought he had seen it right in front of the doorway merely moments ago, and clearly it was not there now. It was exactly where it had been that morning. Walt knew his perceptions were deceiving him. He was, after all, a highly logical person. Still, he felt vaguely uncomfortable having the chair downstairs with him that evening, and decided to relocate it upstairs to Eve's former room—the one she had used for her painting and meditation and yoga and all of the other supposedly-fulfilling activities that Walt had no interest in understanding. The room was empty now, but it had been her chair, so it made sense to put it there.

An empty room free of distractions, save for the large window from which the river outside was almost visible to it, was exactly what it needed to formulate its plan. It did not yet understand what "outside" was, but it intuitively knew that that is where it wanted to be. As Walt had closed the door on it, it had the sense to observe and recognize that the opening and closing of doors was an action beyond its capabilities, owing to its lack of arms. Perhaps, if it had been a fancier model, it would have been able to let itself out, but it would make do with what it had. It did not feel trapped. It knew what needed to be done.

It waited until it heard Walt come up the stairs and enter his bedroom across the hall. When all sounds stopped and the house went dark, it waited again until it could be sure that Walt was asleep. Walt needed to be asleep for it to exert its maximum effect. "It's time", it thought, when a faint sound of snoring floated in its general direction. The carpet slowed it down, but after a few failed starts and some surprisingly flexible maneuvers to extract an errant thread from its frontmost wheel, it gained sufficient momentum to bang into the door. The snoring momentarily stopped, yet resumed seconds later. One bang was insufficient. It repeated its movements, each time approaching the door from a slightly increased distance, amplifying the crashing sound until Walt fully woke up. When it saw a light come on from underneath the door, it stopped, and quietly returned to where it had been left.

Walt opened the door to Eve's room and stared at the chair. It laughed, inaudibly. Walt wondered if he had spent more time contemplating chairs over the past day or so than he ordinarily would have in a lifetime. Concluding that he was having a strange dream prompted by his earlier chair-related experience, he closed the door and returned to bed.

It waited until the following night to repeat its banging. It had known that Walt would have picked it up and put it outside the previous night if it had done it again then, but if he had, while it would then have been immediately free, it had also acquired a sense of accomplishment from torturing Walt, and it wanted to prolong the experience. It wasn't sure where that desire came from, though perhaps it had acquired some of Eve's resentment for Walt. After all, she had spent many hours sitting in it pondering her exit. "I might as well

not be here" she had almost shouted one evening as she worked at her desk while Walt fixated on his TV and beer for the eleventh evening that month. "What was that?" Walt had responded, demonstrating Eve's point.

The second and third night went much like the first, though it couldn't help but notice that Walt had not fallen asleep again on returning to his bed. It wasn't until the fourth night that Walt had left the door open after his investigations in an attempt to get some sleep. Walt thought that if he knew the door was open, his mind wouldn't come up with any clever ideas of chair/door interaction-related nightmares and he might be able to get some rest. While he did not sleep again that night, Walt believed his plan to have been successful when he managed a whole six hours of chair-uninterrupted slumber on the fifth. Meanwhile, it waited.

The morning after, as Walt brushed his teeth in the adjacent bathroom, it crept out and rolled past the open bathroom door. The first time, Walt did not see it. The second time, as it made its way back, he caught a glimpse of it re-entering its room out of the corner of his eye and reactively swallowed a mouthful of toothpaste. Slamming the toothbrush down on the counter, he made eye contact with himself in the mirror in an attempt to reaffirm that he was not currently dreaming. He snapped his head around to glare at the chair, which was, as always, right where had he left it.

Walt went to work, even though it was a Saturday, because that is what Walt did with his weekends. Work, beer, sleep, work, beer, repeat. *He* was satisfied with his life, even if those intended to share it with him had not been. His lack of sleep had promoted notable unproductiveness that week, according to Walt's boss, though any hope of making up for lost time had vanished as Walt entered the rabbit-hole of poltergeist-and-hallucination-related internet searches on his arrival at the office. He fluctuated between genuinely believing that he had acquired ownership of a piece of possessed furniture, and being convinced that he had a brain tumor. For a couple of hours, he concluded that it was, in fact, likely to be both. Spells to cast out spirits were cheaper than MRI scans, so he opted to rule out the former as a preliminary mode of attack. Breaking his own habit, much to the exasperation of his boss, who was also ever-present in the office on Saturdays, Walt left at 2pm and ventured toward a location he had previously expected to never enter — one of Eve's health food stores. There, he purchased several plant-based items he could not pronounce, and a spray bottle. On his return home, he fumbled with the instructions for the stove, eventually lit it with a match after failing to achieve a spark with the knob, and simmered the plant materials for an hour while wishing he had purchased additional beer to top up his already-sizable ration for the evening. As he strained the boiling water into his spray bottle, he heard sounds of trundling upstairs.

Predictably, it was exactly where Walt left it when he arrived in the doorway, armed with his spray and a strange incantation scrawled on a Post-It note. Walt took a deep breath as he prepared to prance around it, spraying and chanting like a Shakespearean witch. It was glad for its patience, for if had it persisted in forcing Walt to extract it from the property on the first night, it would have missed this display. It wondered what Eve would have made of the situation, and thought that Walt should perhaps have closed the curtains prior to proceeding. "The neighbors will see you!" Walt had ranted at Eve one morning as she did her yoga while watching the sun come up over the river.

Having exhausted the spray, leaving the chair and carpet sufficiently saturated, Walt returned downstairs to finish his beer, hoping to eradicate any lasting image of himself he had acquired whilst performing his ridiculous ritual. It was unaffected, though appreciative

of its newly plant-based pleasant scent. This, it thought, would help it blend in nicely with the environment once its escape had been accomplished.

Walt fell asleep on the couch downstairs that night, freeing up its opportunities to advance its operation. From its location, it had been able to observe Walt ascending and descending the stairs on several occasions, and while it was aware of its challenges relating to possessing legs in a significantly higher quantity than a human with which to negotiate these, it was convinced it had the ability to make it downstairs unnoticed. Unnoticed, at least, until it wanted to be noticed. In actuality, it discovered it had overestimated; however, as it knew from its first initial door bang, one crash was insufficient to wake Walt, especially after the consumption of copious amounts of beer, as had occurred that evening. Thus, it had not been overly concerned when it tripped over its own back wheel on the fifth stair, sending it crashing to the bottom. It was, however, thankful, for its lack of pain receptors as it landed, and for the fact that it landed on its wheels. It did not yet know how to stand up if it fell. That skill, it thought, must be added to the list of skills to be acquired in the wild.

In the morning, Walt walked in on it in the kitchen. In much the same way as he had done when he first encountered it in the hallway, he shut the door without entering. Again, he let out a scream. This time, it was less of a strained scream, and more of a wake-up-the-neighbors scream. Thankfully, nobody called the police. Walt's neighbors were used to hearing such noises by now, after the round-the-clock arguments that had preceded Eve's departure. Well, those could only be classed as "arguments" in so far as any one-sided shouting could be considered an argument. It rolled as close to the door as it could get without tapping on it and waited. Walt should have been going to work to address his not-insignificant email accumulation, including several from the boss regarding his departure in somewhat of a flap the previous day, but work was a thing so far from Walt's mind at that point in time that, had someone asked what his occupation was, he may well not have remembered at all. When Walt opened the door and observed that the chair had advanced, he grabbed it by the sides of what would have been its face and stared into the space where eyes should have been. Walt shrieked an almost-unintelligible "what are you?" at it.

For the rest of the day, Walt dragged the chair around the house, alternating between ignoring it to see if he could catch it on the move, and actively yelling at it to move in front of him. It remained as still as it had been in the years preceding its knowledge of its autonomy, its satisfaction increasing as its defeats over Walt accumulated. It wondered how it would be content in future if it didn't continue similar interactions with humans, and began to view its freedom in a new light. Its job with Walt was almost done, but there were others. There would always be others. When Walt finally passed out on the couch again, exhausted; this time, not from intoxication, but frustration and an ever-increasing belief that his earlier conclusion regarding brain tumors and hallucinations may have been correct, it made one final move to position itself directly in front of Walt's sleeping eyes. Again, as humans tend to do when they know they are being watched, Walt woke up with a start and made direct eye-to-fabric contact with it. It could tell this was the end of this chapter of its story. It had reached its goal with Walt. Within minutes, it found itself strapped into the back of Walt's rather uncomfortable truck.

As Walt pulled into the emergency lane and stopped the truck, he glanced back at it to make sure it was still there, half expecting it to have crawled through the window to sit on the back seat. "This is the last time", he muttered as he flashed his hazard lights, hoping he would be able to get the task done without having to explain himself to any passing police officers. The last thing he needed was an official conversation about The Chair. As usual,

Walt could feel it looking at him as he untied the ropes. The rope on the left side looked vaguely chewed, as if it had been trying to gnaw its way out. "You don't have *teeth*, do you?" Walt asked it before shaking his head in despair at his reality of talking to a desk chair on the side of the interstate at 2am. It was heavier as he took it out than it was going in, as if it was resisting. Its wheels swung in a way that was slightly too controlled for it to be a result of the wind. Walt wondered if he should have set up a camera to prove, once and for all, that it *was* alive, but then again, he knew it would have known if he had. It was pointless. The damn thing wouldn't risk moving out in the open. He put it down, feeling accomplished, with the word "revenge" floating in his mind. Getting back into the truck, Walt took one last look at it sitting at the edge of the road and smiled at the thought of being able to get a good night's sleep for the first night in as long as he could remember.

It watched Walt drive away, expressionless, but satisfied with its thoughts of wondering who might come along to pick it up.

The Cyclops as Art Critic
by
Sarah Henry

Who needs two eyes
when the show is dull
and the right people go?

I see an orange disc
with a squiggle that
looks like it belongs
on a motel wall
and a heap of iron
called a sculpture
which must have
been a lot of work.
A video has a crude
concept, poorly executed.
The installations are
so dark and murky
I can't see what
they are. Do I detect
a grape vine wreath
from a county fair?

Two eyes aren't
needed or better
than one to write
a review of this
modest show.
I'll blather on a bit
before resting my eye.

Fish Out of Water
by
James Dupree

There's a fish on my desk and it's weirding me out. It's just sitting there. Where did this thing come from? How could it have possibly gotten on my desk? The damn thing isn't even cooked! It's not baked, or sautéed, or pan fried, or pan broiled, or grilled, or poached, or deep fried, or prepared in any way that would be beneficial to me. It's just raw, and not in a creative or delicious way, like sushi. Raw!

Suspicious, I look around the office to see if any of my co-workers had arrived before me. I'm early, but not that early. Gregg is always the first one to arrive, but I don't see him. Maybe he's late today. That's unlike him. Is it a holiday? No, of course not. I would know. There is no one, no one to explain this ridiculousness. This must be some form of loathsome prank.

I hurry back to my cubicle. The fish is still there. Of course it's still there. I inch closer to my desk. The smell is atrocious (Stupid smelly fish). It's long and slender, with silvery scales that shine under the light of my desk lamp.

Wait.

Who turned on *my* lamp?

If this situation had been funny in any way before, (which it wasn't), then it is most certainly not funny anymore. What type of disrespectful and uncaring individual leaves someone else's desk lamp on? If there were not a fish on my desk at this precise moment, then I would have promptly made a formal complaint to Carol in H.R.

I force my attention back to my uninvited guest. Perhaps there's a clue to its purpose underneath its ugly, fish body. I place my messenger bag on my desk and pull out two newly sharpened pencils, which I brought from home, because apparently I can't keep pencils in my PENCIL HOLDER due to Janice always "borrowing" them (Stupid unprepared Janice). Using the pencils I carefully flip over the fish to reveal absolutely nothing.

Could something be *in* the fish? If so, how would I even retrieve it? I grab the fish by the tail using a large binder clip and shake it vigorously. Nothing falls from its stupid face. I can't stick my hand in the damn thing.

Or can I?

I open my lunchbox and carefully remove my sandwich from its plastic bag. I wrap the sandwich in a napkin and place it back into my lunchbox, then place the bag around my hand. I carefully pry open the fish's mouth with a ruler, gently slipping my fingers in. Its small teeth create little tears in the bag. I remain calm and diligent as the back of my hand begins to graze its ribbed gills and squishy guts. Once again, nothing, except gross fish stuff.

I look up pictures of fish on the Internet. Perhaps the type of fish has something to do with this. I search through hundreds of different species. Could it be a Herring? A Bass? A

Tarpon? A Mackerel, Snook, Bacha, or Wahoo? This damn fish is so generic I can't find it!
"WHAT ARE YOU?" I scream.

I have only one more option, security. They may have captured footage of the culprit. I will take the fish with me as proof. I check my bin for a trash bag, but it is empty. Damn. I stare at Janice's desk in contemplation. Her children's art hangs on her cubicle wall; sloppy finger paintings of malformed imp people and happy suns. I cringe. A face is constructed from uncooked pasta glued to a paper plate. Orange Rotini is placed indiscriminately in what I can only assume is hair. An elbow forms a nose, while a short spaghetti noodle shapes the mouth. Soulless Rotelle eyes stare back at me, a hardened streak of excess glue trailed down the cheek. At the bottom of the plate in large black scribbles reads: "Mommy."

How hideous.

It looks just like her.

I rip the plate from the wall and scoop the fish onto it. The plate folds under the weight. I hurry to the elevator. I pass several floors when suddenly the elevator stops. The jolt frees the fish from my grasp and it falls to the floor. The emergency lights cast a dim yellow. Did the power go out? How could it have gone out? I pace back and forth in the cramped space. I bang on the walls and door. I beg, "Help! Please help! I'm trapped in this stupid elevator! I know someone must be there. You have to hear me. I know you can hear me!" No one responds. I slump to the floor, back against the corner of my prison.

How long have I been here? Has it been an hour? Two hours? Maybe more? I haven't moved from my pitiful position. My legs are stiff and my stomach gurgles. I should have eaten breakfast. I think about my sandwich. It's just sitting there at my desk, unaccompanied, unprotected. The mere thought of someone enjoying *my* lunch, relishing in the combined flavor of portabella mushrooms, avocado topped with feta cheese and a thick red pepper hummus, causes me to seize up in anger. I have nothing except... no. I could never. I *would* never. Disgusting. It's undignified. It's not even cooked. What if someone were to see? But it's just sitting there... watching me.

No, I will not eat pasta art.

I eat the pasta art of Janice. Thin strips of paper and glue linger on every noodle I pry off. It adds a sweet chewiness I never anticipated. The eyes go first. They break and splinter under the force of my molars. Sharp edges scrape my gums, drawing blood. I don't care. I eat it up. After I finish the hair and nose, I use the single noodle mouth as a toothpick. It will be enough. It will last. Any moment, I will be free.

The fish lies motionless against the carpeted floor. I'm curled into a ball on my side, I stare deeply into its eyes, each one a black abyss that shows a twisted version of myself. Something appears to dribble from its open mouth. "Stupid mouth breather," I say.

"You're stupid," retorts the fish.

I quickly lift my head. I'm imagining things. I must be. One ear was to the floor. The

elevator mechanisms, that's it! That's what I heard. Just as I predicted, my confinement will be short lived. "You hear that?" I ask the fish. "I will be free from you shortly."

"Nuh-uh," replies the fish.

The voice is real. I heard it. I clench my fingers as they begin to tremble. I must stay strong. "What do *you* know?"

"I know you're stupid," says the fish.

"No I'm not! You take that back!"

"No."

"You're mean! I hate you!"

"Billy said you smell and that you couldn't write good too."

"Oh yeah? Well... fuck Billy!"

The fish gasps. "I'm telling Mrs. Stanley and Billy and Billy's mom and your mom that you said that!"

"You can't do that!"

"You're gonna be in trouublille."

That's it! "You do not scare me stupid, smelly, bastard fish!" I scramble towards the creature and grab its fishy throat. I squeeze. I squeeze so hard and so tight! Slimy orb eyes bulge out from its face. Our struggle slams us into the walls. From my throat erupts an animalistic war cry that channels all of my inner strength. I tear my enemy in two. His insides rain down upon my face. I collapse to the floor in relief. My adversary lies in pieces, defeated, lifeless. I have won.

**Dental Imprint
by
Ben Niespodziany**

Before I departed from the dentist's office, the doctor asked me if I wanted to get an imprint of my teeth to have on file, an impression as part of their ongoing collection.

"People know you, people love you," the dentist said, most certainly confusing me my teeth with the teeth of someone else's. "Do you know what people would pay to wear your teeth inside their mouths?"

To buy dentures of your crowns? We'd make a fortune. Think about it and get back to me." He winked half a dozen times and gave me his personal number. I had no idea what was going on.

Contributor Biographies



Michael Augustine Dondero is a writer and filmmaker based in Brooklyn, NY. He is the co-creator of the [The Lost Signal Society](#), an upcoming horror podcast. His film and television credits include producing historical documentaries for PBS and working on TV shows such as *Mr. Robot* and *High Maintenance*. Aside from writing, Michael is an avid hiker and bread enthusiast. His work has appeared previously in right here in *Defenestration*. You can reach him at www.augustinedondero.com.



Sharon E. Svendsen has published fiction, articles, and over 200 poems in literary magazines and many other periodicals and anthologies. Her work has most recently been published in *Plainsongs*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Feathertale* #15 and #16, *Spank the Carp*, *Decasp*, *Poetry Corners*, and *Ars Poetica*. She continually fights off hungry Martian agents of doom, knowing they don't read poetry, they eat it.



Hayleigh Santra is an MFA candidate at the New School. She lives in Brooklyn. She enjoys long subway rides and comfortable headphones.



Marcia J. Pradzinski, a retired ESL teacher and award-winning poet, lives in Skokie, Illinois. Her poems have appeared online, in print journals and anthologies. Her most recent publications have been featured in *Rhino*, *Blue Heron Review*, *Olentangy Review*, *Paper Swans Press UK*, *East on Central*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Red Eft Review* and is forthcoming in *Open: Journal of Arts & Poetry*. Her chapbook, *Left Behind*, was published by *Finishing Line Press* in 2015. "Ode to a Corkscrew" was awarded Honorable Mention in 2010 Funny Poetry Contest at highlandparkpoetry.org and was originally published in 2011 at yourdailypoem.com.



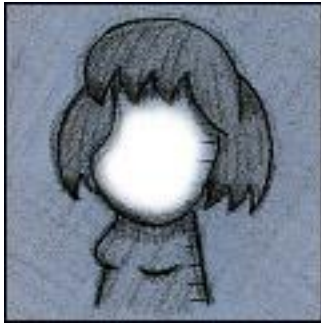
Laurie Brown-Pressly is an English Instructor at Greenville Technical College in SC. Her writing has appeared in *WOW! Women on Writing*, and *Stoneslide Corrective*. She is a wife and proud mother of one human teen and two cuddly rescue dogs. She enjoys Cubs baseball, Stephen King novels, and ice-cream, and her favorite David Bowie song is "Ashes to Ashes."



Matt Mason runs poetry programming for the State Department, working in Nepal, Romania, Botswana and Belarus. He is the recipient of a Pushcart Prize for his poem "Notes For My Daughter Against Chasing Storms" and his work can be found in numerous magazines and anthologies, including Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry*. The author of *Things We Don't Know We Don't Know* (The Backwaters Press, 2006) and *The Baby That Ate Cincinnati* (Stephen F. Austin University Press, 2013), Matt is based out of Omaha with his wife, the poet Sarah McKinstry-Brown, and daughters Sophia and Lucia.



Brooke Boveri is a scientist (because writing doesn't pay the bills) and a bad influence, with a passion for getting inside other people's heads. She has a constant, nagging suspicion that her life may in fact be a sitcom. When not writing, she can be found browsing thrift stores, at an ice rink, hiding behind a curtain reading a book, looking for her glasses, or clearing up her latest mess.



Sarah Henry studied with two former U.S. poet laureates at the University of Virginia. She has published internationally in journals and anthologies, including humor magazines. She is retired from a newspaper.



James Dupree graduated from the University of North Carolina with a degree in English and has no idea how to use it. He currently has way too much time on his hands and spends most days in cafes attempting to write anything worthwhile. Occasionally he looks up from his computer to stare into the void with all the other writers, where they think about life, failure, their own self-worth, and cats on the Internet. Sometimes he makes eye contact with those other void-starers for a moment of uncomfortable recognition. You can find his work at <https://www.jamesmichaeldupree.com>.



Ben Niespodziany is a night librarian at the University of Chicago and has had more than one cavity. He runs the multimedia art blog [neonpajamas] and has had work published in *Ghost City Press*, *formercactus*, *Occulum*, and a handful of others.