

◇ Defenestration ◇

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The Deal
by
Daniel Winn

As an experiment, a very rich man gave me one hundred million dollars, with the stipulation that I'd let him kill me in ten years, about ten years ago. For some reason it kind of slipped my mind. That's how I am: taxes catch me by surprise every year; I forget plans until the last second and rush out of the house; once I left my private jet in the Cayman's because I went back commercial by mistake. The only thing that was on my mind when I got the text reminding me about my agreement was the excruciatingly drawn-out remodeling of the left side of my mansion (when facing the mansion). It was a fairly nice text, as texts about your eventual murder, from your eventual murderer, go.

"Hey, so there's only one more month. Just wanted to give you a heads up. Let me know if you have any questions. -Drew"

I guess I shouldn't call it murder since I agreed to it legally. Maybe 'legally' is the wrong word, but I signed something. It's sort of like a reverse Kevorkian. Killing me when I'm doing the best I've ever been doing. Although I suppose the best I've ever been was certainly before the remodel, and before Trudy left, and before I lost my Patek with the engraving I can't quite remember. But certainly after Drew gave me a hundred million dollars.

They say that lottery winners aren't happier for having won the lottery. That it lasts for a month or two, and then they return to their baseline happiness. That may be true—in fact, I believe that it is. But not in my case. I love having lots of money: it's the most fun I've ever had having anything.

Should I not have taken the deal? Let me point this out: I took it during the recession. Remember the recession? It was 2011, I was unemployed, and my friend Steve had just told me that he didn't want me crashing on his couch anymore, as I had been doing for the past six months, because his girlfriend wanted to move in (not like she would be sleeping on the couch though, so I don't see why I had to leave, but I guess she found my behavior "troubling and unpleasant"). I couldn't find a job and I had been out of work since my manager at Blockbuster caught me stealing DVDs from Blockbuster.

Because of the recession, I had exactly two dollars left, so I went to the convenience store and bought a lottery ticket, because even though people say you have a better chance of getting struck by lightning than winning, at least you have some chance of winning, whereas those condescending assholes are either going to get electrocuted or nothing. Of course I didn't win. I threw the ticket on the ground and stomped on it like life had stomped on me and went on a profane tirade of self-abuse, sprinkling in some stuff about how I hated the universe too. My gesticulations knocked over some Pringles cans which caught Drew's attention as he was on his way to the bathroom while his limo driver put gas in his limo. Just a one-in-a-million kind of thing.

There's two things you might've guessed about Drew, and in both cases you're right. He inherited his massive wealth, and has been wallowing in boredom since birth. Obviously there is something wrong with him that a psychologist should have a word with him about, because he really likes the idea of killing. He admitted to me that he'd killed one person before, and since then desired to do it again, but was afraid of the consequences, which is

where I came in. He came close to being convicted of murder the first time, and he really wanted to avoid that happening.

"People think it's so easy for rich people to get away with murder, but it's actually pretty hard!" he explained. I must've looked aghast, because he told me to stop acting like it was a big deal. "I killed one person," he explained. "It's not like I invented murder. You're acting like I invented murder." And he's actually a vegetarian—bet you didn't guess that.

He explained all of this over lunch, beginning with being a vegetarian, then the rest, because after he calmed me down at the convenience store, he took me out for a burrito.

He didn't want me fleeing, especially now that I had so much money with which to flee, so he had to put a chip in my arm, and hire two guys (Fred, I think, and no idea the name of the other) to watch me twenty-four/seven. Other than that, I had total freedom. He put the money, in a few installments, in a dumpster outside the same convenience store, and I didn't hear from him again until that text. The thing is, between you and me, I still planned to flee. I might as well try, right? Good thing he texted me or I might've forgot.

I could buy two plane tickets. One round trip to Oregon, ostensibly to see my family for one last time, and one one-way to Mongolia, or somewhere. At the airport I'd make a quick dash from the fake flight gate to the real, board the plane, dig the tracker out of my arm with a knife, and go on the run, forever looking over my shoulder, expecting Drew in every shadow.

Then another idea occurred to me. I texted him, "Sorry, I know this isn't the deal, but if you try to kill me, I'll kill myself first (I have bomb), so you'd better not." I got the text ellipses for a while. He clearly did a lot of revising. Finally he said, "Fine, keep the money, live, whatever." Then in another text, "Asshole." So I'm free now, and let me tell you, I love it.

Or wait. Did he just say that so I won't expect it when he does kill me? Shit. Just when I thought this was all so neatly concluded. Fine. I'm going to Mongolia after all. If Drew asks don't say a thing.

Till Tomorrow Night My Love
by
Khaloud Al-Muttalibi

Restless and ready as ever for my night's walk
to his pleasurable lap. You would think by now,
his Antarctic heart would adapt
to the burning zeal of my wandering hands.
Amid my jumbled desires,
the crumbs of our dirty night, lay
on the floor.
Till tomorrow night my love, I say
as I close the freezer door

Dr. Marcie in the Morning
by
Rebecca Anne Nguyen

The sounds of fervent, vigorous shouting vibrated through the office walls and into the lobby where Sloane sat waiting for her Alternative Therapy appointment. When the shouting reached a rhapsodic zenith, the slapping sounds started. She'd never opted for physical violence as a form of treatment, so she wasn't sure if the therapist was slapping the patient or the patient was slapping the therapist. Either way, it was unpleasant, and she was relieved when Dr. Marcie's office door swung open, and she ushered another patient, bald and breathless, from the room.

"See you next week!" Dr. Marcie said as the man hurried to the elevator, head down. "And get your ass to church!" The doctor waited for the elevator doors to ding closed before fixing her attention on Sloane. "You," she said, narrowing her eyes. Sloane gulped. "Your energy is *so toxic* today," she said, clicking her tongue disapprovingly. "Come in!"

Sloane followed Dr. Marcie into her office, which overlooked bustling Georgia Street far below, and plopped onto the purple couch. The doctor sat in a swivel office chair, pulled her legs against her chest, and began removing her shoes, Mr. Rogers-style. Her bleached-blond hair was pulled into a sloppy bun on top of her head, and she'd draped a low-cut, purple tunic top across her trunk to reveal sagging, pink cleavage. Her skintight leggings were printed with the Japanese painting, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, so the top of the wave tickled the triangle between her legs. Sloane batted away memories of all the other leggings Dr. Marcie had worn to her past therapy sessions—donut leggings, where the hole fell right at her crotch; muscle leggings, which showed all the tendons and bones in her legs as if she'd been stripped of her skin; naked leggings, with printed, peach-colored legs and bright red pubic hair where her actual pubic hair probably was.

Now barefoot, Dr. Marcie began picking at the skin on her big toe. "I can't seem to get rid of this fungus," she complained, inspecting her bare foot. Sloane waited patiently; she never got to speak first. "Reminds me of my ex-lover, Satan," mused Dr. Marcie. "No matter what I do, I can't seem to get rid of him. Did I tell you that when we first had our affair, we had sex seventeen times in one day? I mean, can you *imagine* that? Of course, I don't mean we had *intercourse* seventeen times. I'm talking about seventeen orgasms between the two of us in a twenty-four-hour period. Huzzah!"

Sloane nodded pityingly. Satan, whom the doctor alternately referred to as The Devil, Evil Incarnate, and Richard, had broken her heart so badly that she'd been forced to begin every therapy session with her own "self-therapy session," which purged the "trace toxic energy" left in her system by Satan, thus allowing her to unleash her full therapeutic powers on Sloane.

"Mmmm," hummed Dr. Marcie. She began spinning in slow circles in her chair, her eyes on the ceiling. "How are things with Professor Harry lately?"

"Um," Sloane said, treading carefully—as always—around the topic of her famous professor father. "Well, I'm working on it."

Dr. Marcie abruptly stopped spinning and stared at Sloane with an eyebrow raised.

"I've been picking up extra shifts at the coffee shop so I can pay him back faster for the student loan debt," Sloane explained. "And I skipped trivia at his birthday party. It really triggers him if I slip up and get a trivia answer right, especially when *he* doesn't know the answer. My brother's always telling me not to play because using my freak memory—"

Dr. Marcie cleared her throat disapprovingly.

"Sorry. Um, using my...my..." Sloane cringed, unable to say the words she knew Dr. Marcie wanted to hear.

"If you can't call it your *gift* yet, just call it your *memory*, without the judgmental label."

Sloane nodded, swallowing back the low-grade nausea that swelled whenever people said words like "gift" and "memory" out loud. Her whole life, she'd been trying to hide the fact that she could pull up any memory from any point in her entire life the way other people pulled up restaurant reviews on their phones; she remembered where she'd been, what she'd been doing, who she'd been with, and exactly what they'd said. She even remembered her interior experiences, including what she'd been thinking—and remembering—at any given point in time, her mind like a funhouse mirror, memories within memories without end. If she focused hard, she could keep the memories contained in the back of her mind. But if she was especially tired or got a little too drunk, every past reality could converge on the present moment like too many holograms projected onto the same spot—a nauseating phenomenon for which sleep was the only respite.

"My brother's always telling me not to play trivia because using my...*memory* in that way makes me so nauseous. And if Harry calls me out for my freak—for my memory, or if anyone else notices my memory, well. You know."

"You vomit," Dr. Marcie said calmly.

"Right," she nodded, her stomach already swimming. "So, I'm really gonna try and resist when Harry invites me to play trivia again because I just end up pissing him off. But it's hard because those parties are the only time I get to see him. And when he invites me, I just think, maybe he doesn't hate me so much after all. Maybe I can actually spend time with him without completely ruining his night. Maybe we can finally talk, and I can finally get him to, like, *absolve* me. Or, at least accept me. I don't know."

She looked at Dr. Marcie expectantly.

Dr. Marcie stared back at her with an expression so solemn and still, it made her face look like the face of a corpse. "Sorry?" the doctor said, her eyebrows knit in confusion. "Can you repeat all that? I wasn't listening." Sloane's lips parted in surprise. Dr. Marcie's face broke into an enormous, wild-eyed smile. "*Kidding*," she exclaimed, slapping her leggings where Kanagawa's giant wave split across her thighs. She threw her head back with mirth, the back of the chair curving under her weight. Sloane managed a weak laugh.

"And why do you need your father to 'absolve' you?"

Sloane's chest tightened. "He blames me for my mom's death," she said quietly.

"Puh-leeze," said Dr. Marcie, rolling her eyes. "It wasn't your fault she died. You were just a baby."

"But my whole life, I've just sensed this resentment from him, and I've never known why, and the only reason I can think of is that. Maybe he doesn't want to resent me, but he can't help it. I took her away, and deep down, he just hates me for it."

"I think," Dr. Marcie said gravely, "that what you just said is the stupidest thing I've ever heard."

"Oh!" Sloane grimaced. "Really?"

"He doesn't resent you because your mother died giving birth to you. He resents you because he's a narcissist. All he sees, when he looks at you, is someone who threatens his status as the most important person in the room."

Sloane grabbed one of the sequined throw pillows on the couch and wrapped her arms around it. "But most of the time, he *is* the most important person in the room," she argued quietly. "He has three PhDs."

"Which took him decades to get."

"Well, yeah. He worked really hard. And now he could have any university appointment he wanted, anywhere in the world." The upcycled hemp fabric beneath Sloane's arms had gone damp, and her watch beeped to notify her that her blood pressure had increased. "So," she continued, swiping away the notification, "sorry, but I just don't think anyone can threaten that—certainly not me."

With a tight-lipped smile, Dr. Marcie folded her hands in her lap, a move she made whenever she was about to dish out the harsh truth she was known for. "Let me ask you a question," she said, her voice eerily quiet. "Can I ask you a question?"

Sloane swallowed nervously but nodded. Dr. Marcie had strange taste in leggings, but she was good at her job; when she said something that was hard to hear, it was usually because it was true.

"How long did it take Harry to earn all of his degrees?" she asked. "Exactly."

Sloane flashed on a weeknight in the fourth grade. She and Simon had cooked dinner for themselves because Harry was in night school to get his second master's degree. She could taste the plain spaghetti Simon had made, which came out of the pot in a giant clump. She could smell the burnt crust of the cornbread she'd baked for dessert, stuffing the center of each slice with a Cocoa Puff as a garnish. "He earned two Masters' and three PhDs over the course of twenty-three years," she replied.

Dr. Marcie's eyes shone with a devilish glint. "Are you familiar, Sloane, with the amount of material one has to consume, retain, and produce in order to earn *one* Ph.D.?" She nodded toward her own degree, which she'd hung prominently above a sculpture of an Aztec double-headed serpent. Sloane nodded, dreading where Dr. Marcie was headed with this line of thinking. The doctor pushed her feet against the floor and catapulted herself across the room in her chair until her face was inches away from her patient's. "It's a *lot!*" she whispered, her breath a bouquet of coffee and multivitamins. "How long do you think it would take *you* to earn three PhDs?"

Sloane broke Dr. Marcie's gaze and looked down at her hands. "I never wanted to—"

"If Harry hadn't financially barred you from going further in school, and if he hadn't made you so ashamed of your memory that you become physically ill at the mere *mention* of your abilities, how long would it take you? Just humor me."

The manageable nausea surged in intensity until Sloane could feel the contents of her stomach sloshing around as if she were on a boat. "Probably twenty years or more, just like anyone," she said, willing the sick feeling to subside. Dr. Marcie didn't allow crying in her office, and Sloane was pretty sure she had a similar rule about vomiting.

The doctor sighed disappointedly. "Still playing that game, are we?" She slid the chair across the carpeting until it collided with the corner of the sustainable faux-polar-bear-fur rug. She stood and climbed into her ethically sourced eucalyptus indoor/outdoor hanging loveseat and began to swing, pumping her legs faster and faster.

"I think it would take you *one* year to earn three PhDs. Two years tops."

Sloane drew in a shaky breath and exhaled slowly, willing the bile back down her throat.

"I think it took your father a lifetime to achieve what you could achieve overnight—if you wanted to. I think he knows that. And I think that, as a narcissist, it drives him absolutely insane to be outsmarted. Especially by his own daughter."

Sloane shook her head. That's exactly what her brother Simon always said, but it wasn't jealousy. It was resentment for taking away the love of his life. Simon's birth, seven minutes before hers, had gone fine. It was Sloane who'd done her in. It was Sloane who'd required an emergency C-section. It was Sloane who'd stolen her first breath of life just as Thida, her mother, had drawn her last.

"It's not your mother's death he holds against you," Dr. Marcie concluded. "It's your gift."

Sloane hung her head. Dr. Marcie didn't understand. Her memory was a curse, not a gift. And her memory wasn't the reason her father had resented her from the day she was born.

"So, stop trying to get love from someone who has none to give you. Learn to love yourself. It's what I've said to you from day one."

"It's...hard," she managed feebly.

"It's hard to love yourself?" said Dr. Marcie, leaping from the swing and sticking the landing. "It's hard to love yourself enough to revolutionize your *life*?"

Sloane cringed internally. That was the title of her latest book.

"Well, yeah."

Dr. Marcie clicked her tongue. "When you look for love from everyone else," she observed. "you're expecting others to give you something you're not willing to give yourself. That hardly seems fair to the rest of us."

Sloane felt the familiar feeling of shame wash over her. "You're right," she said obediently. "It's not fair to put that burden on everyone else. If I want Harry's love, I should start by loving *him*. I should stop assuming that my mom's death is the center of his life. It was a

long time ago, and just because I think about it so much doesn't mean it's impacted him in the same way. That's just *me* being a narcissist."

Dr. Marcie nodded and smiled. "Good girl," she whispered. "And we're at time. I have a patient now." Sloane glanced at the clock on the wall, hung between framed photos of Dr. Marcie's thirteen rescue dachshunds. There were forty minutes left in the hour. "I wish you the best, Sloane. It's my hope that someday you'll be able to see past yourself and the limitations of your entrenched ego." She stood, adjusting the fabric of her leggings, and held out her arms for a hug.

"Don't we have a lot of time left?"

Dr. Marcie let her arms fall to her sides with a loud slap. She grabbed a tablet off her desk, swept through a few screens, and handed the device to Sloane, who stared down at her Billing Account summary with a past due balance of \$1,116 blinking in red.

"I assume you have not spoken with Harry about this ludicrous student loan payback arrangement that requires you to work two jobs just to afford your payments to him and that you are not able to pay your balance with me in full today?"

Sloane's shoulders slumped in defeat. Dr. Marcie pressed a hand to her heart, her expression pained.

"I hope you know it's not about the money, Sloane." She laughed as she gazed around her fifteenth-floor office. "The swing alone cost me sixty-five grand!" She crouched down in front of Sloane and peered up at her, blinking her heavily mascaraed lashes. "You refuse to see your father for who he truly is out of fear. You refuse to let go out of your mother's death out of shame. And you refuse to work on the core issue that's holding you back—your relationship with your memory, which is really your love relationship with yourself."

Sloane pressed the pillow into her abdomen as if it could hold the contents of her stomach in place. Beads of sweat broke out along her hairline.

"I just didn't want to make a mess in your office," she said. "Talking about my memory makes me feel sick."

"So get sick!" Dr. Marcie cried, springing up. "Ask for a bucket!" Sloane hung her head over the pillow and breathed quick, shallow breaths, willing away assorted memories of the seventeen times in her life when she had vomited in a public place. "You're not afraid to get sick," Dr. Marcie scoffed. "You're afraid to get better. Because to get better, you'd have to look at why you feel so bad about having the gift you have. Why you feel so bad about yourself."

Sloane nodded. Right again. She *was* afraid to talk about her memory. She knew she'd have to deal with it at some point; she'd just hoped that she and Dr. Marcie could work their way up to that topic gradually. Say, over the course of a decade or three.

"Couldn't we just keep working on the other stuff?" she pleaded. "The stuff around my mom, the stuff with Harry. Working with you has really helped me get up the courage to talk to him. Not that I've talked to him yet. But in my head, it's less scary now. Thanks to you. And that's huge, right? The memory stuff just causes problems. It's usually better for everyone if I just ignore it."

Dr. Marcie laughed sharply. "Stuff it down!" she cried, making a little leap toward the door. "Ignore it! I think you're onto something, Sloane Burrows. We'll call it the Antiquated Psychotherapy Technique. APT. It's very twentieth century. It's *vintage!*" The doctor smiled and leaned against the door, her hand on the knob, shaking her head at Sloane. "I simply cannot work with someone," she said, suddenly solemn, "who's not willing to do the real work."

Sloane nodded, contrite. She stood and glanced at her watch, which was flashing with notifications from work. "Would it be okay if my boss called you if you just didn't mention that we stopped working together? At least for a little while? It's just been so nice to actually have a break on Tuesdays, even though I have to use my paid time off for it. If he thinks I'm still coming to see you, maybe I could keep taking an early lunch, just a short one, just once a week..."

Dr. Marcie opened the door. She leaned into the waiting room and told the next patient that she'd be right with her and that her energy was *so toxic* today. Sloane approached her, waiting hopefully for her answer. "Sweetheart," said Dr. Marcie, touching a finger beneath Sloane's chin. "I will not give away my power by being a part of your lies." She hugged Sloane tightly, spun her around, and pushed her, a little too hard, toward the elevators.

Christmas Catastrophe
by
A.C. Cambers

A string of tinsel killed my cat.
My grandma was to blame.
She insisted on a silver tree
And she would have her way.

I can't recall what happened next,
Just tinsel in my hands.
And now my grandma like my cat
Will Christmas in new lands.

There Are Some Things I Would Like to Get Off My Chest Before I Drop You Into This Volcano

**by
Bryan Middlebrook**

Congratulations on sneaking into my secret lair. That took a lot of guts, judging by how hard my minions are having to scrub to clean what's left of yours out of that secret passage. I hope you're enjoying dangling precariously over an active volcano.

You don't look very comfy. It's probably the live boa constrictors we used to tie your legs to that stalactite. I gotta tell you, I don't even know where *that* idea came from. PETA would be on my ass if they found out, but I had to try it. I feel like it adds a little *je ne sais quoi* to the experience that boring old hemp rope or barbed wire simply don't.

This is the kind of thing people in my position always have to do, y'know. We one-up ourselves. Every time, all the time, from now until eternity. You can't rob the Second National Bank once you've robbed the First, and you can't rob the First once you've looted Fort Knox. The media would eat me alive. My rivals would simply try to eat me, and that's if I'm lucky. The first time they get any hint of weakness they'll send their super assassins, then I'll have to send my counter super-assassins, and then they'll send their counter-counter super assassins. The whole thing gets very confusing very quickly.

How the hell can anyone remember which preternaturally skilled minion armed with profane incantations and grenades that go back in time to blow up your grandfather is which? It's hard enough to tell them apart, even when they're not engaged in battle with secret agents. They're so damn taciturn that it's hard to get anything out of them other than *yes, sir*. Maybe once in a while you'll get an *it shall be done*, but that's a once a month thing at best. Most of the time, they just grunt and nod.

I'll be honest with you, I don't even try to tell my henchmen apart anymore. I just call them all Bob. It works well for the most part; the only problem I ran into recently was when I had to execute one of them for incompetence. I found out the hard way that sending out an inter-lair memo instructing Bob to go kill Bob can have *very* messy consequences. Well, live and learn.

You know, I like you. Not enough to stop me from dropping you into this volcano, which I am totally going to do in a bit, but I like you nonetheless. I don't meet many good listeners in my line of work. Usually it's all *help me* this and *please turn that laser off, it burns* that, but you've been doing nothing but listening for this entire conversation. I don't even think sealing your mouth up with quick-drying cement has all that much to do with it, either; I get the sense that you really care.

I've got something that I want to tell you. Something that I really couldn't share with Bob, Bob, or, God forbid, Bob.

I don't *laugh* anymore. Nothing does it for me. Not vaporizing a major city. Not holding a nation for ransom. Not even opening portals into blasphemous hellscape dimensions summons up so much as a giggle anymore.

I asked my shrink about it before I shrank him with my shrink ray. He said that when your only tool is doomsday devices heralding a swift and terrible end to humanity, pretty soon you start treating all your problems like big red buttons, aching to be pushed.

I think I get what he was trying to say. If you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life, but what happens when the love fades? Can you ever capture it again? Or are you doomed to wander through existence as a hollow ghost, eternally trying to recapture what made you feel good about yourself in the first place?

Do you see this? It's a button that will destroy this whole complex. Everything I've ever worked for, every critter with sharp teeth or dull teeth or just plain too many teeth, every rampaging robot, every world cracking machine. All blown up and reduced to rubble. I carry it with me in case someone like you ever manages to turn my own works against me. A final *curse you, jerk* in the face of inevitable defeat.

I'm almost tempted to let you press it. You'd like that, wouldn't you? I can see it in your remaining eye. The chance to be the hero. To take me down. To make the world safe for all the children and bunnies and so on.

First thing's first, though; I have to get you down from there. See that control over there? Down by your head. If you swing a bit, I bet you'll be able to whack it with your nose. That's the control that will blast apart the stalactite you're tied to. You'll fall, and you'll fall far, but I promise you on my honor as a scientist and a scholar: you will *not* fall into lava. Afterwards, I'll toss the button down to you and let you accomplish what you set out here to do.

Deal? Blink once for *yes* and twice for *I want to hang by my ankles some more*.

Ouch. Whacking your face into that control panel looked like it hurt. But I wasn't lying, was I? The stalactite broke apart, just as promised. There you go, down into the shaft. And, just as promised, you won't fall into lava.

Interesting note, by the by; when molten rock is still contained within the surface of the Earth, as the hot sauce down below is, it's not actually called lava. It's magma.

Good to know, right? Though it probably would have been better to know a few seconds earlier.

Kersploosh.

Oh, my goodness, he's actually trying to swim. Not very well, though. Oops, down he goes. Oh, man. I haven't seen anything that good in ages. I almost . . . I think I'm going to . . .

Heh, heh, heh, heh, heh. Ha ha ha ha ha! HAAA HA HA HA HA HA HA!

Oh, baby. I've missed you. Never leave me again, OK?

Welcome back.

Scientific Inquiry
by
Lou Faber

1.
And it
should come as
no great surprise
Isaac Newton said,
"I find I now
prefer to sit beneath."
pear trees.

2.
In his small
Leningrad apartment
Ivan Petrovich Pavlov
cursed "damn dogs,
you bite me
every time
someone rings
the doorbell."

3.
Schrodinger shouted
at the PETA protesters
"I've told you
again and again
the cat
is also alive,
just don't look."

Apologies For The Delay In My Response!
by
Caelyn Cobb

Dear Geoff,

Many apologies for the delay in my response! It's been a crazy couple of days. When I got home Monday, I discovered that my wife went missing in the middle of making dinner. The eggs and meat were out on the counter, the water was boiling on the stove, but the sliding glass door and our dining room table were completely smashed up. I'm surprised there wasn't blood everywhere. My son didn't see anything, but he's pretty upset about it. Won't stop crying. I mean, he's six months old, so everyone thinks that's normal, but it's still been a lot. I'll write to you under separate cover to schedule our next meeting. Apologies again.

Sincerely,
Jared

Dear Geoff,

Thank you for following up. It's kind of you to ask after me and my son. Happily, my wife came back Sunday, and not a scratch on her! She's mostly been sitting in the same place on our couch, not blinking, or sleeping, or eating, or acknowledging our presence, really, but it's good to have her home safe. I appreciate the offer to reschedule the meeting. Things sure have been upside down in these parts!

Sincerely,
Jared

Hey Geoff,

Thanks for your patience in waiting to hear back from me. Regrettably, I've fallen behind on my correspondence. A few nights ago, I had to rush my wife to the hospital for a severe infection from an untreated bite that she had been hiding from me. I then had to rush out of the hospital because she transformed into a werewolf and we had to evacuate. She's resting at home now—give it up for antibiotics and the waning gibbous!—and quite embarrassed about the whole thing. Anyway, let's find a time to finally have that call. Let me know what works for you.

All best,
Jared

Hi again, Geoff,

I'm so sorry—I thought I had replied to you weeks ago! Is there a day other than Wednesday that you can do? I'm taking a half day that day for the full moon. As it turns out, my wife made our son into a werewolf sometime in the past month, so I've got to

figure out how to set up a were-cage that will fit both of them. They don't have that on WikiHow, let me tell you!

Aside from that, though, I'm wide open.

Best wishes,
Jared

Geoff,

Excuse the late email. I wanted to get back to you before I forgot again. A little busier here tonight than I expected since the single mom next door and her four kids seem to be werewolves as well and they are all roaming free in my house right now. What a coincidence! My wife has been over there a lot lately though now that I think about it (I'm tapping this out while barricaded in the closet in the dark so sorry for all typos.) The morning might be a little rough around here but I think I can make tomorrow afternoon at 2. I'll call your office phone then. Looking forward to getting to connect at last!

Best,
Jared

What I Learned From joyfulpreppers.com **by** **Lydia Storm**

You will absolutely need a first-aid kit. In your soft life you are not used to wounds. Gauze and tape will be critical. As will a steel knife for cauterization purposes. Believe it: you do not want to bleed out.

Learn how to set a bone, dress a wound, and sew slashed flesh. Learn how to deliver babies. Do your research. Start now.

Gas masks, yes or no? There is disagreement. However, imagine fire and biological weapons and you will have your answer.

You will need water, food, shelter, and weapons. As for money, you are dreaming if you don't realize your currency is worthless now, and it will be even more worthless later. If you don't believe me, just look at the way all the billionaires are racing to Mars.

Look it up. Do your research.

If you are smart you will have a bugout vehicle as well as a bugout bag. You will in fact have a portable bugout bag stored securely within your bugout vehicle. Your bugout vehicle will be something that can ford streams and climb wrecked hills. Something that can outrun fire.

Remember this: "Prepping can be overwhelming. Start slow and continue steady." It almost goes without saying that research is your friend.

All the blogs talk about the three Bs: beans, bullets, and bandages. If you are on the lazy side, that may be enough for you to deal with. But if you wake up one day feeling ambitious, think about the thirteen As: antifungals, antibiotics, antivirals, antioxidants, anti-inflammatories, affordable emergency heat sources, air cleaners, antidotes, alcohol (isopropyl, not the other), AR-47s, attack dogs, abdominal surgery kits, and last but not least, attitude.

Humanoid steel combat silhouette targets are all well and good, but they do not run. They do not hide.

Scope specifications: Waterproof: Definitely. Eye relief: Of course. Battery: LAF7891043785847362783723093847X. Adjustment graduation: Do you want to hit your target, or not? Windage adjustment: There will be wind. And fire. Size: Big enough to see your target before he sees you.

They say you should list all threats, and that is all well and good, but to avoid becoming overwhelmed, be sure to rank the threats in priority order. You must draw a line somewhere. Don't worry—all smart preppers do this to focus their efforts. As an example, you might prepare for Armageddon, but not Ragnarok. Solar flares, but not planet-killing lasers. Terrorists, but not zombies.

You may think you've heard enough about walkie-talkies, but you're wrong. You can never hear enough about walkie-talkies. Or upgrading your bushcraft. Or silver. Or fire. Or loaded home-defense firearms which have blinding lights affixed permanently to their barrels.

You should do your own research, but for your family's sake, consider building a Faraday cage large enough to protect your encampment from electromagnetic radiation which may in a variety of scenarios be emitted from the external environment. You will need silver wire for this. There is no substitute for silver.

Note: Your limited budget and/or misguided attempts to save money may tempt you to take a few shortcuts, but it is not advisable to purchase any item marked with the words, "Made in China."

Pro-Tip: Stock at least two crank chargers.

Use your secure smartphone to capture and store anything you cannot afford to forget. Maps, formulas, step-by-step instructions, the faces of your kin. (See Pro-Tip, above.)

It will help if you decide how long you plan to live. Heredity is a factor. As an example, if you are 67 and both Mom and Dad are still alive, you may have a problem.

That said, do some simple math, and you will arrive at your required quantities of all your crucial supplies. Whatever you do, do your research and do not forget to account for fire.

If there will be a shortage of anything, there will be a shortage of ammunition.

No, humans cannot eat grass. We are not cows.

Read Joyfulprepper.com to keep your spirits up. Here is a sample of prepper sayings to live by:

"It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark." Howard Ruff.

"The only easy day was yesterday." The United States Navy Seals.

"Never say never. Rats are a delicacy in West Africa." Anonymous.

If you insist on converting concrete culverts into underground bunkers, pay close attention to drainage and ventilation. I am speaking from experience, here.

They have field rations now that will give you 2000 calories for a reasonable price. Modern meal kits cater to many types of preferences, but it is objectively best to forget misguided dietary restrictions and/or veganism and go for the most meat you can.

Ninety-nine times out of a hundred there will be others out there. Sorry, but this means you will have to be far better than you have been at choosing your friends.

Once you are prepared, attitude is everything. Picture yourself having done your research, safe in a fireproof cabin on a mountaintop. Picture yourself sitting on your porch with a deer rifle, a good scope, and plenty of ammunition. Picture your venison drying on a rack, your diesel tanks, your silver, your emergency rations, your mind and conscience clear.

Picture yourself fat and happy for the rest of your days.

Three Poems
by
Andrew W. Turner

Sport

a well trained baboon
could kick our ass at most sports

gymnastics and powerlifting
and pretty much every martial art
the best ufc fighter in the world
wouldn't last five seconds
with a hamadryas in heat

team sports like football
might be a challenge at first
but baboons are herd animals
and could learn to huddle up
as long as their teammates
don't mind being groomed

there are many arenas in which
humans are superior to baboons
like writing sonnets or doing algebra
we don't consider these sports
but maybe baboons do

maybe deep in the jungle
they're holding a math olympiad as we speak
smacking each other
on the bright red butt
every time they solve an equation

The Definitive Guide to Stereotyping

there are three kinds of people in this world
big ones medium ones and small ones

big people are forty six feet tall
with black hair and bushy eyebrows
they eat tree tops
drink cloud vapor
and sleep on airport runways

medium people are five foot seven
have two point five kids
and work in the finance sector
they have accent tables from crate and barrel
and pomeranians named pikachu

small people
well it's not polite to call them small
please refer to them as
people who have been systematically repressed by gravity

all people in the world
fit exactly into one of these categories
and if you don't agree with me
then you are an ignorant racist
the end

Killing Time

i need to kill some time
is a terrible thing to say
life is short enough
without us needing to murder
its constituents

and anyway
we got it all backwards
time is the true killer
hiding behind the curtains
waiting to hack away at our weekend
when we doze off on the couch

it would be great
if instead of killing time
we could savor it or bask in it
but time
is not on our side

at best
time can be a friendly landlord
who we don't mind most of the time
but who we're always going to hate a bit
when rent is due

**Deadly Dangerous Podcast #13:
A Tribute to Greta Greene, Amateur Nanny
by
Sally Simon**

Babysitting isn't what it used to be

In today's episode we're paying tribute to one Greta Greene, a nanny who did her best. She always checked on the children without a phone call reminder, never allowed her friends to have sex in the house while working, and brought healthy snacks for her charges. Nonetheless, Greta is dead.

Greta Greene, of Haddonfield, lived eighteen years on this earth before taking her last breath at the home of Daniel and Danielle Butterworth on October 31st, following what authorities have described as "an unfortunate playdate mishap." She was employed as the household nanny at the time. Born and raised in Fernhill, Greta moved to Haddonfield last June to make money with Nannies R Us rather than rack up debt at college.

The exact cause of death is still under investigation, but unlikely to be truthfully reported since Daniel Butterworth's father is the Mayor and his mother the Medical Examiner. Nonetheless, this is what Deadly Dangerous has uncovered through stealth investigation:

At approximately 12:50 p.m. five-year-old Isabella Strode was dropped off at the Butterworth residence for a play date. Mrs. Kramer arrived minutes later with her son, John, age 8. At 1:10 p.m., both mothers accompanied Mrs. Butterworth in her Mercedes to Blissful Bitches Day Spa for their weekly manis and pedis. Benjamin Butterworth, age 5, remained home for said playdate, supervised by the late Ms. Greene. Mr. Butterworth was reportedly playing golf. The other fathers were in Las Vegas on business.

According to 911 records, at 2:18 p.m. Isabella Strode called to report a nanny in distress.

When police arrived on the scene, Benjamin Butterworth was found attempting to chain the cat to his bedpost. *Saw* was playing on a panoramic TV, and Benjamin's face was covered in white baby powder and red-lipsticked circles. Ms. Greene was discovered in the kitchen. She had been duct taped to a kitchen chair and her mouth gagged with a rag that smelled of Windex. It's unclear how she found herself in that position. A Craftsman hand saw was on the floor in a pool of blood.

When interviewed, Isabella Strode said her drawings of stick figure families in big houses with suns and colorful flowers was interrupted when *How Many Licks?* stopped playing in her ear buds. She heard grunting and ran to the kitchen, where she observed Ms. Greene writhing in her chair, one foot cut off. Isabella's exact words: "There was a lot of red. My favorite color is red." She dialed 911, as her mother, a partner at Mandrakis, Loomis and Doyle, had taught her to do. After which, she returned to her drawing.

John Kramer was discovered digging a hole in the backyard, a bloody duffle bag at his side. Upon further investigation, said duffle contained the severed foot, a jigsaw puzzle, a box of nails, and a kitchen timer. When asked why he didn't attempt to bury the saw as well, he replied, "It wouldn't fit in the bag, stupid."

According to a trusted source in the PTA, Mrs. Butterworth wasted no time contacting a contractor to renovate the kitchen, which she'd wanted to do for years. A representative from Grover Smith Contracting stated Mrs. Butterworth's reason for said renovation when asked: "I need a new color scheme." The source also confided Mrs. Butterworth complained regularly about how lax Ms. Greene was with her son, What's-His-Name? And that if it weren't for COVID, she'd be "hiring an au pair from Latvia in a heartbeat."

The bartender at Hole 19 told a TV reporter at WKIL that Mr. Butterworth entered the bar around 2:30 p.m., after being interrupted on the 17th hole to be told the tragic news. He appeared annoyed and ordered a Hypnotiq martini, mumbling something about missing a birdie. After a refill, Mr. Butterworth began spewing grotesque facts about what had occurred. He quipped, and I quote, "How was I to know Benjamin would want to play a game with my tools." Mr. Butterworth cried while explaining his DIY project to save money after the failure of his last start-up. He must have left his toolbox in the downstairs bath. Out of sympathy, the bartender, who asked to remain anonymous, refused to let him pay for his drinks.

All three children were taken to Haddonfield General Hospital for observation, out of an abundance of caution, and are said to be in stable condition. When leaving the scene, Isabella and John reportedly asked Benjamin, "When can we come back and play?"

The Kramers and Strodes have not returned repeated requests for comment.

Greta Greene, a recent graduate of Fernhill High, belonged to the Drama Club (where she handled props) and Math Club (where she was known as the member who memorized the most digits of pi). Mrs. Johnson, a former employer and mother of three, had only praise for Greta. "My daughter wanted to be a babysitter just like her when she grew up." Mr. Kelsey, her high school science teacher claimed she was "one of the smartest students I ever taught, but she did seem to lack common sense."

Greta is survived by Mr. and Mrs. Greene, now of Miami, and twin siblings Sugar and Spice who work as body doubles in LA, all of whom are currently on vacation in Bali.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations via Venmo to The Nanny Defense Fund c/o Walter Greene. Services will be held at Mourningside Funeral Home. In Greta's honor, free childcare will be provided.

Greta Greene will be greatly missed. By whom, we aren't exactly sure. But let this be a lesson to all nannies, au pairs and part-time babysitters listening in today: The little darlings aren't always what they seem. Be prepared for the worst. It's "deadly dangerous" out there.

Tune in next week when our guest will be Amanda Bundy, Ted Bundy's third cousin once removed on "How to Spot a Serial Killer Before It's Too Late." Until then, happy living.

The Day the Music Died in Walgreens

by
Joe Miller

I just came in to buy Nyquil. The good kind. The knock-you-on-your-ass kind they lock up because you can cook meth with it. The kind that costs ten bucks a bottle. The taste of social uprising I found in aisle six was free.

Maybe I'd get some toothpaste or chocolate while I was there. Sugar on, brush off. Just some odds and ends, you know. I could only imagine what the rest of those sniffing creatures were there for.

You assume everyone in Walgreens has Ebola. A flatulent sneeze rose from the other side of the band-aid aisle, a burst of contagions flying in the airspace above the adult diapers row. That person's a goner. A coarse snuffle, a rough, congested inhalation, right in front of the Exxtreme Jalapeno Doritos. They're dead meat, for sure. But not me. I just needed a little Nyquil, probably a slight head cold, nothing to call the CDC over. I made eye contact with a man in flip flops and a tank top velcroed to thick patches of his back hair. He walked fast and appeared healthy enough: no coughing, no sniffing, no dry heaving on his way down the aisle. Must have had crotch stuff. He had to have something.

The fluorescent lights bright enough to dry your eyeballs covered all corners of Walgreens, as if every damn product was being shined down upon by heaven's rays. But instead of a choir of angels, it was soft pop hits from the 70s and 80s pumped in at a reasonable volume from unseen speakers. It's cozy in a completely uncomfortable way. Which Walgreens was it? Did it matter? Where was I? When was I? It all looked the same.

With gently numbed senses, the pull of compulsive purchases overwhelmed me. I was just there to get what I came for. What was it again? But daggumit, I couldn't turn down that price on old Halloween candy and discounted As-Seen-On-TV gadgets and lawn trinkets. Everything I saw pleaded its case, crying out for me to add them to my boring existence. The equation my life should operate around is: "essential items + purpose = happiness," but instead it's: "accumulated stuff - bullshit = happiness." Okay, look, I don't know. Fuck algebra. *Damn, I love this song*, I thought. I started humming and grabbed some more Halloween candy.

And just when I couldn't spare another finger to hold up my armful of ghoulish orange Three Musketeer bags, my fifth surge protector, and a can of keyboard spray duster, it happened. Right in the middle of an appropriately-volumed rendition of Kool and the Gang's *Celebration*. The music cut off abruptly, the tune cut short while the lyrics trailed off in my mind and I was left wondering if it really is time to come together, and if it is up to me, what is my pleasure?

Silence.

I looked around and I wasn't the only one. A balding Foghorn Leghorn in grease-stained basketball shorts lifted his head up from the battery shelf and looked for reassurance from others. A leather-faced gal wearing an embroidered Rock City, Tennessee sweatshirt, carrying two boxes of Franzia Sunset Blush Rose stopped in her tracks and looked from me to Foghorn and back to me. The silence completely broke the spell we were under.

The Walgreens was quiet then, save for the sniffles and apprehensive coughs. There were no employees around to calm our nerves. No authority. In the anxious silence, I looked down at what was in my arms and I began to question everything. Do I really need seven thousand collective chocolate calories just because it was sixty percent off? Do I even like candy? It wasn't just me. You could see it on the faces of everyone there. With the music gone, we could think again. It looked like Foghorn began to question why he needed batteries for his universal remote control for his smart TV. He didn't need to watch the second season of Stranger Things because he didn't really give a shit. I bet he really wanted to spend time learning to salsa dance and cook his own quiche bites. He was just too distracted to go out and do it. Rock City Franzia probably only drank because she couldn't stand thinking about where she went wrong raising her two daughters. Hell, she did her best and her kids are adults now. You deserve to dream, Gail.

Why was *I* even there?

My eyes were open then, right there in between plastic Yoda-shaped jack-o-lanterns and giant-sized Whopper dispensers. It's all total bullshit. This junk. This yoke of servitude. In the silence I saw the light. The truth.

I dropped the bags of candy, the box of Crest, the can of duster, the surge protector, and the Nyquil to the floor. All waste, polluting our bodies and our planet. A bit of snot is good for you I decided, wiping my nose with the back of my J. Crew factory outlet sleeve. And I probably won't get sick as much if I quit eating all that damn candy. And as for the other junk, well, I don't need that crap either. Maybe I'll do something physically productive with my bare hands instead, like build a rock wall, or finally paint our back shed, or masturbate. I don't need Nyquil! I don't need sleep! Who needs this fucking garbage?

My items landed on the floor with a flaccid splat. Foghorn looked at me like a hero and I could see the revolution unfolding in his mind. Rock City Franzia had it painted on her face too. *This is where it all begins*, I thought. *This is where we throw off the shackles of vassalage and consumerism and embark upon the reclamation of the human spirit*. It was like my thoughts were being narrated by Simon Sinek.

"Liberation," I shouted, untucking my shirt and raising my arms to the stained foam drop-ceiling.

As I did, the speakers crackled, the store music came back on and Kool and the Gang hadn't missed a beat.

Celebrate good times, come on.

The returning melody coursed through my veins. It subdued the fight in my blood. The veil gently settled around the Walgreens once again. I felt silly.

There's a party going on right here.

I lowered my arms slowly. Foghorn's disciple's gaze did an electric slide into a sarcastic smirk. He turned back to his batteries. Rock City Franzia croaked out a laugh that slowly turned to a wheezing coughing fit. She started walking again with her wine boxes, her pace upbeat.

As the addictive synth sounds of American pop crippled my uprising, I felt embarrassed.

I looked down at the bags of delicious bite-sized Three Musketeers minis. I needed them. I'm going to eat them all. I'll need some toothpaste, too. The heartburn will kill me all night; better get that Nyquil. That will make me feel whole again. Man, this is a great song. That candy is going to be the death of me. More consumer electronics will help us. That surge protector is genius. I bent over and grabbed all the smattered items I'd dropped for whatever reason. I can't remember now.

I two-stepped over to the register and got in line behind a young mother with a barking cough, her snot-nosed toddler son was drooling on an unopened automated Paw Patrol lollipop. I picked up a Diet Mountain Dew for the car ride home and kept humming, looking forward to my candy.

We're gonna have a good time tonight.

Let's celebrate. It's alright.

Trees man
by
Kyle Gervais

what the fuck even
is a tree
just this big wood
rod all branching

and shit at weird
ass angles covered
in some green nonsense
blocking the sun

from the littler plants and
these other underground
branches just going like
everywhere getting up in everybody's

business trees
man

fuck 'em

I Let My Mind Wander...

**by
Susan Chertkow**

I let my mind wander, and it traveled to a distant parking lot with thousands of parked cars, one of which was mine. But which one? My car was silver, but there were literally hundreds of silver cars.

Fortunately, a Vehicle Security Angel dressed in a pink satin ballgown appeared. She was stunning—a vision—not just her dress, but her expertly applied cat's eye eyeliner and the chic layering of strands of gold and silver jewelry.

"Is there a problem?" she asked.

I gestured feebly to the sea of cars and said, "I can't find my car. I want to go home."

"You've always had the power to find your car—but you didn't have this ..."

And she handed me a bag of roasted, unsalted, unshelled pistachio nuts, my favorite snack food.

"When you finish shelling the last pistachio nut, you'll be able to find your car and go home."

Then she disappeared in a cloud of pink smoke.

I followed her instructions and shelled several nuts (which were delicious). Then my thumb nail broke off, slowing down my shelling progress. Next, I had to contend with the dying of the light—not my own—the sun's. I managed to make it to the last pistachio nut at nightfall only to discover that it hadn't any crack in it at all. How was I to get it open?

Luckily, I remembered that the wild Capuchin monkeys of Brazil use rocks to smash open large cashew nuts. In lieu of a rock, I took off my boot and aimed its substantial heel at the little nut shattering it into several pieces. I was able to collect all the pistachio remnants and, true to her word, at the last minuscule morsel of pistachio, help arrived. Actually a semi-cataclysmic event of sound, light, and music arrived.

The night sky lit up with a pyrotechnic display with the magnitude of three Fourth of Julys—red, yellow, blue rockets, flares, streaming stars, not just anywhere-- but strategically over my mislaid car.

But that wasn't all. A forty-member strong high school brass band marched down the parking lanes playing "Eye of the Tiger." They came to a stop at my car's location.

Of course, a crowd gathered. As I approached my car, I saw my face on a Jumbotron screen.

When I opened the car door, and started the motor, the crowd erupted in cheers.

As the last firework rocket soared and plummeted, I drove off.

Lost My Erotic Fan Fiction and Likely My Medical License by Alex Dermody

Every member of this chatroom knows I write extremely graphic (but tasteful) Lord of the Rings erotic fan fiction. What most of you do *not* know is that, in case my apartment building burns down, I always carry a USB with my life's work saved on it. And ... yesterday ... yesterday I lost the USB at a Baskin-Robbins. I called the store in a panic to see if anything turned up, and a sarcastic teenager said no (but I heard giggling in the background, almost like they *knew*). Guys—I'm fucked. My nickname in this chatroom is The Professor. But I'm not a professor. I'm a *medical doctor*. And when someone sends that USB to the state licensing board and those stiff queefs feast upon the scene where Bilbo uses a solid gold dildo on Smaug the dragon while atop a mountain of treasure, well, I suppose they'll have no choice but to can me. I don't understand! Some people paint, some play sports, some write stories about elves edging dwarves in a forest to symbolize a peace treaty between historically sworn enemies. I can't imagine what they'll think about the orc orgies, the hobbit bukkake scenes. It's not my fault Vigo Mortensen's perfectly defined jawline inspired a thirty-page single paragraph epic where Aragorn and Legolas double-penetrate Arwen. I'm just knocking down pins here! What? Pediatric oncologists can't have hobbies? They never taught me that at *Johns Hopkins*. I thought watermarking every page I've ever written with "Dr. Geraldo McGuckin" was good business! My story about Gandalf the White giving Gandalf the Grey a golden shower, my story about the ring finally giving Frodo the courage to enter Samwise before ascending Mount Doom, they'll ruin me. I can already see the headline in tomorrow's paper: "Miami Doctor Fired After Heinous Hobbit Hobby Discovered." Cassie's gonna divorce me. She'll get the kids too. The judge will hear the Mary and Pippin incest chapters read aloud in court and *zipp*—the kids fly right out of my life. Well, dear friends of Smeagol Spread Eagle, whatever happens, whatever the teens running the Baskin-Robbins decide to do with my work, please know this chatroom has brought me an insurmountable amount of happiness over these last five years. Your deviant videos, cartoons and poetry have inspired me beyond belief.

One vibrating cock-ring to rule them all. The Professor, signing off.

Contributor Biographies



Daniel Winn is a writer and person of other hobbies living in Brooklyn, New York. His work has been published on *Defenestration*, *Oddball*, *Citius*, and very few other places.



Khaloud Al-Muttalibi is a poet and translator. She resides in the United Kingdom. Her poetry has been published internationally by various magazines and journals, including *The Glasgow Review of Books*, *After the Pause*, *Dying Dahlia Review*, *Akhar*, *Ygdrasil*, and *The Paragon*.



Rebecca Anne Nguyen is the co-author of *Where War Ends* (New World Library), a 2019 Foreword Indies Book of the Year Silver Award winner for Autobiography & Memoir. Her writing has been published on *Points in Case*, *Mamamia*, *Frazzled*, and in the *Military Times*. She lives in Milwaukee with her two sons, seven houseplants, and an unquantifiable number of Legos.



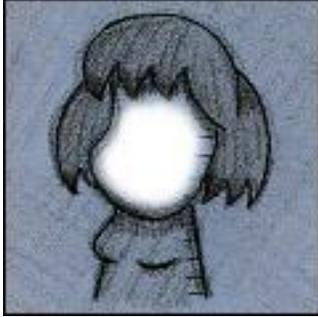
By day, **A.C. Cambers** moonlights as an actor/playwright waiting for her big break. At night, she dreams of paying off her student loans.



Bryan Middlebrook spends his days reading, writing, and bitterly complaining about the finer points of obscure comic book story arcs. He has worked in libraries for over twenty years and has only recently ceased calling them "liberries" due to a court order.



Lou Faber was a dolphin, and poet, but on deciding to become vegetarian, adopted a human form. That didn't work out so well, so he opted for a Hoolooovoo. But he continually was mistaken by Microsoft for a Holoovid so he resigned to being human again. That and Douglas Adams threatened copyright infringement suit. His work has previously appeared in *Defenestration*, *The Poet* (UK), *Dreich* (Scotland), *Atlanta Review*, *Backchannels Journal*, *Rattle*, *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *Borderlands: the Texas Poetry Review*, *Pearl*, *Midstream*, *European Judaism*, *Greens Magazine*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Worcester Review*, and the back of cocktail napkins at some of New York's leading watering holes, among many others, and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.



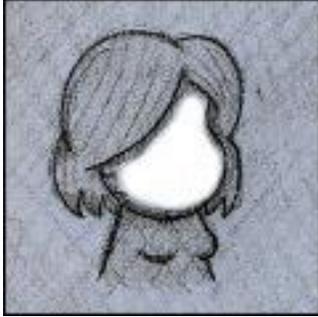
Caelyn Cobb's writing has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Passages North*, *X-R-A-Y*, *The Hunger*, and elsewhere, and has been nominated for Best of the Net. She lives in Queens, New York. You can follow her on Twitter at @caelyncobb.



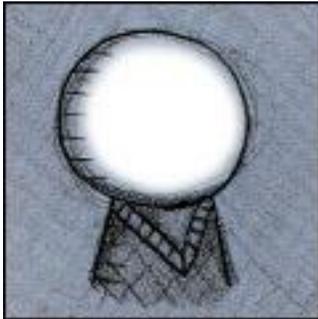
Lydia Storm is a writer who lives in Seattle. Her poems, essays, and stories have appeared in *Del Sol Review*, *Burrow Press Review*, *Litro*, *The Metaworker*, and other magazines. You can find her on Twitter @lydiastorm.



Andrew W. Turner did stand-up for a few years in New York City, and has been writing poetry his whole life, alone and in the dark. Recently he's been attempting to fuse the two genres. His poems are ideally meant to be read aloud to drunk people, but hopefully they're fun on the page as well.



Sally Simon lives in the Catskills of New York State where she dreams of horror movies that don't make her eyes roll. When not writing, she enjoys stabbing people with her epee. Read more at www.sallysimonwriter.com.



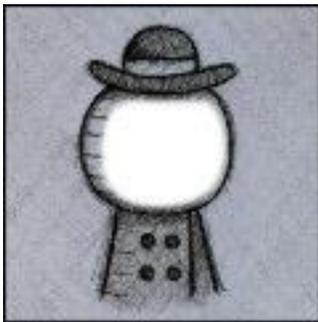
Joe Miller is a dull, old grump who counts things for a living and uses fiction to escape his spreadsheet cell. He lives in the Midwest and writes fiction in the wee hours of the morning before his toddler wakes. His work has appeared in *Drunk Monkeys*, *Five on the Fifth*, and others.



Kyle Gervais lives in London (the one in Canada). He has one husband and two cats. He teaches Latin at the local university. You can find his other poems in *Arion*, *Canadian Literature*, *Classical Outlook*, *Literary Imagination*, *Triggerfish Critical Review*, and a file called "Poems.doc" on his laptop.



Susan Chertkow is an artist and writer. She has a poetry blog at tuesdaypoems.com. She is also the author and illustrator of the urban fantasy novel, *The Gnome and Mrs. Meyers*, which is also a podiobook at gnomehomestay.com. Susan resides in Chicago, but claims her imagination dwells in multiple realms.



Alex Dermody can be reached at alexdermody15@gmail.com