

# ◇ Defenestration ◇

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**The Bright Side**  
**by**  
**Mary F. Lee**

Medusa turned every one of her boyfriends into stone  
yet still found that her physical relationships with them  
were deeply satisfying and lasted for hours.  
"Such a hard on!" she exclaimed to the Gorgons.

Icarus, whose father gave him wings,  
flew too close to the sun while drunk on hubris  
yet found cause to be cheerful as he fell  
due to a hot wax that left him soft, glowing, and stubble free.

Hera, the wife of that philandering shape-shifter Zeus,  
sometimes got a case of nerves while he was out impregnating virgins.  
Concerned, she went to Hippocrates who swore  
"You're fine; it's only a tic, Hera."

Prometheus, freed from his chains by Hercules,  
said these words of wisdom for the ages:  
"Better an angry vulture pecking on your liver  
than an angry vulture living on your pecker."

**The Interview**  
by  
**Paul Stansbury**

Lehman stepped off the elevator on the 5th floor of the building identified only as 100 Canard Place. Directly across the hall, a hand lettered note was tacked to the wall beside a frosted glass door. It read, "Candidates for the position go inside."

'Inside' was a long, vacant reception room. A single chair was positioned to the right of the door. Above the chair was another hand lettered note that read, "Please be seated." Lehman glanced at his wrist watch as he sat down. It read 10:40 am. His interview was at eleven o'clock. Perhaps they would call him early, he thought. He kept glancing at his watch until the hands slowly crawled around to 10:58 am. He should be called soon he thought. The straight-backed metal chair was digging into his thighs and the trickle of tepid air that was flowing from the dusty vents only served to add to his discomfort. Suddenly, he was aware of a presence standing directly in front of him.

"Mr. Lemon Farts."

"That's Farst! L-E-H - with a long 'A' - man Farst," Lehman protested.

"That's not what the list says," the small balding man with thick spectacles bleated, jabbing the paper he held with his forefinger. "Right here plain as day, F-A-R-T-S. How do you explain that?"

"How about a mistake to start off with?" Lehman shot back.

"Mr. Farts that is quite impossible. All applications are scanned into our computer and trained technicians prepare the list. Once prepared, the list is proofread by Rita from the temp service before it is disseminated. So you see there is no chance it is wrong. Are you sure you're not mistaken?"

"Quite sure!"

"None-the-less, Mr. Farts, Hubie Smelley," the small man with the list said, nonchalantly offering his hand.

"I say, there is no need for insults! And that's FARST!"

"Oh, none taken. Hubie is short for Hubert, but I prefer Hubie as it puts people at ease."

Lehman opened his mouth to reply, but reconsidered and reluctantly took Hubie's outstretched hand.

"Well then, I believe the Director is ready to see you. Come this way," Hubie said turning and heading toward the oversized mahogany door at the end of the long reception office. He tapped three times with his pen and vanished through the door, disappearing from Lehman's view.

Lehman followed quickly, grasping a worn valise chocked full of resumes and references to his breast, as he peered into the cavernous office. The walls were sheathed with mahogany. A brilliant chandelier hung from the vaulted ceiling. His feet sunk into a plush royal blue carpet extending out before him like the ocean. At the far end, he could see Hubie had approached an oversized desk and was leaning forward as in a deep but furtive conversation with the man who sat in a large leather chair. The grandfather clock in the corner softly chimed eleven times. Hubie then placed a folder on the desk in front of the seated man, pirouetted and floated out a side door.

The seated man sat motionless, staring down at the folder Hubie had placed in front of him. Then he motioned with a long arm for Lehman to approach the desk. As soon as he reached the front edge, the long arm motioned for him to sit in a small folding chair to the side. Lehman sat down and watched the top of the seated man's head bob softly as he continued to peruse the folder.

"Lemon Farts, I like a name that makes a bold statement."

"That's Farst! L-E-H - with a long 'A' - man Farst," Lehman offered politely.

"That's not what the list says," the seated man declared, lifting his head to look Lehman square in the eye. Tapping the folder on the desk with a long finger he continued, "Hubie said you were confused on that point. But, it's right here plain as day, F-A-R-T-S. How do you explain that?"

"As I explained to Mr. Smelley, it must be a mistake?" Lehman offered.

"Mr. Farts, that is quite impossible. You see, all applications are reviewed by trained interpreters located at a secret location in the Honduras. From there, they are sent over to Quantico where trained technicians, who have years of experience in this area, enter the data into our secure database. The list is then prepared and proofread by a specialist from the temp service over at the USDA before being disseminated. And don't forget Hubie Smelley, Mr. Farts."

"What?"

"Hubert, he personally checks all the results and I can assure you he can sniff out any inconsistency or mistake. So you see there is no chance the list is wrong. Are you sure you're not mistaken?"

"I'm not sure of anything."

"None-the-less, Mr. Farts, Erasmus Tink," the seated man smiled as he leaned forward offering a hand.

"I say, there is no need for insults! And that's FARST!"

"Oh, none taken. Let's not be so formal, you may call me Mr. Tink."

Lehman opened his mouth to reply, but reconsidered and tentatively shook the Director's outstretched hand.

Mr. Tink returned his attention to the folder while Lehman sat awkwardly watching his head.

"Do you always show up late for an interview?"

The question took Lehman by such surprise that he could only stammer, "Beg your pardon?"

"I said do you always show up late for your interviews?"

Lehman glanced at the large grandfather clock that stood in the corner behind the seated man. It read 11 o'clock. "My appointment was for eleven o'clock Mr. Tink and by your own clock over there," Lehman said nodding toward the clock, "it's just now eleven."

"Exactly!"

"I'm sorry sir, I don't understand."

"Anyone can see that clock has been broken for years. It always reads eleven o'clock. So you see except for the two seconds every day it is correct, it is wrong. What are the odds that you would just happen to sit down at exactly one of the two seconds that it is correct? Ha! 1 in 84,600. So I think it highly unlikely that you were here the exact moment that clock was correct. And, since you were not here earlier, it is obvious that you are late. You really shouldn't put your trust in clocks that you know nothing about."

"Begging your pardon, sir, I did not rely on your clock, I was merely pointing out what time it read. I relied on my own wrist watch."

"What time does it read now?"

Lehman looked down at his Timex. "11:03 am"

"My point exactly," the seated man smirked. "Personally, I don't trust timepieces. I just ask Hubert when I want to know what time it is." He pushed a button on a small black box at the corner of his desk.

"Yes, Mr. Tink," came Hubert's tinny response."

"What time is it?"

"11:04 am, Mr. Tink. Anything else?"

"Thank you, Hubert," the seated man said as he looked at Lehman. "There you go, just as I said, late. Now are you quite ready to continue with the interview?"

Bewildered, Lehman nodded. The seated man turned his attention once again to the folder that lay open before him on the desk. Lehman watched as he slowly turned each page examining each with unerring concentration. The only sound was the ticking of the grandfather clock.

"So tell me why you are here?"

"For the position." Lehman stammered.

"What position? I wasn't informed we had a position," the seated man snorted. He pushed the button on the black box once again. "Smelley, Farts says he is here for the position. Do we have a position?"

"Let me check." came back Hubert's reply. "No sir, there is no position. Did you authorize a position?"

"No, did you?"

"No."

"So why do we have Farts here?"

"Well sir, I don't know, but apparently someone thought we needed Farts."

"That's Farst!" Lehman interjected.

The seated man abruptly said, "See what you can find out about this unexpected appearance of Farts and get back to me."

"Right on it, sir," came Hubert's prompt reply.

Turning to Lehman, the seated man questioned, "What qualifications do you have for this position?"

"I learned how to read minds, levitate, and fly in India."

"Really, Calcutta or New Delhi?"

"Actually it was Wehdaunaupon."

"Ah, the Swami Riva?"

"Yes, far, far from home."

"Well, that would make sense. I knew a chap there by the name of Amal Shucup. Small brown fellow with a light blue turban. Do you know him?"

"Was he with the Service?"

"No, no, he was a beggar."

"You see, it's been a while, sir. Can't say I remember anyone of that description."

"Yes, yes, I see. But I would work on your powers of observation if I were you. Can't let things like that go unnoticed."

"You can count on it, sir."

The seated man returned to his study of the folder. The minutes continued to tick away. The front edge of the folding chair began to dig into the backs of Lehman's legs and his feet

began to go numb. A cold blast of air whirled down from the ceiling vents, causing Lehman's nose to run.

After what seemed an eternity, the seated man looked up and said, "Says here that you are from Boston."

"That's right sir. Lived in Beantown all my life, except, of course, for the time I spent in India."

"Interesting. Tell me, do all the Farts come from Beantown?"

"Come again?" Lehman asked incredulously.

'Your family man, come on pay attention. First impressions and the like."

"Yes sir, all the FARSTS come from Boston."

"Well, I think that does it. It's obvious you're the man for the position. We here at the Fantastic Information Bureau are in the forefront of the most important and under-appreciated work in government. For years, our Bureau has stood as the last line of defense, the bulwark, protecting the citizens from the crippling effects of unexpurgated truth. We need men like you! Now, let's get you up to Human Resources for your paperwork."

The seated man pushed the button on the black box for the third time and snorted, "Hubert, call HR and tell them I've got Lemon Farts headed their way."

"Will do."

The seated man closed up the folder and shoved it into Lehman's waiting hand. "Now take this up to HR on the 17th floor and make it snappy."

"Thank you sir! You won't regret this."

"Farts, you are a breath of fresh air. Now skedaddle!"

Lehman shook his hand profusely, then hurried out of the office, through the long reception room, across the hall and straight into a waiting elevator. As he looked at the control panel, he found the buttons stopped at 13.

## No Title (*on purpose*)

By  
Matt Kolbet

As Charles jumped from atop the building, he yelled like a native (*which is to say he made a noise as often depicted in the media of Western countries (clearly an artificial division, unfairly favoring one side with false criteria of culture) though natives surely had their own reasons to yell, just not—perhaps—jumping from buildings*).

Suicide was a luxury (*having failed to give a trigger warning, let me say that this poem may not be a safe space*), for he did not worry over invasions or bombs except those in his own body.

Charles' cancer (*no heads up, sorry!*) had made life unrecognizable, so death of his own choosing seemed the only option (*this character's lack of belief in miracles in no way indicts those who have faith and is not meant to be taken as a suggestion for anyone (though of course you as an individual have the right to make your own choice (with the necessary addendum that one's choice may affect others' perception, particularly in terms of value))*).

And as the air rushed about him, the question that had always plagued him—when it would end—was answered (*in one sense maybe, though not a teleological one, for Charles could still be a case study for students of psychology and biology, as well as seeming an advocate for our ecology (recycling, lowering the burden of overpopulation) not to mention what might possibly happen to his potential soul*) leaving witnesses to wonder why (*without creating an obligation, for of course life is busy,*



*(and it would be egotistical to expect earth-shattering change in such an instance))* for even Charles understood before he leapt how adjectives had been flattened by internet gossip sites, knew he could not melt hearts, but at least someone would be forced *(unless able to escape conformist culture)* to describe his transformation as jaw-dropping. He'd let people record his act as bystanders without facing moral quandary, died thinking that art may not always be beautiful *(beholders' eyes)* but it's forever temporary.

**Tourist Problems**  
by  
**KJ Hannah Greenberg**

Hi Irene:

I hope you are well. I know that you left a message wanting to know when we arranged tour guides. I'm answering you late because one guide has not yet gotten back to us. So, here's the best information I can give you, at this point.

Quimby and I would like to pay for two days of touring. One has already been scheduled and paid for. It's for our boys to go to Vallis Bohr and the Bohr Crater. The tour guide will pick them up at your cube and drop them back off very late in the day. He will make sure they hydrate at appropriate times and will otherwise take good care of them.

Quimby used him when he and Jasper, four summers ago, toured some of the moon's seas; Mare Frigoris, Mare Anguis, Mare Imbrium, and Mare Tanquilitatis. Please reserve that date for the boys.

We would also very much like to arrange another day of touring. We want a guide to take the boys among some of the smaller basaltic plains, including, but not limited to: Lacus Spei, Lacus Veris, and Lacus Oblivianis. To wit, we have been messaging a second company, daily, and asking them to commit to a date. So far, we haven't gotten a direct answer.

As far as your friend, the tour guide, goes, I tried to reach her several times and finally talked to her husband, who told me she'd call back. I haven't heard from her. I doubt it matters if we hire her or a different lunar denizen.

Anyway, I'll get those two trips arranged. I think that's sufficient.

I hope the dates I picked out are OK for you. If not, please let us know immediately. Lunar tour guides are extremely expensive.

I am sorry if we've inconvenienced you at all. I'll send you those things you requested on one of the shuttles lifting before the eclipse.

Please see to it that the boys tour Lunar City during some of the less structured days of Reese's visit. I want him to have as full of an experience of the moon as possible.

I will contact you as soon as we hear the second tour's date. Please buzz me if there is any part of this communication that you don't understand. Earth memos can be a bit confusing.

Ta. We're off to Key Largo for the weekend.

Be Well,

Cathy

\*\*\*

Cathy:

I marked off the tour dates. I prefer that our boys, if possible, journey during the day as the nights here get pretty cold. Also, that way, Justin can take care of his solar panel responsibilities on schedule.

We are looking forward to Reese's visit. His ship should land soon. I hope you packed plenty of sun screen, a helmet, star charts, and a canteen. All of that equipment is necessary when tourists get lost. He was always a very "enterprising" boy during Earth-based excursions.

Irene

\*\*\*

Hi Irene:

Nice to receive your message!

OK-so the basaltic basin tour is set. I sent Reese a message that wandering off from the group, on the moon, can be lethal. He might listen to reason if sufficiently drugged. Do you still have your emergency supply of benzodiazepines?

I am sure that he won't need them, except for when he and Justin are checking out Lunar City's tourist attractions.

Bye for Now,

Cathy

\*\*\*

Cathy:

The basaltic basins tour sounds great! Please keep in mind that our insurance does NOT cover kids who separate themselves from their tour guides. Space radiation is the least of his worries if he gets "misplaced." Did you reserve an extra cemetery plot, just in case, or do you want us to inter him, here, should the need arise? If the latter, please wire funds and we'll put them in escrow.

Also, please send me the guides' contact info. Was the first guide the one that Quimby used?

Regardless, do both guides know that Reese holds by the Aztec pantheon and as such requires daily human sacrifices?

Irene

\*\*\*

Hi Irene:

I asked Quimby to get their contact data for you. They have been told of Reese's spiritual practices. Each of them has already sent an invoice to us for their acquiring and preparing the necessary sacrifices. They refuse, though, to be responsible for cleanup. Might you guys do us that favor?

I'm glad you recommended touring by daylight. I always forget that Reese surges under the sun, but shrinks in the dark. Surely, he'd get lost if he was on tour during his miniaturized phase.

Cathy

\*\*\*

Cathy:

Reese ought to be authorized to buy two heavy duty spacesuits. The boys will be traveling over rough terrain. Asphyxiation, due to spacesuit leaks, is a horrible death.

Irene

\*\*\*

Hi Irene:

OK, thanks, I'll take care of that. Please discourage him from buying mummified alien remains. We have no more room for any new collections.

Anyway, are you sure you want me to ship earthworms? They're unlikely to help you improve lunar soil. As for the marshmallow fluff, I can send it, but I can't believe you bothered to take your pet hedgehogs with you.

Was there anything else you wanted?

Quimby and I are packing for our next freshening. We're headed to the Bahamas.

Thanks, again, for watching Reese.

Love,

Cathy

\*\*\*

Cathy:

How was your trip?

We are looking forward to hosting Reese. Please send me, stat, the names and contact information of the guides you hired-we still haven't received them and Reese's rocket is due here within a fortnight. You know, there are malicious pedophiles among the lunar population.

What's more, some of our friends expressed concern that some of the places on the guides' itineraries are on the dark side. I think we should postpone the touring of certain of the basaltic depths until Reese acclimates and until Justin receives his license to carry.

Perhaps, instead, they could visit some massifs. Given their altitudes, peaks are almost always illuminated.

Yes, cheap-o marshmallow fluff is really lacking here. Please send it. I don't like it that our hedgehogs are eating indigenous creepy crawlies. I worry about their digestive systems.

Keep in touch. Pass my regards around the old community.

Irene

\*\*\*

Hi Irene:

I can ask the guides to wait half of a year. After all, you will have Reese with you for nearly twenty-four months. I will forward you those guides' names.

Take Care,

Cathy

\*\*\*

Cathy:

I can't sleep (it's the middle of the night, here). Yesterday, when I got my hair cut, the stylist discovered that I was infected with *Lunar Phthiraptera* :{

Just a warning-obviously, as Reese is a boy, I wouldn't hug him or otherwise get close to him, but all of the kids will have to be checked, today. Two of mine had it a few months ago. It's common, here. Fortunately, neither of them died.

Also, please check Reese's medical interstellar medical insurance. He'll need it if he catches the contagion.

Speaking of which, you failed to prepare all of the papers that the lunar authorities require. We went to great expense and effort to arrange for your child to disembark. You owe us big time!

At your first convenience, please send Reese's documents. Hubby and I especially need that paper that shows us to be his de facto guardians. Without such pages, Child Services will take him from us. These matters are far more important than even the hedgehogs' direly needed marshmallow fluff.

Irene

\*\*\*

Hi Irene:

Sure, I'll take care of that business as soon as we return from Nantucket Island. I haven't gotten the earthworms, yet. Are you sure you want them? Quimby says you'll probably breed them and then feed them to the hedgehogs. Is there anything you won't do for your pets?

Cathy

\*\*\*

Cathy:

Hubby had to bribe a Family Services representative not to remove Reese from our cube. My man's annoyed, though, and said to tell you that he's making no more payouts for your kid. He said to remind you, too, that the lunar agencies don't look kindly on Aztec practices and will likely prohibit Reese from following his faith should Reese be placed in government custody.

Thank-you for the earthworms and for the marshmallow fluff. At the moment, I'm disinclined to discuss my views on pet maintenance with you. I believe you're still holding that pregnant barracuda in your postage-sized swimming pool.

What's more, those gifts you sent from the Cape Town sailing store were amazing. I'm not sure how to thank you. Those anchors must have been very costly to ship. We needed them at least as much as we needed those colorful buoys you also sent.

Sorry I haven't communicated sooner. I have been fairly ill, bed-ridden, actually. The docs blame the lunar lice. My primary care provider changed my meds today, so hopefully my healing will progress. I did tell you those bugs are highly contagious, right?

Irene

\*\*\*

Hi Irene:

I'm very sorry to hear that you have not been feeling well. Speedy recovery from the bottom of my heart! Quimby and I are switching things up; we're letting someone else be the skipper this time. We're on our way to an Italian river cruise!

I hope it isn't too much extra trouble having Reese around while you're fighting a potentially lethal disease. Take good care of yourself.

Of course, I paid the extra charge to send you anchors and buoys. That's what friends are for.

Cathy

\*\*\*

Cathy:

You never supplied Reese with interstellar insurance or us with guardianship papers. This morning, Family Services removed Reese from our cube. While he was being processed, he tried to sacrifice another child. Immediately, Family Services sent him to juvie. Note: on the moon, the juvenile correction facility is on the dark side.

We were told that Reese shrank to the size of a cockroach and that the kid he had tried to slay stepped on him. He completely and irrevocably splatted.

Additionally, I couldn't cancel the tours for which you prepaid since you never gave me the guides' contact info. I suppose they're enjoying your money.

Meanwhile, I suffered only two damaged vertebrae from the lice attack. Speaking of which, because Reese caught the infection before he was removed from our cube, the authorities cremated him.

Irene

\*\*\*

Hi Irene:

I'm sorry you nearly lost your life, sustained paralysis, and paid umpteen fines to the lunar government on Reese's behalf.

I should have made it clear to Reese, before his rocket lifted, that you guys had just moved to Lunar City. I guess I was so busy sailing that I forgot. Oops!

Please send me pictures of the cremation. Quimby and I are so glad that Reese had had a phenomenal visit!

Cathy

## How to Write a Good Book

By  
Cole Bellamy

First take a bath  
A long bath.  
Sit in the tub with your phone and  
Send a text message  
To someone you've never kissed  
But would like to kiss.  
Tell them you're going to write today.

Dry yourself off and pet the cat a while.  
If you don't have a cat  
Get one.  
You're a writer now.  
You need a cat.  
The parasites they carry  
Help to kill the fear.

Rub essential oils into your armpits.  
And put on something nice.  
Wear a cardigan or  
If it's hot out  
A thrift shop Hawaiian shirt  
With hibiscus flowers on it.

Go down to the coffee shop where  
You think there may be some people  
Who you would like to kiss.  
Order a coffee, and make sure  
To let them know that you're writing today  
So they give you the secret special writer's coffee  
That they keep locked up under the counter  
In most good coffee shops.

Take a picture of the coffee  
Then go outside for a smoke.  
Approach a stranger  
And tell them not to talk to you  
Because you have a lot of writing to do.

Turn on your laptop.  
Go up to the counter  
To get the WiFi password.  
Login to Facebook and tell everyone  
Not to bother you  
Because you're writing today.

Open a new Word file.



Look at it for a while.  
Type: 'George was.'  
Delete this.  
Type: 'Mister Hoffman sat.'  
Delete that too.  
Type: 'It was Spring time in Minsk.'  
Delete this as well.  
Type: 'The rain in Brooklyn'  
Delete.  
Type: 'Project Omega'  
Delete again.  
Type: 'The fury of Poseidon'  
And delete.

Check your Facebook.  
Post a famous quote  
About how hard it is  
To be a writer.

Get another coffee.  
Have another smoke.  
Pack up your laptop.  
Go get some lunch.

Go home and pet the cat some more  
Then turn on the TV  
And take a nap.  
Let the commercials  
Mix with your dreams.

Wake up and go to a bar.  
Bring a book. Order a beer.  
Don't read the book. Just  
Show it to people.  
Tell everyone you can that  
You've been writing all day.  
Tell them that your novel is  
Almost finished.

If anyone asks what it's about,  
Just say "everything."

Get nicely drunk and  
Talk to people you want to kiss.  
Don't kiss them  
Just keep telling them that you are a writer  
Try to work it into every sentence you say  
And soon they will not be able to control themselves.  
They will throw their arms around your neck  
Pull you forward and kiss you  
Passionately.

Go home and go to sleep.

Repeat this process every day until  
You find a manuscript  
Growing like a mushroom  
Under your kitchen sink.

Don't touch it and  
Don't tell anyone  
It's there until  
A cryptic title, something like  
"Josephine's Hat Pin" or  
"The Cannibal's Step-Child" or  
"The Sparrows of September" or  
"The Colonel's Marionette"  
Appears on the cover.

Harvest your manuscript  
By carefully peeling away the layers  
Of mucous and webbing from its cocoon  
Let it dry for a day or so  
Out on the front porch.

In a spray bottle, combine red wine  
And cat piss  
In equal parts.  
Add a pinch of cinnamon.  
Spray this mixture on your  
Manuscript twice a day.  
This will attract any literary critics  
That may be in the area.

Do not approach the critics.  
They can be dangerous  
And are easily spooked.  
Do not try to kiss them.

If a critic approves  
And remains unspooked,  
They will rub their scent glands  
(located just below their tail)  
On your manuscript.  
This is called Advance Praise

If your manuscript  
Gets enough sunlight and Advance Praise  
It will begin to molt.  
The plain paper cover will peel away  
To reveal a picture of  
A nightgown or  
An insect or the  
Silhouette of a famous bridge or

A sad-looking woman or  
Just your name and your title  
In giant colorful letters.

The back cover should say things like  
"Groundbreaking" and  
"Powerful."

If you follow these steps correctly  
Your book will begin to bloom  
In bookstores and libraries and  
In the hands of beautiful people,  
That will lick their fingers  
To turn your pages,  
And show up at your house  
Uninvited  
Just to tell you how perfect you are.

**Love in the Age of Global Warming**  
by  
**Alice Hatcher**

Eva Wright announced her wedding engagement with little forethought one cold April morning, during an uneven thaw at the end of an unseasonably long winter. She'd been wandering for hours along slushy Chicago streets, admiring the frost glittering on the petals of tulips, when she decided to visit her father, if only to fill the empty hours of a quiet Saturday morning.

"It's been awhile," Thomas Wright said. He averted his eyes from his daughter's frayed sweater, an affront to fashion that recalled the color of withered limes.

Thomas' second wife Peggy glanced at the living room carpet. "You should remove your shoes. So you don't get sick, I mean. They're all wet."

Eva settled into a leather chair. "Life's too short to worry about getting sick."

Thomas stiffened for an instant and then sat down on a claw-footed couch.

"It's been so cold." Peggy smoothed her skirt and sat down beside Thomas. "If the planet's getting warmer, you'd never guess from these Chicago winters. This is the coldest –"

"That doesn't mean anything," Thomas said. "It's about unpredictability. Extremes."

"You don't need to lecture me about–"

"I've been seeing someone," Eva fingered a button dangling by a thread from her sweater. "He says we'll all be under water soon. He's 92, and he has a lot of perspective on things."

Peggy cleared her throat. "It's wonderful that you volunteer. The elderly need visitors. My friend used to run bingo tournaments at Elysian Fields. It ended up being too depressing, though, and she quit. She couldn't stand all that sag. All that sickness."

"I've actually been living with him. Since March." Eva slid the button off its thread and slipped it into her pocket. "His name is Vernon, and we're engaged."

"Engaged?" Thomas paled.

"We're living in his nursing home. I guess I should say *our* nursing home. Off I-55 in Brighton Park."

"That's not a very nice neighborhood," Peggy clutched a string of pearls resting on her chest.

"Vernon doesn't have a lot of money. He gave most of it to the American Cancer Society. He said if other people want to live forever, it's their own business."

"He's 92." Thomas massaged his forehead. "And this isn't about money?"

"If you're worried about *him*, he has a war pension. It's not like he's taking advantage," Eva said. "Our reason for getting married might sound crass—"

"I'm guessing it will." Thomas leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees.

"—but some of the residents thought it wasn't right that we were living together."

"I see some of them still have their marbles," Thomas said.

Peggy rose from the couch to adjust the thermostat. "I feel cold all of the sudden."

"Most of the center's residents are happy for us."

Thomas rested his face in his upturned palms. "I'm sure the men are happy for him."

"The women are, too. It was just one crank who complained. He didn't think it was fair that a non-resident was staying every night. Without paying. The management talked to us, and we decided to circumvent any dispute by getting married."

Thomas lowered his hands. "Legally, are they allowed to do that? Force you to cohabit as man and wife?"

"Don't be so litigious," Peggy said, sitting back down.

"I'm not going to *sue* anybody."

"Then legalistic. Lawyerly. Whatever." Peggy fished two mints from a bowl on the coffee table. "You don't need to correct me all the time."

"I just want to understand the situation," Thomas said.

"Then don't be rude."

"We thought it would be easiest to stay where he is. We don't have much to move, but—"

"—Don't you need to be a certain age to live in one of those places?"

"You're playing lawyer again," Peggy said. "Boring everyone to tears."

"I'm not *playing* lawyer. I *am* a lawyer. The point is, I don't think my 28-year-old daughter should be living in a nursing home."

"They won't kick you out if you're married to a resident. It's in the by-laws."

"So this is for real. And if God blesses the union, will the management let my grandchildren live in the nursing home, too? When they're toddlers, they can eat mashed cauliflower and stewed prunes in the cafeteria. Get home schooled in the bingo parlor."

"We won't be having children." Eva folded her hands in her lap. "Vernon got a vasectomy right after he came back from Europe. When he was 23. He served in World War II."

"That's awfully young," Peggy said, shaking her head.

"He didn't think it was right to bring children into this world –"

"Maybe he had a point," Thomas said.

"He landed at Normandy Beach and spent a year in Europe. He saw refugees and bombed-out cities everywhere he went. How self-destructive the human race is."

"That sounds so depressing," Peggy said. "I have loads of friends with hobbies. They play golf. Go on cruises. People can *choose* to be happy."

"You mean to say he's a fatalist," Thomas muttered. "A real philosophical type."

"He figured any children that survived to adulthood would only get drafted and killed," Eva said. "Or die from atomic fallout."

"Is that what he thinks, or what you think?"

"It's what we both think."

"A vasectomy in his 20s." Thomas said. "This conversation's making me think I should have done the same thing."

"Vernon understands me."

"A 92-year-old who grew up listening to Glen Miller and jacking off to posters of Betty Grable. This is the guy who understands you?"

"Don't get nasty, Thomas. She's–"

"He probably voted for FDR, knowing the kind of bums she's dated in the past."

"He's young at heart," Eva said. "He lives every day like it's it last."

"Why the hell wouldn't he?"

"He doesn't get worked up about everything. He knows there isn't much time left."

"And you find this comforting?" Thomas asked. "That he's counting down his days and feeding his last food to the pigeons?"

"We're a lot alike. He knows life is fleeting. Things. Possessions. They're all meaningless."

Thomas closed his eyes. "I failed as a father," he whispered. "I suppose it was inevitable."

Eva settled into her chair and studied a framed oil painting of kittens while her father composed himself. She was fully accustomed to the awkward attentions of strangers, including those in her own family. She was, after all, the daughter and granddaughter of two very successful suicides.

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Thomas Wright had long known of the suicidal strain in his wife's family. He learned of it eleven months after Eva's birth, at a cocktail soiree held on a rooftop terrace eighteen stories above Lakeshore Drive. He'd been mingling with the senior partners at his law firm when he spied Eva's mother, Julia, struggling to stay upright on four-inch stilettos. Excusing himself, he made his way to the cash bar.

"What the hell's wrong with you?" he whispered.

"It's the anniversary. Of my mother's death." Julia lifted her glass. "I never told you much about her, did I?"

Thomas cupped Julia's elbow and guided her away from the bar.

"She committed suicide. Arsenic. The day after we dropped the second bomb. On Nagasaki." Julia blew air through her lips to mimic the sound of an explosion. "She said it was a grotesque experiment. On babies."

"You've reached your limit," Thomas said. "You're drinking on an empty stomach."

"I've had loads to eat." Julia drew a skewered olive from her drink. "They say my mother loved these."

Hearing someone call his name, Thomas looked over his shoulder and left his wife in the dubious care of a jaded bartender. Minutes later, Julia stepped up to a railing and leaned forward. The soles of her Italian shoes slipped, and without a word, she entered a terminal nosedive, away from the incessant chatter of her husband's tedious colleagues.

"Tragic," his colleagues offered at the funeral.

"Inevitable," he answered each, inaugurating a relentless suicide watch focused on Eva.

Within weeks, Thomas had developed exacting routines to monitor his daughter and the successive nannies driven away by his unreasonable expectations and impossible demands. Every evening, he hovered over Eva's crib and scrutinized his daughter for signs of psychological distress. He pathologized each of her expressions, misapplying a rudimentary knowledge of abnormal childhood development gleaned from his growing collection of psychology textbooks. His most dire diagnoses followed routine diaper changes. With a harried nanny beside him, he'd examine Eva's pudgy limbs and press her stomach with his fingertips.

"There's something wrong with her," he'd remark.

"She didn't fancy her applesauce, and a bit of indigestion is sure to be normal," one Irish nanny insisted, stymied by the insurmountable challenges of her job.

"She's just like her mother," he said.

"Sure as God she is, if her mam ever filled her nappies," the unwitting nanny said, ensuring her own dismissal by making light of family tragedy.

Week after week, as apricots replaced applesauce, and stewed prunes replaced apricots, Eva's indigestion only worsened; with a different nanny, Thomas engaged in the same

rending of linen shirts and satin ties. As Eva developed from a fussy infant into an inscrutable toddler, Thomas treated each of her birthdays as cause for rumination on the brevity of life. On her fifth birthday, Thomas watched her unwrap a porcelain doll with fluttering eyelids and soft ringlets of harvested human hair. Eva evinced no interest in the doll. Its unbending arms and immobile expression hardly warmed a heart bent on the glittery stickers *au courant* among kindergarten girls. In her disinterest, Thomas saw indications of an underlying affective disorder characterized by an inability to sustain meaningful attachments.

Relative to his wealth, Thomas invested little in Eva's future. He never started a college fund. Eva was, after all, a risky investment with assuredly diminishing returns. As such, she became the subject of whispered speculations at summer barbeques, when the extended Wright family gathered in Thomas' backyard to eat grilled hotdogs and mushroom canapés. Shortly after her twelfth birthday, Eva spent once such gathering sitting alone in the backyard, just beyond the pale of paper lanterns, eavesdropping on intoxicated adults.

"I saw Eva poking a dead bird with a stick earlier." Eva's aunt sipped her wine spritzer. "I hope she's not taking after her mother and grandmother. With that morbid streak."

"Strange to think suicide's hereditary," her uncle said. "It'd be hard to pass on the genes. I guess some people only get depressed after the kids show up."

"It's tragic," Eva's aunt said.

Thomas stared at a shriveled hot dog lying on the grill, above a bed of ash. "It's inevitable," he stated.

An hour later, Eva sat down beside her father. All around, pulsing fireflies competed with suburban porch lights in a desperate mating display. Mosquitoes meant for fleeting lives circled sweaty arms and electrified themselves in a nearby bug lamp.

"I read mosquitoes only live for a day." She lifted her glistening eyes to her father. "Do they fly into the bug zapper because they're sad?"

At that moment, Thomas recognized his own potential for a nervous breakdown and pledged to escape the lingering horror of his first marriage, however desperate the requisite measures. The following July, he wed Peggy Fairley, the least qualified secretary at his law firm. If her filing errors suggested a distinct lack of familiarity with the English alphabet, her effervescent laughter echoed in the chambers of Thomas' heart and drowned out his memories of madness. Thomas loved Peggy with abandon.

As Thomas withdrew from his daughter, and kitten figurines and mauve furniture began to appear throughout the house, Eva sought refuge in her bedroom. Throughout her adolescence, she spent hours at a time smoking Marlboro Reds and staring at Polaroid images of her mother, noting each similarity between her own features and those fading beneath yellowing gloss finish. She anticipated her own death, invariably imagined as a suicide. Conditioned by foregone conclusions, Eva wandered joylessly into adulthood. After college, she enrolled in a mediocre law school and then accepted a job at a large gas company. She never adopted the life of a corporate lawyer, though; she never bought a Lexus or elected stock options.

"Rust never sleeps," she told colleagues. "And most people die before cashing in."



For three years, she renewed short-term leases on a second-floor apartment in a dilapidated house and surrounded herself with cheap furniture from downscale chain stores. She shied away from close friendships, convinced of their inevitable brevity, and avoided long-term romantic entanglements, opting for casual encounters with incurably fatuous or terminally ill men.

That is, until she met Vernon Johnson at a failing art theater, just before a matinee of *Casablanca*. Vernon made small talk about unpredictable weather and environmental disasters, and Eva shared her heavily salted popcorn. After the film, Eva helped Vernon cross the street to get to his bus stop. Enchanted by his pale eyes and depressing stories about the Second World War, she suggested dinner, and Vernon invited her to his nursing home for tapioca pudding. That night, she found herself thinking about Vernon's weak handshake and worn trousers and realized that she'd fallen suddenly, deeply and hopelessly in love.

Over the next few months, Eva and Vernon met for matinees of black-and-white classics and documentaries about the destruction of rain forests. They sat on weathered park benches and fed diseased pigeons. When Vernon finally confided that he couldn't father a child, Eva embraced his bony frame and wept with joy. She stayed over at Vernon's nursing home for the first time that night, and in the flush of new love, braved curious stares to eat mashed bananas in the cafeteria the following morning.

Eva kept only a toothbrush at Vernon's nursing home until the early arrival of staggered cold snaps that amounted to winter. The first snow fell in October, blanketing fallen leaves and freezing debris in clogged gutters. Temperatures varied wildly, spiking and plummeting in rapid succession. Snow melted and quickly re-crystallized. Roads buckled, cracks appeared in foundations, and roof tiles curled.

The stain appeared one Sunday, in the grey light of a sunless dawn. No larger than a quarter, at first, it spread across Eva's bedroom ceiling throughout the day, leaving rust-colored streaks and bubbles in softening plaster. That evening, she watched the stain assume the grotesque shape of a Rorschach blot and drifted into dreamless sleep. On Monday, she returned from work to find her landlord in her apartment, examining large clumps of wet plaster lying on the floor.

"Your downstairs neighbor called." He shook his head. "My contractor's up to his ass in work because of this weather. Could take weeks to get to this."

When he left, Eva called Vernon and shared her predicament.

"You're the apple of my eye," Vernon said, "I'll lower the bed railings for your arrival."

Eva knew, then, that by marrying her fortunes to Vernon's, she was simply bypassing the misery of a predictable midlife crisis and embracing the wisdom of advanced geriatrics. A month later, she made her way to her father's house to announce her engagement.

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"We want a small wedding," Eva said. "With a reception at the VFW clubhouse. We're going to invite friends from the nursing home and some veterans Vernon knows."

Peggy glanced at Thomas, now slumping in the corner of the couch. "We could plan something fun. Set up a registry at Macy's. The Newberry Library has a gorgeous courtyard."

Thomas turned to Peggy. "Have you ever been the Newberry?" He struggled to his feet and crossed the room to a buffet lined with bottles. "I hear they have books there."

"Don't be sour," Peggy said. "We could have a nice reception and invite *our* friends, too."

"Does Macy's sell wheelchairs?" Thomas asked, filling a highball glass with scotch.

"Don't go to the trouble," Eva insisted. "Everyone's on a fixed income, and we have everything we need."

Thomas stepped up to a window and surveyed a patch of dirty snow. "Do whatever you want."

"We'd like to get married as soon as possible."

"Probably not the worst idea," Thomas said. "In the circumstances."

"That's what Vernon said. I think you're going to like him."

The father of the bride-to-be never gained the pleasure of Vernon's acquaintance. Five days before his wedding, Vernon died during an extended nap. Eva was sitting beside the window, reading to the sound of hail on the roof when Vernon's shallow breath expired with a final, unmistakable rattle. She placed her book on the nightstand and sat down on the edge of the twin bed she'd shared with Vernon for eight months. She held Vernon's hand and studied the creases in his face until his fingers grew stiff and the light faded beyond the curtains. When the hail subsided, she called the management to report her fiancée's all-too timely death.

The weather on the day of the funeral proved as uncooperative as Vernon's failing kidneys. Heavy rain began to fall early in the morning and continued, unabated, throughout the day. Discarded fast food wrappers disintegrated on the streets outside the church, and the runoff from overflowing gutters washed across sidewalks and into roiling sewer-bound streams. Despite the mud clinging to her heels, the bride-cum-bereaved was lovely in borrowed black lace.

In honor of Vernon's thrift, Eva had avoided cancellation fees by keeping her reservation for the wood-paneled reception hall at the VFW clubhouse. There, she drank warm champagne and chilled prune juice with bingo champions and world-weary war veterans with stiff fingers, clouded minds and uncertain legs. She switched to whiskey when she met Seamus Sullivan, an arthritic from Belfast.

"One year from now, a few more of us will be gone. In ten years, the whole lot of us." Seamus drew a flask from his jacket and handed it to Eva. "Not you, of course."

Eva shrugged. "Who knows how long any of us have?"

"That's the one certainty," Seamus said, nodding.

Eva spent the next hour watching her guests shuffle back and forth from the open bar on canes and neuropathic feet, complaining all the while of ill-fitting dentures and diabetic diets. Thomas drank himself into a stupor, furtively sipping and then openly guzzling from a flask of expensive scotch. Peggy avoided talking to anyone, completely unnerved by so much sickness and sag. She approached Eva only to distance herself from a conversation about incontinence.

"The cake is lovely." She strained to smile. "I forgot sheet cakes can be good."

Seamus lifted a fork to his mouth with a trembling hand and took a swig of whiskey to ease the passage of frosting.

"This is how he would have wanted it," Eva said. "Having his friends here. The ones still left."

"Seamus' eyes grew misty." Now's as good a time as any." He drew a thin box with rusted hinges from his oversized suit. "Couldn't be bothered with the registry. Mixing bowls. Four-hundred-the-fuck-count sheets."

Eva prized open the box and unhooked a tarnished silver star from worn velvet backing.

"Your man got that for gallantry in action," Seamus said. "He gave it to me after I went on my first date in this country. Hell, everyone who gets out of bed in the morning should get a medal."

"It's beautiful." Eva kissed Seamus on the cheek.

"It's a shame he'll miss his honeymoon. He always wanted to see the sea one last time. A clean beach that wasn't littered with bodies."

Peggy wiped a line of perspiration from her face. Eva rubbed the medal between her fingers and remembered the first time she kissed Vernon.

In accordance with established by-laws, the nursing home allowed Eva to retain her room until the end of the month. She spent weekend mornings lying in bed and listening to the wind, and quiet afternoons playing canasta and eating fruit cocktail in the cafeteria. On her last day in the nursing home, she took a train downtown to scatter Vernon's ashes over Lake Michigan.

At the water's edge, she surveyed a line of rusted pilings and watched mottled gulls skimming waves for floating garbage, mesmerized by their graceful movements and the endless sky burial of trash. Dead fish and foam containers floated on iridescent rainbows of oil. She gripped the urn's chipped base, glanced at an oil refinery on the south shore, and then released Vernon onto a littered beach.

That night, she packed Vernon's silver star and worn slippers into her tiny suitcase. She lay down in an unlaundered flannel shirt and took in Vernon's comforting smell, and to the sound of wheezing in the next room, imagined starting a new life, or at least a new day, in another apartment. She buried her nose in Vernon's sleeve, knowing that whatever happened, she'd known love, and that she'd soon be tying her tubes in deference to a dying planet.

**New Pantheon  
by  
Mickey Kulp**

The hippie gods of tree and field  
gave way to an elaborate telenovela  
of scheming olympians  
which gave way to The One  
that nobody can agree on.

Now, maybe, the world  
will skid the other way again  
(even bell bottoms came back,  
proving nothing is impossible).

The new pantheon is rubbing their  
bejeweled hands with excitement  
to be relevant again, and  
they are ready to receive your  
earnest supplication:

Zeus, god of social media;  
symbol is the poop emoji

Hera, goddess of daytime talk shows;  
symbol is five open mouths  
with nothing coming out

Poseidon, god of investments;  
symbol is a burning roller coaster  
filled with blind puppies flying  
off the rails over a pool of acid  
filled with constipated,  
radioactive sharks that have zika

Demeter, goddess big pharma;  
symbol is a list of of side-effects  
written on a hundred dollar bill

Artemis, goddess of rich people;  
symbol is the pacifier taken  
from a poor person

Apollo, god of bumpkins;  
symbol is the empty beer  
can punched with shotgun holes  
sitting on a tattered banner that  
reads "Make America Great Again"

Ares, god of military manufacturers;

symbol is nine circling vultures with  
politicians in their talons and gold  
bars in their beaks

Aphrodite, goddess of porn;  
symbol is industrial lube  
atop a bag of silicone

Hestia, goddess of grandparents;  
symbol is the flip phone  
with huge numbers

Athena, goddess of writers;  
symbol is the tear-stained pillow  
made of letters saying "we appreciate  
the chance to read your work, however..."

## **But How Will Brexit Affect Vampires?**

**by  
Lita Kurth**

In a huge cavern in Transylvania, a hundred thousand bats gathered for an emergency meeting, clinging in tribal clusters from stalactites. At the center of the cave, various national representatives nudged and wedged themselves into better spots, until a huge ancient bat with scarred wings, raised his head and emitted a sonorous whistle. All fell quiet.

"I must convey extremely bad news," the ancient bat said. "We no longer have an account at the Blood Bank of England."

A groan went up. A mother bat extricated her wing from her children and waved wildly. "But I've been feeding my kids English blood their whole lives!"

The ancient bat nodded. "It's a big change, but I hear there's a good chance the Blood Bank of Scotland or of Northern Ireland can step in. It's even richer blood, I hear."

"Nothing like Celtic blood," boasted a Scots bat, but everyone could see the vested interest in that, and worry remained palpable. A flurry of questions ensued: "What if other blood banks withdraw? What if they charge higher prices? What if because of red tape, blood takes so long to get here, that it spoils?"

The ancient bat raised a wing. "We have an even bigger issue," he said. "Forty percent of our membership want us to consider tight national boundaries."

A bat from Spain flew off the wall. "Brothers and sisters, we've always been international. Like squirrels, like deer, like falcons, we know no boundaries."

"Animals? Speak for yourself! I'm a spiritual essence that occasionally takes material form," proclaimed a bat whose flag was apparently hand-made. No one recognized the country.

The Spanish bat grimaced. "This is just a capitalist ploy to beat down the workers, region by region, country by country, and destroy our high standards in product quality and working life! Don't let them do it! We're stronger together."

"We're a mess together," said a small-town bat from Nottinghamshire. "And I prefer local blood. You never know what they put in foreign blood."

"Then maybe you shouldn't be allowed into Transylvania! Apparently, you don't mind being exploited as long as it's under the Union Jack!" spat out a German bat. "You'll be drinking Chinese blood with a British label."

All the bats were murmuring now, shoving, pushing, and glaring. After numerous attempts, a bat in spectacles made himself heard. "From a strictly empirical and biological viewpoint, we need a diverse diet. The EU has helped each country retain its smaller farms, its genetic array. Better blood for us."

"Until we're in debt and they starve us in the streets!" shrieked a Greek bat.

"What do you want? Another world war?" cried out the Spanish bat.

The noise subsided. Everyone enjoyed a blood bath, but there was a price: a tainted and anemic blood supply for years afterward.

The ancient bat sighed. "Let's keep our wars small and continual and preferably out of the EU. Shall we have a show of wings for staying in the EU, please?"

Most wings went up. There seemed to be general agreement.

Then a flapping like that of flags in a high wind arose from the far corridors of the cavern. Unknown bats with razors in their claws tore into their brethren, killing, maiming. The cavern echoed with shrieks. Most fled madly toward the exit. Some abandoned their children. Some suffocated in the crush. Some, the Spanish bat among them, stayed to fight and, after fierce battle, overcame the unknown enemy. As he lay bleeding and dying on the dirt, the Spanish bat noticed, scattered among the dead intruders, the banners they had carried in: a French flag, a British flag, a Spanish flag, all dirtied, all torn.

**The End of the World Comedy Roast**  
**by**  
**CL Bledsoe and Michael Gushue**

When the world ends, it will end in squirrels.  
The sun will warm our bald spots, and the wind  
will blow the stench of our failures into someone  
else's kitchen. No more being sad about the price  
of acorns. No more hollow trees filled with someone  
else's nuts. I'll have my own shoebox of fetal  
oak trees rattling around like my long lost teeth.  
They say the best way to eat acorns is to wait  
for them to become a squirrel, for the squirrel  
to make it as a stand-up comic. Then consume  
him by laughing about airline food, white people  
dancing, his war against the interlopers  
in his backyard, the psychological cost  
of which is darker than the inside of a nut.  
When the world ends, when it's finally over—  
which is right now—it will end in floss.



**Burger Fervor**  
by  
**Walter Nyman**

A stray hamburger in the middle of the freeway stopped traffic for three hours. The news crew came in helicopters to film the event and conduct interviews. The hamburger had nothing to say. It was there for only one purpose: to be eaten. But who would eat it? It had been laying in the hot sun and there were probably bugs crawling on it now and at least a few people had wheat intolerances.

Finally, a brave soul came forward and declared himself "The Chosen One". He stood a whopping six feet tall and wore leather gym shorts paired with a khaki wifebeater. His bare shoulders bore tattoos of his favorite professional bowlers: Jimster "Four-Fingers" Jackson and Chester "Bigballs" Charlton. He was known throughout town as the only man to ever eat the local Burgermonster's 5 lb. Big Shit Burger in one sitting.

The Big Shit left him comatose for the following two weeks, during which time he had recurring dreams of a strange hamburger laying on a familiar freeway. The dreamburger had pickles and spoke to him in a sharp cheddar accent. It told him he was The Chosen One and that if he were ever to see a hamburger like it in real life, he should eat it without thinking.

Now he stood before that very hamburger, but this time he was not dreaming. He could feel the humid wind on his elbows and the vibration on the road from the thousands of idling cars behind him. He was hungry. He hadn't eaten since breakfast. The burger looked up at him and the sharp cheddar was melted in such a way that made it look kind of like a smile. The burger was smiling at him and saying, "Eat me, Chosen One, eeaat meee."

He knew what to do so he stopped thinking and leaned over and grabbed the burger with two hands, lifted it up to his snarling teeth and ripped a big bite off it. It was gooey and had bits of gravel stuck to the bun, but it tasted like a burger should. He finished the rest of it in three bites then wiped his face with a handkerchief drawn from a back leather pocket.

He took two breaths, then turned around to face the thousands of awestruck drivers who had stopped honking and sitting to watch what was happening. He lifted his arms, raised his head and roared,

"I HAVE DEFEATED THE ROGUE HAMBURGER! I WANT A STATUE MADE IN MY NAME TO HONOR MY BRAVERY!"

All the people in their cars applauded and hooped and hollered and started a chant of "Cho-Sen-One, Cho-Sen-One!"

Then, suddenly, the hamburger hero made a rubber-ducky-like squeaking noise, clutched his chest, collapsed, flopped around for about seventy-two seconds, then died. Hundreds in the crowd rushed to his aid, but it was too late and he was too dead. An autopsy would later reveal that the hamburger had laid out in the sun far too long and carried a fast-actin' Tinactin-pamphloma virus that shut down his nervous, circulatory, and limbic systems.

The town made good on his final wish by constructing the statue he asked for. They tried at first to make the statue out of hamburgers, but it kept collapsing, even when they used a lot of glue, so they decided to make it out of petrified macaroni instead.

Macaroni is very stable.

**Two Poems**  
by  
**Daniel Galef**

**Daylight Saving**

I remember  
the hour we lost.  
It was April,  
and the hundred-year-old trees were being born for the first time again.  
I felt,  
so briefly,  
like I had control over time,  
although of course I was only doing what I was told, like everyone else.  
I remember a shameful sense of loss  
at the time that didn't really exist,  
and an annoyance at the feeling, and at the fact that I had forgotten the date again.  
Just like today,  
I had to look up the instructions,  
be told whether the occasion marks a gain  
or a loss.  
And it was a loss.  
We lost an hour,  
or pretended we did.  
And today, we got it back.  
What will you do with yours?  
I cannot do what I wanted to do with this same hour then,  
when the birds thought they could speak to us and the sky was wider than the horizon.  
I cannot make good on the plans of spring when the parchment leaves lie dying in the  
gutter.  
My hour has depreciated;  
it is no longer worth what it was.  
Damned inflation, it gets you everywhere.  
But what I don't know is  
whether my time is losing its value,  
or time is.  
There is a factor of absent potentiality, to be sure.  
In April, I could have,  
through the unremarkable sorcery of effort,  
turned that hour into a deed,  
or a friend,  
or sleep,  
or (if I could bear not to toss them back like I do the hours), a fish,  
or a poem.  
But the hours since have robbed the hours to come,  
and capital has been lost  
in hours,  
and in friends, and sleep.  
Now that I have my hour back,  
it bears the scars of its six month captivity.

It is thin, and pale, and it has lost as much faith in me as I have in it.  
The hour we lost we spent together.  
It has come back to us separately.

### **Adventurer, Take This TV Repair Manual on Thy Quest and It Will Serve Thee Well**

Take thou thy silver socket wrench,  
That which thy fathers hadst entrusted,  
And thy fathers' fathers' before them,  
And the Stevens Street Ace Hardware Outlet before them.  
Take thou up thy wrench,  
Battered and battle-weary with the rust of a thousand fixtures  
Pied across its noble face,  
Take thou thy strong and ancient socket wrench,  
And tighten the nuts, every one, across the skin of the particleboard.  
Now,  
With the reverence of a lover,  
Turn the knob and pray.  
And yet do the spokesmen hock?  
And yet do today's big, big winners cheer?  
And yet do the penguins march?  
Black and white, though the set is color, across the frozen wastes  
To the war cry of Morgan Freeman?  
They do not, and the felted speakers lie dead anon.  
Hero, your quest has failed,  
Although many trials you have yet to face.  
Let not the scars of hopelessness mar the visage of your determination!  
Lay thou aside thy trusted and tired socket wrench, and  
Take thou now thy magnetized ratcheted Phillips-head screwdriver.  
It is dull and black-handled, but it bears the proud and undaunted blazon  
That is a polymer-molded ergonomic grip.  
It rests in thy workman's hand like the hand of a friend,  
And it has known thy hand before,  
In tougher times,  
And lived to tell the bloody tale.  
The selfsame Phillips-head screwdriver,  
Which the elders call *Craftsman*,  
Or sometimes *Fuck the thing's slipped again*,  
Was your tool when the Batteries of Elmo perished  
And served well in its task.  
On that day the Triple As fell and the counter their grave,  
But you snatched them up from the grim maw of oblivion,  
And ensured that they should not that day see the feasting halls of the battle-slain and out-  
of-juice.  
And, yea, even when the bicycle betrayed thee,  
And tossed thy heir to his merciless punishment upon the cobbles of Anderson Park,  
Broken of spirit and skinned of knee,  
To be met only with the solace of a popsicle from the ice cream truck,  
Which wept its garish purple blood and bile upon his arms and new shirt.  
Then thou campaigned,  
All afternoon before the toils of variously scaled hexes and WikiHow guides,

And fought, and fell,  
But emerged, lifetimes later, bloodied yet victorious,  
Having at great cost to house and home bought another bicycle.  
This day is the day of thy destiny,  
Thy prophesied triumph over the flickering window of snow,  
Rabbit-eared and rubber-footed.  
Take thou thy screwdriver,  
O driver of screws,  
And as the physician with his sutures,  
Reattach all of the connections.  
Alarum! A hit! Zounds! Pull back, for thou hast been struck,  
A blow as mortal as infamy,  
The bolts of Jove slung from the screws of Zenith.  
Thy hand has been bitten by the beast you tend to,  
An ungrateful pet in the house of an overgenerous lord.  
Retreat,  
And tend to thy wounds with cold water and unguents and much cursing of vacuum tubes.  
The days of darkness have begun, long ere the days have started to grow shorter,  
For this is not a darkness of the divine sun,  
Its reliable luminescence even as the 60-Watt CrystalBright halogen bulb,  
But a darkness of the spirit,  
And also of the television screen.  
But a sole recourse remains for the doomed adventurer,  
Steadfast and unhesitating  
In his assurance of defeat.  
Hero, lay thou down thy ratcheted magnetized black-handled Phillips-head screwdriver,  
Lay thou down thy silver socket wrench,  
Which has failed for the first time,  
Lay thou down thy manuals and thy scrolls of lore,  
For they are snake-tongued and in a savage scrawl,  
And hold no loyalty to you.  
Hero, lay thou down thy self, upon the shaded bower of thy sofa,  
The soft sepulcher that swallows and does not release except coins and crumbs,  
And take thou up thy telephone receiver,  
And call Best Buy.

## Flexible Groups by Desmond White

Mrs. Whittaker paused from grading papers to appreciate the room. The kids were engaged in what's called Flexible Learning, working in what is called Flexible Groups, to accomplish Flexible Goals, based on a Flexible Curriculum. The class almost ran itself, although Whittaker had a very important role as professional educator—to applaud loudly these children's talents, to cultivate their unique gardens, to preserve and prepare their individual snowflakes only to release them at the end of the year, ice crystals now advanced in length and complexity, for three months of summer and another teacher's care.

Whittaker's classroom complimented this theme with an array of art work. On the back wall were the "ABC's of Shakespeare," in which each student had taken a letter, such as *A* or *G*, and found a special Shakespearean property beginning with that letter, such as *Anne Hathaway* or *Gloucester*. There was only one imperfection on the whole board—*B*, which had been given to Shelby, was for *Billy*, a gross abbreviation of William. Of course, *B* was for *Bard*, and Whittaker winced every time she saw *Billy* on the wall, drawn in pencil (not even marker!), without an image or passage.

On another wall were ribbons of six-word stories, each as sharp and rare as diamonds, except for one rough patch, where a student (Shelby) had written a seven-word story about an unexceptional Spring Break spent at Grandma's.

Today, the students were composing, culling, cut-and-pasting, calculating, creating, and choreographing their Final Projects for William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, some selected from a menu, some invented by the students and teacher-approved. Long gone were the days of paper and pencil tests, even 3-5 page essays. Now, Jia-Ling Pan worked on a line of faces made out of clay and based on the geometry and conclave eye sockets of African Woyo masks. Lim Haberly was writing a twenty-page critique on the *SAS Survival Handbook*, a long reigning staple in survival literature (no longer!). Two students were working in tandem to design a course curriculum for the boys on the island—Yu Jeong was revising the Dress Code and Sung Wong was researching grade level expectations. Lowki Ou was writing a gender-bent manuscript, called *Lady of the Flies*, and Marli Diesel was sketching a 1:25,000 topographic map. By the book store, keeping her voice down, T. C. Suwabe interviewed Golding's daughter Judith on Google Hangouts about her troubled childhood and the anger that drove her to write a memoir, *Children of Lovers*. By the pencil sharpener, Dany Damaske, Greg Nice, and Kissy Shorrock held a round table discussion, recorded by field reporter (and President of the Yearbook Club) Toni Ngrule, on the inherent errors in jumbling together biography and fictitious prose. Jazz Kaye was just finishing his obituary for Piggy, Lima Hysty the trajectory and impact speed of Piggy's fall, and Harris Soezay a water-color portrait of Virginia Tiger, the young graduate student who'd stolen Golding's heart in his mid-fifties, to the discomfort of his (soon-to-be-deceased) wife. And Shelby—

Whittaker paused. Shelby was using markers and brown cardboard paper to draw Virginia Tiger, turning his head sharply to spy on Harris every few seconds. Whittaker felt a pang of shame when she also noted that Shelby's desk was the same color as the student to his left—they were both bittersweet cherry fuchsia. How had she not noticed that she'd ordered two of the same color desks?

Whittaker had tried to be understanding about Shelby, but the boy was hopeless. While his peers were designing cell phone covers and using 3D printers to generate miniature battleships, Shelby couldn't find a thesis in a one-sentence paragraph, cheated on tests by writing the answers on his desk (in pen), and only knew how to turn paper into basic paper airplanes (in comparison, Sindy once made a Boeing 787 Dreamliner out of solar panel tinsel. Theoretically, the plane could fly indefinitely, weather permitting). The only original idea Shelby ever had he plagiarized from a neighbor.

Now, Whittaker approached Shelby's table. Harris frowned as if to say: "Do you see what Shelby's doing?" and Shelby looked up at Whittaker, and then down at his work.

Whittaker took the cardboard artwork, folded it a few times, and ripped it into pieces. She gave the papers back to Shelby. "Now Shelby," she said delicately, "plagiarism is a—well, it is a form of flattery, although it's rather self-conceited. You do know what 'self-conceited' means, don't you, Shelby?" The boy shook his head. "It means having an exaggerated sense of self-importance. Do you know what 'self-importance' means?" Nope. "What about 'an exaggerated sense?' No?" Not at all. "Look, Shelby, you were copying your neighbor, and that's dangerous, selfish, and unethical. You know what 'copying' mean, yes?"

Shelby was getting it, but Whittaker felt the need to press on. "In my classroom, copying is stealing, and that's not living up to the expectations we decided together—the whole class—in our *Social Contract*." Whittaker pointed to a poster of classroom rules adorned with signed names, each its own multifaceted John Hancock of sorts. In the corner was a little x.

"Shelby," said Whittaker. "Shelby, Shelby. Inside of you, there's an individual crying to get out."

"I don't feel like an individual," said Shelby.

"But you are, Shell. Well, technically, you are. You have a name. Although lots of people have the name Shelby. But in combination with your last name—"

"There are fifty other people with his first and last name in this state alone," said Marli, looking up from her phone.

"You must have some kind of personalized middle name," said Whittaker, fearing to look at the attendance sheet.

"I'm—I'm sad," said Shelby, wiping a tear.

"Oh, honey, you're not sad. That's what Maria is feeling. You're just being difficult."

As the teacher moved away, the students moved in. "Nobody likes you," said Lim Haberly. "Maybe that's your special talent—being unlikable," said Yu Jeong. "Nah, George is unlikable, too. He breathes too loudly from his left nostril," said Sung Wong. "And he eats soup with a spoon and scrapes the bottom of the bowl. It hurts my ears," said Lowki Ou. "Maybe Shelby breathes too loudly with his right nostril?" said T.C. Suwabe. They listened. Nothing. Shelby breathed just like James and Sindy. "You annoy me," said Dany Damaske. "You bother everyone, even Mrs. Whittaker," said Toni Ngrule. "Maybe that's how I'm unique? I'm annoying?" said Shelby.

The boys and girls of Classroom 208 sat in surprise. What Shelby had said made a lot of sense. It dawned on them in different ways that this was exactly what made Shelby unique. Lim Haberly did a backflip. Yu lit a match. Sung, who'd set up a circuit connecting a halogen lamp to neural discharges, had a lightbulb ding above her head. And Mrs. Whittaker slipped back to Shelby's desk and grabbed his shoulders. "Yes! Yes! That's it, Shelby! Shelby, you genius (along with Paul and Lindi). You could be the most special of all of us, because none of us are annoying. Not one of us. You bring us together, in a way."

"I'm sad," said Shelby, again.

"No, you're not—not really—because Maria's pet turtle died." The teacher's eyes lit up. "Oh, you got me again. Good work, Shelby! Good work!"

Mrs. Whittaker smiled warmly and patted his head. Before returning to her desk, she gave him a new sheet of brown cardboard paper. "Go ahead. Do you."

Shelby, in rebellion, tried drawing his own version of Virginia Tiger, but after a few tries, started peeking at Harris' canvas.



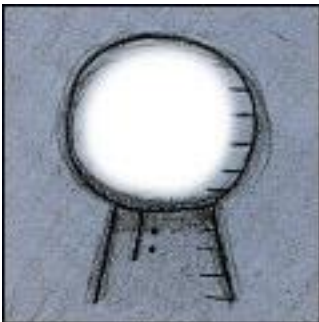
## Contributor Biographies



**Mary F. Lee**, poet, is also a musician, wife, mother, and activities director for an assisted living apartment complex. She spends a lot of time writing dirty limericks and has been published 17 times, including the August 2006 *Poetry Magazine Humor Issue*, *Dust and Fire Women's Poetry Anthology*, *Aqueous Magazine*, *Reader Weekly*, *Duluth News Tribune*, online at *Ernie Watts dot com*, *Minnetonka Review*, "*Amethyst and Agate*" a *Lake Superior Anthology*, and *Zenith City Style* online mag. She is "a woman of a certain age" and hopes to have a collection published before she hits death.



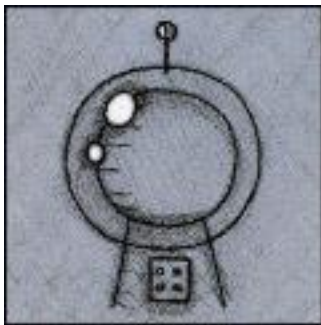
**Paul Stansbury** is a lifelong native of Kentucky. Now retired, he lives in Danville, Kentucky. His stories have appeared in the anthologies, *Brief Grislys*, published by Apocryphile Press, *Neo-Legends To Last A Deathtime* published by KY Story, *Frightening* published by SEZ Publishing, *Out of the Cave* published by MacKenzie Publishing, *In Media Res*, *Stories From the In-Between* published by Writespace Houston and *Nocturnal Natures* published by Zimbell House Publishing. His novelette *Little Green Men?* was published as Kindle edition by Bards and Sages Publishing. He is a contributing writer for the Danville Advocate Messenger Newspaper.



**Matt Kolbet** teaches and writes in Oregon. His most recent novel is *Lunar Year*.



Playfully quaint **KJ Hannah Greenberg** gets high on adverbs, mixes more metaphors than a platypus has pockets, and attempts to matchmake words like "balderdash" and "xylophone." Her newest collection of short fiction is *Friends and Rabid Hedgehogs* (Bards & Sages Publishing, June, 2016).



**Cole Bellamy** lives alone with a cat and a synthesizer in Tampa, Florida. He teaches creative writing and English composition at the University of South Florida and Saint Leo University. He also writes, creates strange music, and tries to make fun stuff happen.



In addition to publishing scholarly work in academic journals and fiction in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The Beloit Fiction Journal*, *34<sup>th</sup> Parallel Magazine* and *Albuquerque Arts*, **Alice Hatcher** has placed creative nonfiction in *Gargoyle Magazine* and poetry in *The Storyteller*. In 1995, she lost control of a remote-control model airplane after it went out of range, and she's still wondering where it crashed. She loves subways but is terrified of public busses, especially in Tucson, where signs above exits discourage but do not prohibit the discharge of firearms.



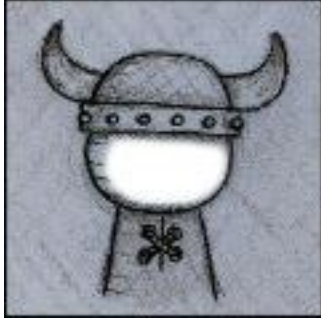
**Mickey Kulp** is a writer and father of two mostly grown children who have survived his shenanigans through smarts they inherited from their mother. His creative nonfiction, fiction, and poetry have appeared in consumer magazines, newspapers, and literary journals. His first book, *Random Stones: A book of poetry*, was published in 2016. More at [www.MichaelKulpWriter.blogspot.com](http://www.MichaelKulpWriter.blogspot.com).



**Lita Kurth** received her MFA from Pacific Lutheran University and has published work in three genres. Her CNF, "Pivot," was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her CNF "This is the Way We Wash the Clothes," presented at the Working Class Studies conference, 2013, won the 2014 Diana Woods Memorial Award (summer-fall 2014) and appeared in *Lunchticket 2014*. She teaches private workshops online and in her living room (Lita Kurth Writing Workshops on Facebook). In 2013, she co-founded the Flash Fiction Forum, a reading series in San Jose. She contributes to [Tikkun.org/tikkundaily](http://Tikkun.org/tikkundaily), [TheReviewReview.net](http://TheReviewReview.net), [classism.org](http://classism.org), and San Jose's *Metro*.



**CL Bledsoe** is the author of a dozen books, most recently the novel *Man of Clay* and the poetry collection *Riceland*.



**Michael Gushue** runs the nano-press Beothuk Books and is co-founder of Poetry Mutual/Vrzhu Press. His work appears online and in print, most recently in *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, *the Michigan Quarterly*, and *Gargoyle*. His chapbooks are "Gathering Down Women," "Conrad," and "Pachinko Mouth" (from Plan B Press).



**Walter Nyman** lives near the ocean and recently saw multiple whales. Whales are enormous and highly hydrodynamic, but cannot swim upside down. You know that now. He sometimes eats toast with just jam on it, but most of the time he butters it beforehand, though not before toasting it 'cause that would make a mess in the toaster. It shall also henceforth be known that Walter approves of two-toed sloths, but not three-toed sloths. That's too many toes for a sloth.



**Daniel Galef** is a poet and playwright oscillating between New York and Montreal. He has previously published humor in *Kugelmass*, *Light Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Irreproducible Results*.



**Desmond White** is a beleaguered high school teacher in Houston, Texas.