

◇ Defenestration ◇

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Table of Contents

Mars Schupsky, "IKEA Even Sells Cheap, Do-It-Yourself Metaphors For What To Do With Your Drunken Sailor"	2
Benjamin Davis, "Kids These Days"	6
Rebecca Gomez Farrell, "Submission Caws"	9
Jim George, "The Ten-Foot Pole Store"	12
Sheree Shatsky, "Boondockers"	13
Alex Z. Salinas, "Long Time No See"	14
Steve Goldberg, "Filed Under: Taxes"	18
Lou Faber, Two Poems	19
Elizabeth McMunn-Tetangco, "Drogon's Pointless Journey: <i>Game of Thrones</i> Fan Fiction by Me, a Person Who Didn't Watch <i>Game of Thrones</i> "	20
Don Malkemes, "Must-Haves for Amber Jambers's Annual Jamberlation"	21
Contributor Biographies	23

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IKEA Even Sells Cheap, Do-It-Yourself Metaphors For What To Do With Your Drunken Sailor

**by
Mars Schupsky**

I woke up in the water, well below the surface but still in the light. When I breached, I gasped and looked for safety. He was floating not too far from me, leg up on the back of the IKEA couch, his hand in a bag of chips, passed out. Even as I swam over to him, calling his name, he didn't wake up; not until I almost tipped the thing climbing on.

He woke with a sniff and look of disgust. My hair, stiff with salt, clung around my shoulders and back like locks of scared children or a bouquet of eels. Or whatever a grouping of scared children or eels is called. The IKEA couch took as easily to the ocean as a twig. Just a few minutes of rocking and I was throwing up over the side. It took a minute for fish to come feast on my chum, another minute for me to calibrate, one more for him to finally recognize me.

"Jake, we're at sea." I told him.

"I sea that."

"How the hell did we get out here?"

"I don't know. Did you set the alarm?"

"What, to the house?"

"Yea."

"...I don't think so, but what does that have to do with anything?"

"That's probably it then."

"You think someone broke into the house, stole us and the IKEA couch, rode us out into the middle of the ocean, and dropped us in...because I didn't set the alarm?"

"Don't talk to me like I'm stupid."

He pulled his greasy hand out of the bag of chips and sideswiped it into the water. I quickly recovered it.

"This is our only food."

"I don't have the energy for this shit. I have work in the morning."

"Jake, we're at sea damnit."

He rolled over onto the chaise lounge completely, so I was left alone on the loveseat. Then he tucked his hands into his pits, made a few soft slicks at the back of the throat and was

rocked back to sleep within seconds. I stood on the cushions to get a better look around. Nothing, no one. Birds. Too far to mean anything.

He woke up again after twenty-four hours had passed. I had just dove down several feet below the couch looking for other fish in the sea. Not that I had any skills or resources for catching one, but somehow I felt constructive at least looking.

"I've been crying," I told him.

"I can't tell because all of you is wet."

"My eyes are red."

"The sun is hot."

"I'm telling you I've been fucking crying."

"Where is this coming from?"

"The part of me that dies from starvation."

"You make such a big deal out of everything."

Another twenty-four hours passed and I'd awoken to my hand getting bitten off at the wrist. Blood was squirting all over and I had to shove it in between the cushions to keep from creating a pool of it around us. I chewed screams into the one remaining throw pillow.

"There are sharks here now, Jake! One of them took my hand."

He pinched the bottom of the chip bag and shook the last of the crumbs into his mouth.

"Well," he said, salt on his lips. "Less of you to feed."

Later on, he managed to get drunk on his own blood supply. I caught him suckling from one of his arteries.

"I think you're confused." I told him. "And you're sabotaging us."

"Holy shit, is that all you talk about anymore?" Blood dribbled off his chin into his diminishing lap.

"What would you prefer to talk about?"

"Remember when how our old porch had that window into the dining room?"

"Yea."

"That was cool."

"I'm not going to reminisce with you when you're blood drunk."

"I've barely had a pint."

"It's not about quantity. You know how I can tell? Only one of your eyes is paying attention to me."

It didn't matter because in another day, birds would peck out both his eyes. Also, he'd have had more blood in his stomach than his veins, not that that stopped him. I even watched as he pissed a stream of solid red off the back of the IKEA couch.

"You're pissing your life away."

"Oh, you're a fucking riot."

I'd cauterized my wrist with a piece of aluminum framework I'd broken off of the IKEA couch and let bake in the sun. We were truly ship wreckage then, sitting there with our bloody stumps, two eyes between us, and the complexion of chili powder and rattlesnakes. We weren't survivalists, we were food for flies the moment we got out there, just taking a comically long and grotesque amount of time to die.

We'd tried to have sex, just to pass the time until our deaths, but I was so dehydrated my vagina was sand. He offered to lubricate with blood from his open artery, but I wasn't feeling it. It was nice of him to offer though.

On what scientifically should have been the last day of my life, I lay on my back staring unabashedly at the sun. A kind of damn you, let's do this shit now Sun. If you're going to fry me, let's get it over with Sun. Let's end this. You and me. Outside. Sun.

Jake had become literal toast. Toast that still wouldn't shut up about having work in the morning. In the same vein, I was so unappealing that sharks spurned my advances. And then out of the clear blue -

"I think...is that? Holy shit, it's a boat."

"Hm."

"No really, Jake. There's a big ass boat over there. Look." I turned back to him and immediately saw those two sore, vacant pockets. I screamed a little. "Oh damn. Sorry."

"No, I get it. I'm a monster."

"Don't take it that way. You just usually keep your eyelids closed."

"It's cool. I know I disgust you. It's been that way for a while now."

"No it hasn't," I argued. "Just since birds ate your eyes."

"Well you're no rose garden either, honey. That dead wrist of yours stinks like trench warfare. Have you checked it recently? Because I can smell the gang green from here."

"I think I can swim to it."

"To what?"

"The boat."

"Neat."

It took more courage than energy to swim to the boat and as soon as I was spotted, there was a whole system of rescuers deployed to pull me from the blue. I was washed, fed, quenched, my skin was treated, my wounds tended. It felt good to among people again.

As the boat sailed past the bobbing IKEA couch, all us spectators saw the back of Jake's head resting against the cushions, oblivious to salvation. The captain pulled me aside to ask me a question.

"What do you want us to do with him?"

"Leave him," I said. "Less he rises."

Kids These Days
by
Benjamin Davis

Where I spent much of my time as a kid was a magical place.

It was a pirate ship. It was a castle. It was a barracks and a spacecraft.

But mostly, it was a rock.

I'm sitting on it now, smoking a cigarette. It feels like a rock.

Coming home is odd. Smoke in the woods is odder.

Not my smoke, of course. I'm used to that. The smoke over there, in the distance.

I snub out my cigarette, thoroughly, and leave it on the rock. I head for the smoke. The wood becomes dense and the light, thin. I walk for longer than it takes to write about.

A hut sits in a clearing. Fat and frosted.

Dark, dark smoke rises from the chimney. I go up to the door, cautiously. I knock. The sound is more of a thump. The door is almost soft. I frown.

"Hello!" I call. A moment later, the door slides open. A face. A broken twisted face. More like a boxer and less like a witch.

"What do you want?" the old woman asks, pleasant enough.

I look behind her into the hut. Warm air flows out.

"I uh, saw the smoke."

"Yes, it's fine, I'm trying to cook some children."

I feel my chest swell with a bit of fear. But, I stand my ground.

"What do you mean, children?"

I grip a pen in my pocket. Ready for frantic stabbing.

"You know, kids, offspring, little ones," the old woman sighs and steps aside, "come in and see."

I hesitate at first but, not taking my eyes off her or my hand off the pen, I step slowly in. The inside of the hut is less sinister than I expected. A table, a kettle, a pair of children, boy and girl, sitting on a musty couch, noses to phones.

In fact, the oddest thing in the room is a newspaper, laying open on the table. "Kids These Days," the headline reads.

The woman bustles around me and clicks on the kettle.

"Tea?" she asks.

I shrug. I look at the children.

"Kids?"

They stay silent.

"Hey, guys, are you okay here?"

The girl makes a noise. "Uh."

I turn to the old woman. She is looking at the children, a deep sadness in her eyes.

"I used to be terrifying to children," she mused, mostly to herself. She glares at the kids.

"I am going to eat you!" she screams, shrill and menacing. I step back and grip the pen harder in my pocket. But the little boy only lets out a belch, the girl scratches her ear. The old woman slumps into a chair at the table. She puts her face in her hands.

"They've been here for two days," she moans, "I thought," she continues, "I thought maybe when their electronics died, they'd do something. But the little girl has a bag full of portable batteries. A whole bag! They just sit there."

She begins to cry. I never know what to do when someone cries. I feel sympathy welling inside of me. I awkwardly pat her on the shoulder.

"No, no," I say, "it's like, it's like that documentary about how McDonalds genetically modifies all their birds. It shows this video of them all beakless and sad and you just don't want to eat chicken again for a long time."

The old woman sobs louder.

"But!" I say quickly, "they have free range birds now. It's a thing. They are a bit more expensive, but you can find them. That's what you need, some free-range kids."

I frown at my own words. My consoling has gone into autopilot.

The old woman looks up at me. "You really think so?"

I smile and nod.

"Well, what am I supposed to do about these ones?" she asks, snot dribbling from her crooked nose.

I look over at the kids. I shrug. I walk to where they sit and snatch both phones from their hands. The effect is immediate. They begin screaming. The hut shakes. The old woman covers her ears. I quickly drop the phones back into their laps.

"Holy crap!"

"You see," The old woman says, dejectedly, "I'm stuck with them. If they were clever, they could have gotten away. If they were foolish, they'd have been eaten. That is how things are. That is how it is supposed to work. But, this!" she shakes her head, "this is all wrong."

"The world is changing," I say, attempting philosophical comfort.

"No, it is not, it is ending." She takes a deep breath. I stand, unsure of what to do.

Then, she smacks her hand on the table and stands up, straight and tall, "I will die how I was meant to. I will not live in this absurdity any longer."

Her tears have all dried up. She looks proud and fierce. She walks over to the smoking oven and flings open the door. She turns to me.

"Find some free-range children and eat them," she smiles, "for me."

I frown, "I'm not going to do that."

She sighs, "The world has lost its magic then." She climbs into the oven.

There is no sound, only more black smoke. I turn around to the children. The girl is looking at me, a smile on her face.

"I got to level seven!" she says, then puts her face back into her phone.

Submission Caws
by
Rebecca Gomez Farrell

A black crow swoops onto the open window ledge, and yearning gushes from deep within me. I tamp down the emotion swifter than the crow can deliver its charge: a rolled parchment that bangs against the bookshelves as it flips toward the floor. The crow musses its feathers and launches into the air, off to retrieve its next assignment. Soon, someone else will receive fresh misery. I retrieve the parchment, find it quaint that the Gate Keepers use it for correspondence when they could just place a call by sandspelling. The parchment's seal displays a sentinel guarding a mountain of scrolls piled behind an ornate, locked gate.

My muse caller, a wooden whistle, drops from my lips. The enchanted object's been passed down my mother's line for generations. I'd been about to revise a new spell recipe with it, but now I'm not so sure I'll have the gumption. I roll the whistle between my fingers, try to take strength from its well-worn carvings depicting an open spellbook, music notes, and a fairy staring at the sky in ecstasy. Grandma created the most beautiful symphonies with it, conducting singing sprites while they painted with water colors. My mother used it for brilliant choreography, training crows to deliver prophetic messages to entire audiences. But I'm not one for performance, so I write spell recipes for visions that others can conjure to entertain themselves. The only problem? None have been released to the public.

I take a breath that isn't deep, only determined, and open the parchment. The message, written in black calligraphy, is too concise to yield anything but rejection. Disappointment courses through me as I read, "Thank you for submitting your recipe, 'Hope is a Fluttering Wing on the Breeze,' for our spell collection. Although we enjoyed your ingredients' inventiveness, especially the marmot whiskers, the spell lacked a certain *je ne sais quoi* when we cast it. Maybe add glitter? We receive many quality recipes; thus we must reject many quality recipes. Please do submit to our future anthologies."

This is a familiar message. When my mood is cheery, I recognize it's better than the standard response. The Gate Keepers admired how I combined my totems, how I laced my intended result through the narrative instructions and took extra care to use a charm that ensures the recipes arrived typo-free.

My mood is not cheery. All I can see is that word: *submit*. It pulses with implied subjugation. I channel years of disappointment and burn it off the parchment with a finger beam. My familiar, a docile gray tabby named Precious, meows discontent at my histrionics. I watch flame engulf ink strokes, and eureka strikes. I laugh, a sound that begins in humor but ends in deep, gravelly stubbornness.

I am done submitting. I will make the Gate Keepers submit to me, channel my conviction into a fireball that shatters the fabled gate's metal into filaments. I will storm their fortress, rush past towers constructed from the compressed ashes of failed spellings and moats filled with crumpled correspondence. The Keepers will be in the study, dozens of them reclining by the flickering fire as nearby, herbal tea steeps. They will toss glowing spell sheet after glowing spell sheet to the floor. Only when the felines perched on their shoulders mew their blessings, will they stop flinging away those failed dreams. "You like that one, Pookie?" the Keepers will say in seeming synchrony. "Acceptance it is!"

I will burn it all down with a fire burst fierce as my unleashed fury.

Meeer-ow!

Back in reality, Precious lashes my ankle with her tail. I meet eyes so dilated, I can barely see their deep emerald green.

"I wouldn't really do it, Precious," I promise. "It's just nice to dream."

Precious lifts her head and marches down the hall, leaving me to my resentful hallucinations. I slide my family's *Book of Spellcraft* from the shelf, hoping for inspiration. There must be some way to get past the gate, some cheat for outsmarting the Keepers' opaque criteria. Why, that Betty Hex announced her third spell sale this week, and I've tried her recipes. They're uninspired incantations that barely fizz before they fizzle out, providing no more than a fleeting ecstasy, as insipid as a child transforming dry pasta and cow's milk into overboiled mac and cheese for their first dinner enchantment.

Yet Betty Hex's stories keep selling.

I grumble as I toss up a handful of sand from the telepot at my feet and mutter, "Find Betty." The suspended grains swirl together as a hazy image of her blonde pigtails comes into view. Though we're pushing thirty, she looks for all the world like she did at thirteen.

Betty giggles and the connection is complete. "Oh, hi there, Kimmie!" She waves from the same bedroom where we played Connect-the-Fireflies as younglings. "I haven't thought about you in ages."

"It's Kim," I grumble, but this isn't the time for that. "Hey, I have a question for you? Got a minute?"

"Sure thing!" She rolls onto her stomach on the bed, holds her head in her hands.

"So...um..." I stumble, loathe to admit my failures. But I must find a way, and if Betty, dear god Betty, knows the secret, "How did you get your first spell recipe accepted for a collection?"

Her eyes crinkle with delight as she claps her hands. "Oh my god, I had no idea you're spellcrafting again! It's so easy, isn't it?" Her chuckle slaps me with a green mist of envy. She speaks with a patter that could never be mistaken for thoughtfulness. "I suppose you had to come back around to it eventually, with your family."

I soften my tone...well, a bit. "So how do you do it? Come up with so many—" I cough, "—winning recipes?"

She sounds grave and stares wide-eyed into the screen. "It's a family secret." Then she winks and rolls back with laughter. "Just kidding! Reverse the enchantment on your muse caller, silly, so the little bugger travels away from you and toward a Gate Keeper instead. Do it the moment you ring for a crow to deliver your spell submission, and the muse's brilliance will smack the first Keeper it reaches right in the noggin. Us Hexes have been doing it for years!"

Us Hexes have been doing it for years, I mock with a high voice in my head. Of course, they have. I contain my condescension—barely.

"I swear you'll see an acceptance on the next crow after that. And if the Gate Keeper it hits has a patron charm or two lying around, they'll even send their next submission call directly to you."

"That's it?" I'm already searching for a reverse muse entry in my book. A drawing in pink and green ink illustrates a fairy flying backward on a breeze. It looks promising. Maybe...maybe Grams and Ma weren't as effortlessly brilliant as they led me to believe.

"That's it! Happy crafting!"

"Thanks—"

The sandscreen goes fuzzy and sprinkles to the ground, but not before glitter poofs from it: Betty's signature calling card. She's gone before I can thank her properly, no doubt off to tea with the newt delegation or some other nobility. I roll my eyes, but if this works, I'll send her a bouquet of exotic flower charms—I just know she's the type that lives for garden entertaining.

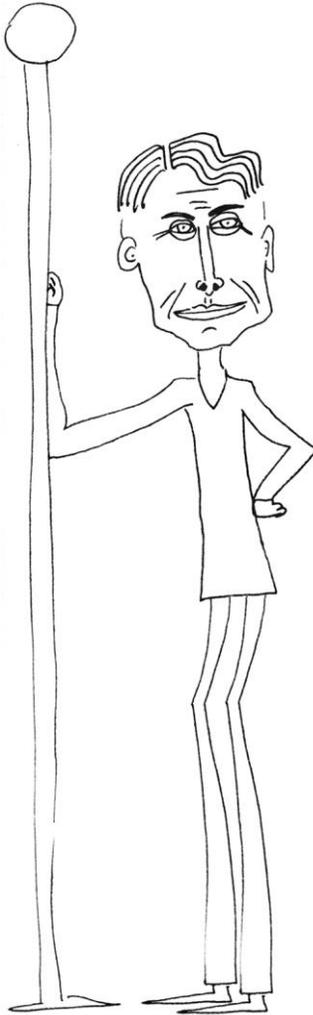
One more test of my recipe, "Nighttime Visions of Stars Dancing," and I'm ready. Shaking stardust from my hair, I fish out the muse caller. The spellbook insists I mix the same three ingredients as the invocation that binds the fairy to the whistle: birch tree bark (reminds the muse of home), ambrosia fluff (for long life and sustenance—it looks like cotton candy), and honey (so the fairy goes down sweet, but stays stuck in the sticky). I plop them in a cauldron—okay, my coffee mug—and swirl them counter-clockwise while humming whatever song most inspires me (I'm not telling).

Neon blue steam rises from the liquid, and I hope that means it worked. I gasp, realizing the muse can't fly both toward the Gate Keepers and me at the same time, so I'll be flying solo myself. But I know "Nighttime Visions" is a solid recipe, or at least I know it long enough to lean out the window and caw as loud as I can.

Before the crow arrives, I dip my quill in fresh ink and carefully write "End Recipe" at the bottom of the glowing spell sheet, making sure to exactly center it. I roll up the parchment and place a seal on its exposed edge. The muse caller touches my lips and I blow.

The Ten-Foot Pole Store
by
Jim George

Ten-Foot Poles
Now on sale!
Stop on down
To 10th & Dale.
They're just the thing
(And don't cost much)
For all the things
You wouldn't touch.
Assorted colors
Sized the same—
Ten-foot tall
(As per the name).
They're two for one
So you won't fear
Twice the things
You won't go near.
Don't be fooled
By other sizes;
Five-foot poles
Are compromises.
Avoidance is
Good for the soul,
And nothing says it
Like a pole.



Boondockers
by
Sheree Shatsky

A thin guy wearing a Comic-Con hat stands outside the screen door of my RV.

"Sorry to bother you. Is it okay to park here overnight?" He speaks in an accent I can't quite place.

"Yeah, Walmart's good with it." I look over at his rig. "That your Class A?"

"Venusian Sports Model. Vintage. Rebuilt with parts off the mother ship. Dig my new stabilizers." He beams a grin formula off his spindly finger. The steel support legs raise and withdraw into the underside.

I watch it hover in place. "Cool," I say. "Camping World carry those?"

He shakes his bulbous head. "Picked 'em up last trip out to Marfa. Private dealer." A woman pops open a porthole and leans out. "Harry, put this thing down and come help me with the awning."

The stabilizers unfurl like an arachnid. "Name's Harry," he says, holding out his gaunt hand. I laugh. "So I heard. I'm Steven." His four digit grip illuminates my palm. "Where you headed, Harry?"

"Flyover country. Got a couple of old friends to visit, then home. You?"

"North, maybe New Hampshire."

Harry nods. "Buzzed through in the '80s, but from what I can remember, beautiful homes, incredible dark skies."

The woman steps out the stainless steel entry hatch. "Harry!"

Harry points at his wedding ring. "Gotta get back to the old Shipmaster. Mind if we run the generator later?"

"Hey man, no problem. Sooner the better. This north Georgia heat is a killer. By the way, the awning..." I nod toward Walmart. "Best not to look too permanent to avoid a late night knock on your door by security."

He chuckles in dolphin, all clicks and whistles. "Men in black waving flashlights, eh?" With a wink and a so long, Harry strolls over to his rig and buffs his vanity plate with his shirt sleeve. RETIRE IN ROSWELL.

I slip out later for a late night smoke. The parking lot hums steady with generators cooling motor homes and tractor trailers. I look over at Harry's and see a soft swirl of cast off litter slowly rotating where he parked earlier in the day.

"Martian cloaking device, 1956," Harry telepaths in an accent I can't quite place.

Long Time No See
by
Alex Z. Salinas

I sip morning coffee at a Starbucks I'm at every Saturday and pretend to read *The New York Times*. I skim headlines, wonder how wonderful it'd be if I actually read the articles.

I look up and see Bob. I haven't seen Bob in three years, not since I left my last job. I'm not thrilled to see him, but not unhappy either. He told corny jokes and had a fittingly vanilla, somewhat unlikable face. You could say once upon a time, I invested a few stock-shares in Bob's life.

I wave at Bob. Bob, in line, sees me and squints, then smiles and waves back. After he gets his drink, he walks over to me and shakes my hand, then sits down at my table. Real formal.

"Bobby boy," I say. "Long time no see."

"What's going on with you, Porridge Breath? Never see you around here."

"I'm always here," I counter. "Bob, you look exactly the same. As handsome and dickless as a G.I. Joe."

"Correction," Bob says, "they still call me Stretch Armstrong."

Bob flits his eyes down south and waggles his near-invisible eyebrows. Nobody ever called him Stretch Armstrong.

"Your mother would know more about that," I say.

We laugh. I sip my coffee and Bob slurps his light green sludge.

"What're you having?" I ask.

"Oh, you know, just a"

Bob strings together a series of words the sum of which loses me entirely. I don't know why I even asked him the question. I couldn't care less.

"Cool," I say coolly.

"And you? What're you having?" Bob asks.

"Coffee," I answer. "Plain black coffee. See, Bob, I keep it simple. Only takes me three words."

My tone comes off strong, but luckily for me, Bob hasn't a clue about social cues.

"You always were a routine guy," Bob says, a twinkle in his lazy gray eye. "Does your mom still make you tamales? Man, I never forget the time she brought some in. They were muy delicious!"

"Nope," I say to Bob. "No more tamales." I have no idea why I lie.

Bored, I change the subject.

"So how's Joanie?" I ask.

"Joanie," Bob says, taking a quick breath. "Well, her and I divorced three years ago."

"Jesus," I say. "I'm sorry. I—I didn't know."

"Of course you didn't know," Bob says. "How would you?"

"You're right," I say.

I sip my coffee and Bob slurps his green stew.

"And Mitchell?" I ask. "How's that rascal doing?"

"Mitchell," Bob says, taking a deeper breath. "Well, the thing about Mitchell is Joanie took him. I haven't seen him in a while. I miss him. I do miss him a lot."

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph," I say. "I'm sorry, Bob. I'm firing blanks, aren't I?"

"It's OK," Bob says. "You didn't know."

"You're right, I didn't," I say.

I sip my coffee and Bob slurps his booger mush. Watching and hearing him do so is nauseating. Exhausting.

"And Clara and Abe?" I ask. "Did they end up getting hitched after all?"

Bob wipes his lips, sighs, and then says, "They did, but they're dead now."

I almost spit out my coffee in Bob's face.

"Christ!" I say. "They're *dead*?"

"Yes," Bob says plainly. "They died in a car accident in Vermont. Abe smashed into a bus head-on. He was going eighty. Him and Clara died instantly. Happened in broad daylight. They guessed Abe was texting and driving. He wasn't much of a drinker."

"Good God," I say. "Vermont? How does something like that happen in Vermont?"

"The lesson here," Bob says as though he's a preacher, "is that death isn't restricted to any one geographic location. It happens anywhere, even in Vermont."

I feel something heavy inside roll around. It wasn't there when I first got to Starbucks.

"And Nate?" I venture to ask, hopeful I'll receive some good news for a change. "Please tell me your brother's doing alright?"

Bob stares at me for a few seconds, silent, then smiles. Phew! I think. I finally hit a shot.

Bob shakes his head side to side.

"Dead," he answers. "We lost Nate last Christmas. After his gastric-bypass surgery, he stopped eating. He lost almost two hundred pounds and got real sick. My mom went into depression."

All I manage to do is to sip a long, slow sip of coffee, now lukewarm.

Bob slurps his liquid diarrhea, in turn churning my stomach.

"Can you please stop doing that?" I snap.

Bob looks at me with his vanilla face—a face so stupid and garish I wonder why I even decided to engage with him.

I glance at his hand and notice a silver wedding ring. Was his old one gold? He'd mentioned his divorce with Joanie, but I desperately need to hear something positive—who his new wife is.

"Bobby boy," I say, nodding toward his ring, "at least you caught another one. To tell you the truth, I never really liked Joanie. She was argumentative and full of herself. She thought she looked like Joan Crawford, but really, she looked like a retarded wallaby. So what's the new one's name?"

Bob looks at his ring and smiles.

"I'm not remarried," he answers. "I just couldn't bring myself to take this off."

I'm off the reservation now. Going eighty, ninety, a hundred. Looking for something, anything, to smash into.

"You insufferable buffoon!" I shout. "You're fucking relentless, Bob, as fucking relentless as King Harold in a children's hospital!"

Bob stares at me for a moment, silent, then giggles. He giggles loud, his eyes closed like he's a gigantic baby. Other patrons stare at us.

Suddenly, something inside me softens, and I laugh too. I can't help it. I laugh along with Bob. Bob giggles and I laugh.

After a while, Bob finally says, "Good one, Pete. Good one. Man, I haven't heard King Harold's name in a long time. You're a riot, Pete, a real riot!"

Bob giggles again, and this time the patrons join him. They all lose their minds.

I sip my coffee and feel the cold joe bubble in my guts. I feel the weight of death lift off my shoulders. Aliveness, I think, what a tremendous thing while it lasts.

Amidst Bob and the roaring audience, I stand and raise my arms to the roof, to heaven and hell beyond it.

"Bob," I proclaim, my hands clenched into fists, "I'm going to stab your stupid fucking body until your stupid fucking intestines fall out, then I'm going to feast on them and shit on your stupid fucking mother's stupid fucking grave!"

Bob and the crowd explode as though I just said the greatest joke in the world. They laugh so hard they fall out of their chairs and writhe in pain on the dirty floor, all the while pointing at me. Everyone pointing.

I'm standing, the only one upright, the only one quiet. I try to hear myself think, but can't. I'm drowned out.

When the laughter dies down soon—hopefully soon, I pray—I'll ask the barista for a plastic knife.

Filed Under: Taxes
by
Steve Goldberg

The DMV Statements folder, feeling cornered and bent out of shape, continued screaming at the bulging 2016 Tax Return, whose fat ass was jabbing into DMV's pale-yellow, elegant edges, smashing the slight, thin folder into the back wall of the second drawer inside the darkened, musty file cabinet.

"I mean, have you ever heard of personal space? Pfffft. You oversized goliaths never consider the needs of those smaller than you!" It felt good to let off some steam, but DMV Statements knew no one else would have his back. Not even the army of empty file folders filling the cabinet's bottom drawer.

"Stop acting like such a whiny brat, tiny," 2016 Tax Return said, its booming baritone causing its papery contents to sway inside its green accordion-shaped hanging hammock. "Besides, I'm sure in just 20 or 30 years you'll grow big enough to give Vet Bills a run for its money!"

The cabinet filled with peals of laughter as all the other file folders knew damn well that DMV Statements would never get any fatter, as their owner had recently signed up for online statements. It was a fear that American Express Statements, Visa Statements and Wells Fargo Statements had harbored for months. None of their folders had gained any new paperwork in recent memory and they wondered if they would be next in line for the shredder.

"What're you looking at, motherfucker!" DMV Statements turned and snarled at Purchases 2018 -- five folders over and bigger by two 8" x 11" sheets at best. DMV Statements could kick Purchases 2018's ass; there was no doubt in its mind. "Just because you're all organized and coiffed -- bridge tolls and restaurant receipts and movie theater stubs all separated into labeled envelopes, doesn't make you better than me!"

"Respect your elders, you ungrateful tyke!" A deep, scratchy voice echoed from the back of the top drawer. This was followed by at least 30 seconds of continuous, phlegmy hacking.

"Who said that!" demanded DMV Statements, attempting to adjust his hanging folder's plastic tab to get a better view in the dark. The top horizontal edges of the folder's contents poked above the lip, blocking its view. "I'm gonna kick your...!"

A cacophony of guffaws echoed in the drawer, the entire swath of tax folders, from 2001 through 2015 doubling over in uncontrollable hysterics, their papery, stubby contents shuffling around like undigested dinner.

"Oh, millennials these days," grunted 2006 Tax Return, once the last chortle had resolved. "They think they know everything. The narrow blinders of youth."

"Did you say, narrow binders?" called out 2002 Tax Return, pulling a Blackberry receipt from its ear.

The file cabinet again roared with laughter, even louder than before.

Two Poems
by
Lou Faber

Advice to The Beginning Haikuist

Now take up the pen
and write economically
lest you run out of

The Writer Stumbles

Each year
in Pamplona
the bulls begin
their slow descent
down the narrow streets
gaining speed
nostrils flaring
muscle and sinews taut
they forge ahead
a white wave
preceding them
in their mad dash
and each year
there is one,
some years two
who, by slip of foot
or lapse of judgment
meet the horns
of the lead bull
who in disgust
snorts
"this one
is no
Hemingway."

**Drogon's Pointless Journey: *Game of Thrones* Fan Fiction by Me, a
Person Who Didn't Watch *Game of Thrones*
by
Elizabeth McMunn-Tetangco**

Drogon flew and flew.

What was wrong with all these garbage people, he thought. Drogon could totally think things like this because he was a completely sentient being.

He also wanted to know why no one spelled his name right. In his mind, he was named DRAGON (because he was a dragon!), and all of it was in caps. Caps being a thing they had in the imaginary Middle Ages, to make things sound important. But that wasn't his name in *Game of Thrones* so we'll just go with it.

Anyway, Drogon was annoyed because my husband informed me that he just kind of flew away at the end, and now he was going to have to find a new place to live. (AND SOMEONE KILLED HIS MOM. WHAT THE FUCK.)

It was okay, though, because soon he got to Tahiti.

In Tahiti the sword throne, or whatever, didn't matter, and Drogon was the only one there who could fly.

That was pretty cool, and he eventually developed a side-gig where he flambéed whales and dragged them out to eat, and this became a popular attraction for everyone else who was there / was hungry. In a little-known subplot, he also brought some of the people whose names I can spell to Tahiti.

Drogon, and the people of Tahiti, and the various other *Games of Thrones* characters (...Elton? Jimmy? Mensa?) lived happily ever after, and no one ever peer-pressured me to watch this show again. Everyone was happy.

I guess except the whales, because they were flambéed.

Must-Haves for Amber Jambers's Annual Jamberlation

by
Don Malkemes

BOILERPLOP

One year and four cycles ago, our pan-am mega-island boldly ceded all authority, marketshare, and event planning to Amber Jambers, its First & Only Celebritator. Under her divine, righteous and benevolent leadership™, our new society finally remembered trash day, and left like 100 bags out for the garbage truck of history. Free from the detritus of a corrupted society, we, led by Amber Jambers, forged the most shiny path under the banners of Totality, Currency, and Libbers. So let's party!

AN I-CCED-YOU-ON-THAT FROM THE ADMANNERS OF INFAMMERS

The Admanners of Infammers has RSVPed Libber Teams for exciting home audits during Amber Jambers's 97th Annual Jamberlation. When the Libber Team arrives, please provide proof of purchase, materials, memories, and/or services for all mandatory Jamberlation items:

Amber Jambers's Jam Hammers

(listen)

DESCRIPTION:

Amber Jambers and her apostolic Jam Hammers destroyed all previous musical works in what sovereign entities and music critics collectively described as, "a tower of Fear that replaces all Beauty and Intellect." Art was dead. Long live Art. It was literally the soundtrack of a revolution, and supremely, unavoidably catchy.

Amber Jambers's Ham Jammers

(eat)

DESCRIPTION:

The food that redefined food: an easy-to-nuke cylinder of tradition (peanut butter and jelly) and innovation (pork-roll center). It's hard to remember a time when fridgerammers didn't have a built-in HJ bin. But there was a time, and during that time no one smiled, and the world stunk of fat-gross bodies that menstruated, urinated, and had hair. As we say at the Admanners of Infammers, "I'll have two more, for life!"

Amber Jambers's Marinanners

(go)

DESCRIPTION:

No one remembers The Olive Garden (nor gardens), due to the wild success of Jambers's Marinanners. Restaurants used to be for friends and fammers, but they were horrible places of torturous speech and stagnant pools of choice. Marinanners gave us what we never knew to ask for: the ultimate take on fast-formal Italian cuisine and homogenized legislation. As the sign out front tells us: Food, Laws & Eugenics. We might go because we have to. But we stay to avoid eye contact.

Amber Jambers's Stammer Blammers

(say)

DESCRIPTION:

After the HamJamMarinan Plan was adopted for a healthier, stronger citizenry, Jambers pressed forward with her goal of healing us all. The Stammer Blammers inoculation podcast ended the stuttering epidemic of the first cycle, which at its height affected 75% of all Jamberites. Filled with Amber Jambers's trademarked motivational phrases like "At first, you don't succeed," and "Patriotism is the last refuge," millions finally found a cure. But the podcast didn't stop there. It also cured myriad undiagnosed health issues and social anxieties until everybody was healthy. As each episode's sign-off says, "No sickness will be tolerated!"

Amber Jambers's Glamour Clammers

(wear)

DESCRIPTION:

Through the sustained use of the aforementioned fidelities, and by design, every healthy Jamberite slowly grew gills on their ankles. We were paragons of health and beauty, now amphibious, but we still wore pants and socks. We were literally suffocating ourselves! Not the fun way either.

The Glamour Clammers freed us all. The disruptive short-pant let the world breathe again, which was an auspicious innovation as aquatic cities became the coolest places to frolic and tremble. Sea or land, the world could now survive whatever Mammer Nammers threw at us: tsunamis, choke-clouds, the Blue Angels, whatevs. And we looked 1000 percent better.

So got that, get it? And have it all ready for the Libber Team upon their entrance. Let's not RSVP Amber Jambers's Problemmmer Scrammers this year.

Be fast. Be faithful. Be fun.

HAPPY JAMBERLATION!

Contributor Biographies



Mars Schupsky is one of the many natives of New Jersey who defected to Florida to escape winter. She currently does financial analysis for big law and has been published in nothing (until now).



Benjamin Davis is a super cool and creative sock puppet who wrote a book: *The King of FU*. If you need anything, he'll be able to help you right over there at the checkout counter. Other things about him can be found here: benjamindaviswriter.com



Rebecca Gomez Farrell writes all the speculative fiction genres she can conjure up. Her first novel, *Wings Unseen*, debuted from Meerkat Press. You can find her shorter works in over twenty publications including *Typehouse Literary Magazine*, *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, and most recently, the *Fright into Flight* anthology from Word Horde.



Jim George is a writer-artist-songwriter-musician from Reading, PA. His fiction, poems and artwork have appeared (or will appear) in *Otoliths*, *The MOON*, *The Sea Letter*, *The Ear*, *Fleas On The Dog*, *Praxis*, *ANON*, *The Disappointed Housewife*, *Hock Spit Slurp*, *Queen Mob's Tea House*, *The Five-Two*, and *Angry Old Man*; his nonfiction has been published in *Playboy*, *Cinema Retro*, and *Best Classic Bands*; and his songs have been used in television and film. *Jim Shorts*, his first book, is a humorous collection of wordplayful stories, poems, and line drawings, available as a PDF from the author. More information at: <https://byjimgeorge.wordpress.com>



Sheree Shatsky writes short fiction believing much can be conveyed with a few wild words. She was selected as an AWP Writer to Writer mentee for flash fiction Spring 2018. Recent work has appeared in *New Flash Fiction Review*, *Funny Pearls*, *Moon Park Review*, *Flash Flood*, *Crack the Spine*, *Foliage Oak Literary Magazine*, *KYSO Flash*, *Fictive Dream*, and *X-R-A-Y Literary Magazine*. Read more at <http://www.shereeshatsky.com>. Sheree tweets @talktomememe.



Alex Z. Salinas lives in San Antonio, Texas. His short fiction has been published in *Every Day Fiction*, *Mystery Tribune*, *Red Fez*, *Points in Case*, *Me First Magazine*, *101 Words*, *Schlock! Webzine*, *121 Words*, *365tomorrows*, and *The Fusty Nut Review*. His poetry has appeared in the *San Antonio Express-News*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *As It Ought To Be Magazine*, *Duane's PoeTree*, *The Dope Fiend Daily*, *Brave New Word*, *Yellow Mama Webzine*, *Black Coffee Review*, and in the *San Antonio Review*, where he serves as poetry editor.



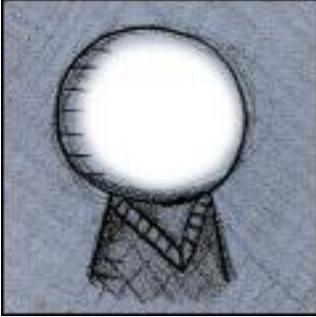
Steve Goldberg is a video editor in the Bay Area who wishes he could make a living writing short stories from the point-of-view of everyday objects and short articles about music. But being a practical and somewhat responsible person, he fits story-making in between going to work and walking the dog and keeping his wife happy and playing tennis. Oh, and watching TV. Too much damn TV. Some of his musical essays have been published at memoirmixtapes.com. The rest can be found at fuzzyswarbles.wordpress.com.



Lou Faber was a dolphin, and poet, but on deciding to become vegetarian, adopted a human form. Nonetheless, as Douglas Adams noted, he is still smarter than a human being, though far short of a super intelligent shade of blue. His work has previously appeared in *Exquisite Corpse*, *Rattle*, *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *Borderlands: the Texas Poetry Review*, *Midnight Mind*, *Pearl*, *Midstream*, *European Judaism*, *Greens Magazine*, *The Amethyst Review*, *Afterthoughts*, *The South Carolina Review* and *Worcester Review*, among many others, and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.



Elizabeth McMunn-Tetangco lives in California's Central Valley, where she works as a librarian and co-edits *One Sentence Poems*, an online journal. She also writes poetry, and has published three chapbooks, *Various Lies*, *Lion Hunt*, and *Water Weight*.



Don Malkemes lives in Chicago.