

◇ Defenestration ◇

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The Old Joke
by
Lillie E. Franks

Okay, so there's a flood. A man is caught in it, and he climbs up onto the roof of his house in order to escape the water. As he's sitting there, another man comes by in a raft.

"Jump in!" the man says. "We can row to safety!"

The man on the roof says, "No, leave me. I have faith that God will save me."

So the man in the raft paddles away.

An hour later, a boat comes by.

"Jump in!" the captain of the boat says. "I'll take you to safety!"

The man on the roof says, "No, leave me. I have faith that God will save me."

So the boat sails off.

An hour later, a helicopter flies over.

"Climb up!" the pilot of the helicopter says. "I'll take you to safety!"

The man on the roof says, "No, leave me. I have faith that God will save me."

So the helicopter flies off.

An hour later, an airplane flies by.

"Get on!" says the pilot. "We'll take you to safety and provide complimentary nuts!"

The man on the roof says, "Should you really be flying this low?"

But the airplane had already flown by. Airplanes aren't really good at slowing down.

An hour later, a train comes by.

"Hop on!" the conductor of the train says. "I'll take you to safety!"

The man on the roof says, "I question the logic of a train track running close enough to a house that I could hop onto it, not to mention the question of how a train would be running in a flood situation."

The conductor of the train says, "I have faith that God will get us to Union Station by 12:45."

"Well, I have even more faith that my God will save me, so take that."

The conductor says, "Have you considered that the series of increasingly unlikely vehicles might be manifestations of the will of your God acting through other the physical laws of the universe rather than breaking them?"

The man on the roof says, "Actually, according to question 43 of the third part of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, the grace of miracles is—"

But by that point, the train had moved on. Not because trains are fast, although they are, but because so would you if you had a train and someone was talking to you about Thomas Aquinas.

An hour later, Thomas Aquinas rides past on a tandem bicycle.

Thomas Aquinas says, "Actually, you have to take what I said in that section of the Summa with the context that I was explaining scripture, rather than prescribing—"

The man on the roof says, "Wow, another hater trying to question my faith. Yawn."

Thomas Aquinas replies, "No, I'm just trying to explain your misconception about my—"

But the man on the roof says, "I think I know a little bit more about Thomas Aquinas than you."

So Thomas Aquinas pedals away.

An hour later, the Second Ecumenical Council of Nicea, from the year 787, arrives, all balancing on top of a single skateboard.

"Get on," says Saint Tarasios of Constantinople. "We'll take you to safety and also explain to you why you're wrong about miracles."

But the man on the roof says, "Oh, nice try. Like I care what you have to say."

So the Ecumenical Council of Nicea does a kickflip, then skates on.

An hour later, an Angel of the Lord descends from the heavens.

"Be not afraid," the angel says. "I have come to take you to safety."

The man on the roof says, "Oh, stuff it. I said I had faith GOD would save me. Not some angel."

The angel answers, "Okay, but I was literally sent by—"

"Yeah, don't wanna hear it, pigeon boy. How many universes have you created?"

So the angel flies away.

An hour later, the flood waters descend.

The man's neighbor walks by. "Hey, you know you can come down from the roof, right?"

The man on the roof says, "It's a matter of principle, now. God started this. He's gonna have to finish it."

The neighbor says, "Uh, yeah, that's nice, I guess. Um. See you around!" and goes into his house as quickly as he can without looking like he's running.

An hour later, God comes to Earth.

"Okay, fine, I'll get you down."

The man on the roof says, "I also have faith that you'll make dinner for me tonight."

God replies, "You're pushing it."

The man on the roof says, "I was thinking maybe a risotto? Also, I'm gonna need you to kick me, like fifty bucks for the electric bill."

God says, "Yeah, I'm not doing that."

The man on the roof replies, "Your power comes to you secondhand. You rely on others to have faith in you. I create my own faith. Let's see which of us is truly strongest."

God attempts to smite the man with a lightning bolt, but the man dodges it, and does a spinning roundhouse kick that knocks God backwards like ten feet. God summons a raft, a boat, a helicopter, Thomas Aquinas on a bicycle, an Ecumenical council and an angel, but the man beats them all up with cool karate chops.

"Now I'm God!" the man says, and he body slams God unconscious and leaves Him, trapped on the roof.

And They Shall Inherit the Earth
by
Ping Yi

"We must live thriftily," he said
to the next generation, waving
a pencil extender, with
not a little melodrama, and not a little hope.

The next generation suppressed
an eyeroll out of self-preservation,
and continued to write with
the newly-opened European box of pencils.

"We must live thriftily," he said
with glee the next day, to
no one in particular, on finding
a stash of unused Christmas cards circa 1996.

The next generation was running
lights and air-conditioning in two rooms,
while using rivers of water
and paint for watercolour homework.

"We must live thriftily," he said
to the next generation triumphantly,
heart soaring with prudence, as he printed
school assignments on the back of old presentations.

The next generation sighed, having
exhausted the what-noo-please cycle
of protest, and got down to work,
a new case of Japanese correction tape beside him.

Talk to Your Doctor

by
Jon Wesick

I was up to talk to my doctor about Rybelto. I wanted to know what Rybelto did. The guy on the commercial held a bowling ball. Maybe Rybelto improved hand-eye coordination. I wanted better hand-eye coordination so I ate the \$50 copay and went to see my doctor. He told me Rybelto wasn't right for me.

"What about Entresus?" I asked.

He said he didn't have time and maybe we could discuss it later. The commercial showed a classic T-bird driving the Coast Highway to 60s rock. All I ever drove on the Coast Highway was a Honda so I made an appointment. I had to miss a half-day of work and cough up another \$50 copay but I wanted to know what Entresus did and why the commercial said I should talk to him about it.

"You don't need it," he said.

"Okay, but what about Entyfigo?" I asked.

He told me I didn't need that either. As I left the exam room, I realized I hadn't asked about Tremtyfya, Cibinya, Keycovy, Destruda, Cosenica, Lyrityx, or Eliquivex. I made another appointment.

My insurance company declined to cover these visits. I had to pay an additional \$200 but friends and loved ones surrounded the guys in the commercials. They had full heads of hair and wives who looked like 20-year-old models with a few streaks of gray. I wanted to sleep with 20-year-old models and damn it, I wanted to know what this stuff did.

The doctor's office called and said they'd turn me over to a collection agency if I didn't pay my outstanding bill. I told them I'd bring the money next week when I'd ask whether Humirify was right for me. It wasn't but I couldn't stop now. I raided the kids' college funds, cashed out my 401k, and made appointments to ask about Latujanx, Xeltuda, Celentix, Chantbrex, Rinvocity, Trulicox, Skyrxulti, Rexizi, Stelcetrin, Adcara, Cabeniance, and Jarduva. My work suffered. Debt collectors called at all hours and threatened to garnish my wages. I was so stressed that I made an appointment with my doctor to ask if Abilixent was right for me. My doctor told me I didn't need it. That night, a woman on an ad said her doctor talked to her about Duprixify. I made an appointment with my doctor and hoped he'd bring it up.

An Avocado Gift
by
Jennifer Spadaccia

Give an avocado gift to a friend as a kind gesture. Give an avocado gift to a friend to show them that you care in a quirky, unexpected way. Your friend was eating avocado toast long before this meal became fashionable and this friend often paired it with Brie cheese as a snack. Give a head pat to a friend who's much taller than you to let them know how enjoyable it is to pat their head, especially if they have silky hair. They'll most likely find it strange that you're patting their head in an affectionate display but they won't find it strange because they know you very well. Pour the first bowl of the new cereal you just bought to your neighbor who lives across the hall. Chances are they won't be home because everyone breakfasts at different hours but you can still leave it on the welcome mat for him. If his welcome mat isn't a sign of welcome then the doormat will do. The amber colored Pomeranian who lives three doors down will enjoy this sudden treat before you remember that this neighbor told you in the elevator three months earlier that he's not really a fan of breakfast. Pay your rent three months early to let your landlord know just how responsible you are. Your landlord won't understand it's three months early and will assume it's the current month's rent but you know the truth and that's all that matters. Pay your friend who has a young child to let you take their young child out for an afternoon ice cream cone. You've read it's a sign of a problem to eat ice cream alone so if you're eating ice cream with a child, then you're not eating it alone right? Brush your hair one hundred strokes every night before bed. That's how you keep your hair healthy. Take the brushed out strands of hair and weave them into a unique key chain for your backpack. That's called recycling. Bake a birthday cake for your cat when she turns seven. Her favorite kinds are chocolate and strawberry so you choose cocoa frosting and slice a box of red, ripe fruit across the top. Play your cat's favorite songs by Nina Simone and Christina Aguilera and brush her fur for two hundred strokes. Make another key chain and feel good about how environmentally friendly you are. Plant some basil in the empty pot on your porch and water it every day for three days. Then take your basil pot to the new pizza shop across the street that everyone grumbles about because they miss the old one. Leave it on the rusting picnic table outside with a note that says "EAT ME ONCE I'M GREEN" taped to the bottom of the pot. Trap an ant beneath a glass and let it go instantly, before the ant ever realizes she's captured. Take the long way home from work to delay the realization that you have nothing to do once you get there. You live across the street from work so try not to laugh too loudly at the irony of it all. Bake yourself a strawberry pie on Wednesday night and share one gigantic slice with your cat because you know it's her favorite. Lick your paws together and revel in the warmth of it while sharing a knowing glance. Let this cat sleep in your bed while you curl up in her burlap cat tower. It's not too cramped when you wrap your arms tightly around your knees. You can hear her purring from the other room.

Pre-Chum
by
Cody Adams

Tropical sun rays glinted off turquoise waters, beckoning her brown skin to a richer shade of chocolate, turning mine from a wintry white to a pale pink that stung slightly, like a lovebite that lands right at the threshold between pleasure and pain. We waltzed in waist-deep lagoons while slurping rummy cocktails out of coconut halves. Sometimes twice in a single day we found ourselves tangled up in clumsily wonderful sex (clumsy because we waited, and wonderful because, well, we waited). Nestled in a hammock strung between two palm trees, massaged by silver moon beams, I wondered if it could possibly get any more clumsy or wonderful.

It did.

The best part? Our honeymoon trip wasn't even halfway finished; that sad date of departure that haunts the final days of every vacation seemed lightyears away. Edenic euphoria titillated every inch of our joined skin and spirit as we settled into a Bahamian paradise wrapped in ribbons of pristine beach that seemed to stretch into forever.

The first few days were ultra relaxing. We lounged around the resort mostly, winding down after the chaos of the wedding. On the fourth day we'd scheduled a guided excursion. From Nassau, it was an hour-long ride to the Exuma Cays, a string of tiny islands dotted along the Caribbean that, based on the aerial shots from the brochure, looked like tiny splatters of lovely volcanic spittle.

About 75 of us loaded into the luxurious speedboat in the warmth of dawn. It was full, but not cramped. Amber and I took stock of the people we'd spend the day with, an eclectic bunch of folks from various places across the globe. We sat on bench seats behind the captain, in between a couple from France and a fellow traveling alone from Bulgaria. The French couple didn't say much to us or each other. They looked close in age to us, late 20s, early 30s. He was short, skinny, and wore an eye-brow raisingly scant swimsuit that failed to fully conceal a triangular perimeter of curly black hair. She was at least 6' 3", thunderously robust at every junction, and boasted an even smaller swimsuit that consisted of a series of golden strings. With white sunglasses, she hid gorgeous eyes of translucent aqua. They both had prominent outie belly buttons that left me wondering how, biologically speaking, that occurs. When I asked where in France they were from, the man, without turning his face even remotely toward me, responded, "Not Paris. You would not have heard of it." The pot-bellied fellow from Bulgaria took approximately 30 selfies during the boat ride and just seemed really happy to be there.

The sleek vessel flew across the glassy surface, slicing through the sea so that thin sheets of spray misted our sunglasses and cooled our cheeks. The shade of water was indistinguishable from the cloudless blue sky. The two identical blues met at some invisible line along the horizon, but it was impossible to tell where. It just looked like a vast azure curtain, a big blue heaven that we penetrated as if we belonged.

Our first stop was an itty bitty island swarming with iguanas. The dinosaur looking things flashed around in a mosh pit of orange, green, and black scales. Rainbow colored spikes swayed along their spines as they scurried across the shore; they seemed all too familiar with the excursion's operation. The tour guides distributed wooden skewers bejeweled with fat, purple grapes at the tip. The lizards scampered toward us, snagged their treats, and

hurried away again. The old plump ones had eyes that were pale blue and cloudy; I guessed they were blind or slow or both. Amber felt sorry for them, and weaved through the crowd of leaping lizards to get some fruit into the old-timer's mouths.

From there, we were shepherded back to the boat for a short trip to the main island where we'd spend most of the day.

After docking the boat at our final destination, the captain made an announcement: "Listen up here peoples. Welcome to our little slice of paradise. We call it *Crooked Tanlines Cay* and it'll be your own private island for the day. You're welcome to swim on the beach, but you should know that it's best to avoid water that's more than a few feet deep. There's lots of wildlife here. This ain't a zoo. They are *wild* animals. We feed the sharks almost every day, so they're accustomed to meat in the water. Don't be their meat. I know we made you sign those release waivers, but don't be scared, we've almost never had any injuries. The most important rule is to party hardy, okay? Okay, see you all tonight."

Amber and I turned to each other with wide eyes. After a second, we shrugged our shoulders in unison and stood up. We stepped off the boat onto a wooden dock that turned into a tiki shack. The excursion package included an open bar and I intended to get my money's worth.

We sucked down a couple cocktails as quickly as we could before the group was made to form a single file line along the beach. Excited whispers snaked down the line as we realized it was time to feed and swim with the pigs that inhabited the island. The ocean activity guide guy—an extremely dark skinned Bahamian dude so muscle-strapped that he looked like he could defeat a great white shark in combat—told us that some of the swine were quite large, and that we should hold our carrot sticks at an arm's length away from our bodies while feeding because last week a woman had the bones in her big toe pulverized after Oreo stampeded by with his "big fat pig foot."

The pigs were even more finely programmed than the iguanas, sprinting from their pen straight to the orange batons waving in the air. This "swim with the pigs" activity is on the list of "things to do" in the Bahamas. My wife was more excited about it than I was, but they turned out to be cuter than I expected. They swam well, which I suppose makes sense. Pudgy hoofs paddled their barrel-esque bodies, bodies loaded with blobs of buoyant bacon. We enjoyed their little parade until they started to shit big brown globes that bobbed up and down in the shallow water in which we stood. That's when we headed back to the open bar for a rum punch and piña colada.

We sipped our drinks near the bar, staring into ocean that looked more clear than that top shelf bottled water that only bougie people buy. What held our gaze was a reef shark lurking just below the dock; its tail lulled us into hypnosis as it tread in the same spot with subtle wavy movements, hovering as a singular gray muscle designed precisely to manipulate water like a prehistoric Poseidon, patiently waiting to pounce using a mouth packed with a trillion tiny tridents.

Amber finally broke the silent spell cast over us, "I've never seen a shark up close like this."

"I have. But only through thick glass. Like at an aquarium" I said.

Most folks were still playing with the pigs—our Bulgarian friend seemed determined to take a selfie with Oreo the Toe Smasher. The gargantuan French girl with pretty eyes posed for a photo while holding a hefty pig directly over her head; with one hand she hoisted the pig,

the other hand perched powerfully atop her mighty hip. The pig's pastel pink skin matched the crescent of nipple that peeked from behind her swimsuit of strings, but I watched her face: her mouth flirted with the idea of smiling for the camera, but couldn't quite commit. The flying pig thrashed its legs violently through the warm breeze and squealed bloody murder.

Amber and I watched from under the shade of the tiki shack with the bartender, an extremely slim and somewhat tall man with an infinite number of deep wrinkles that crisscrossed his leathery face so that it was impossible to tell his age. I was pretty sure he landed somewhere within the 40 to 70 range, but didn't feel confident narrowing it down beyond that. Apparently, he'd come to the Bahamas on a college spring break trip decades earlier and never left. He didn't enjoy talking much, but fed us drinks steadily. With four and a half piña colada's swimming through her, my wife reached under the bar, slid her hand on my thigh, and hovered there for a moment like the shark below us. As soon as the bartender turned his back to wrestle open a new bag of ice, her hand squirmed inside my trunks and gave me a squeeze that left me shaky. She giggled, guzzled the rest of her drink, dropped the ice cubes down my trunks, and skipped back to the beach. I fished out the cubes and watched my favorite parts of her bounce away. I finished my drink, ordered two more, and followed her.

The wildlife guide that looked like the Bahamian Hulk gathered the pigs back to their pen and distributed raw shreds of mahi mahi to each guest.

"Alright now people, we're gonna feed the stingrays. This is a bit more dangerous than the pigs, but if you listen carefully, you'll be fine. Hold the bit of fish I gave you between your fingers like a cigarette. Kneel down in a few inches of water and reach your hand out in front of you as far as you can, placing it flat on the sand underwater. Now if you're holding it properly, your bit of fish is gonna float above your hand as you pinch it between your fingers. The stingrays will come down the line of hands and snatch the snacks away. You'll feel them sucking and that's fine. Whatever you do, DO NOT touch their tails. They're friendly, like water puppies, but if you touch their tails, they'll shoot venomous barbs straight through one of your organs. Understood? Alright now, snacktime!"

If I'm being honest, the stingrays scared the piss out of me. Their flat fins, waving like flags underwater, were beautiful to behold from a distance. But when those same fins flapped against your groin as they sucked fish flesh from your fingers with mouths you can't see—it was unsettling. And always we kept our eyes on the lethal tail that followed each creature. For the first time on the trip, we felt more alive than relaxed. All the stingray adrenaline overshadowed the buzz we were trying to build, so we refueled at the bar, grateful to leave the beach without poisonous daggers gored through our livers.

The noonday sun hung directly overhead now, illuminating the paradise in lustrous brilliance. We'd both grown up relatively poor and only seen water like this on screensavers. It's one of those rare things that seems too good to be true, but exceeds what you even dared hope.

Lounging in the impossibly clear shallows, we noticed Hulk with a snorkel. He kept disappearing underwater for a minute at a time, scouring the seafloor. After about 20 minutes, he hauled a basketful of conch shells back to shore. We gathered around him while he demonstrated how to prepare conch salad. First, he cracked the shell with a hammer to make a quarter-sized hole. Then, he slipped a butter knife into the hole to force the conch muscle into relaxation. From here, he slid the conch out of its shell and wielded a massive machete like a surgeon's scalpel to remove squishy white globules of flesh. My eyes zipped

back and forth between the conch and this behemoth of a man. His biceps seemed to double in size with each passing moment; rivers of sweat poured from the tip of his bald head across the veiny topography of his bulging arms. After removing the guts and the eyes from the conch, he smothered it in salt and rubbed his hands around the surface of the muscle to remove a goopy film. He rinsed off in the ocean and walked to a cutting board. Every eye on the beach clung to him as he diced tomatoes, peppers, and onions for the conch salad. After incorporating the raw veggies into the diced conch, he added more salt and squeezed fresh lime halves over the salad. He passed around big plastic shot glasses packed with the finished product.

The conch salad was cool, light, and crisp, a marvelously balanced amalgam of seasalt, acidity, and juicy fat. It was just the appetizer for lunch, a buffet befit for Caribbean kings and queens. To the employees on the island, we were less like royalty and more like little sheep to be led here and there. In this manner, they lined us up single file yet again; now, we were the animals being fed. Awaiting us was a pyramid of charred sausage, stacks of lightly fried red snapper fish, a mountain of the cheesiest macaroni and cheese ever concocted, and gigantic bowls of juicy watermelon, pineapple, and mango garnished by the rest of the grapes the iguanas didn't gobble up.

Amber asked the chef what kind of meat the sausages were made of.

"Pork," he responded.

We looked at each other with wide eyes, shrugged our shoulders in unison, and loaded up our plastic plates to the point where their structural integrity had been challenged.

Our Bulgarian friend sat next to us and showed us the selfies he took with Oreo. "I'm gonna show you all the filters I can do on this photo. You say 'STOP' when you see the one you think is the best one" he instructed.

"STOP," I said after the very first filter.

"Coolness my brother!" he says. "She is the most adorable piggy on the planet, right?"

"Absolutely adorable," said Amber.

"Delicious, too!" I mumbled with half a sausage link munched in my mouth. Amber whacked me upside the head, and looked to gauge our Bulgarian friend's reaction. He was lost in a seemingly endless scroll of selfies with Oreo.

After finally putting his phone down, he wadded bread into dense balls and tossed them to the flock of seagulls perched atop the tiki roof. They attacked the airborne bread balls with more fervor than any creature that had eaten that day. With her sixth piña colada in her, my wife had graduated from tipsy to whatever comes after that. She figured if the birds liked bread, then they'd love sausage. She chucked a chunky link toward the roof of seagulls, but it fell way short and slapped Frenchie square in the face.

With a shiny streak of grease smeared across his forehead, he leapt to his feet and shouted, "What in the fuck was that you dumb American bitch?!"

Between the booze and his accent, it took me a full five seconds to comprehend what he said before I could respond: "Hey Frenchie, what in the hell did you just call my wife?"

I jumped out of my seat and threw my rum punch in his face. I heard the ice cubes bounce off his forehead. He launched his bony body into mine like a harpoon and we flew off the dock in a tangled mess. We thrashed in the shallow waters just below the tiki shack like clumsy morons. My nose got busted and poured red like a faucet from a horror film. Almost immediately, everyone had their phones out to record what would be the highlight of their vacation. A hurricane of voices gathered over us like a storm cloud, including a thunderous and throaty scream from Frenchie's big lady, but Amber's words were the only ones I discerned: "Kick his ass, Cammy baby!!!"

The chum from my nose garnered the attention of a few reef sharks nearby. They swirled slowly around us in shrinking circles. Unbeknownst to me, the smallest one darted into the skirmish and latched onto Frenchie's flat ass. Hulk jumped off the top of the bar into the turquoise-red scum. With one hand, he took the little shark by the tail. His other hand transformed into a mammoth fist that punched the shark's snout. Of course, my French foe was more than a little distracted with three rows of shark teeth implanted in his tush, but, at that point in time, I had no idea he was being attacked, so I began to think the tide of the fight was turning; Hulk swung his fist behind Frenchie, so clearly he had my back, and I was landing some shots that I thought might be at least close to his kidneys. I knocked him in the nose once so that it bled like mine and asked, "Have you had enough? Apologize to my wife right now, damn it!"

"You idiot! There's a fucking shark eating my ass!"

"Oh Shit!" I noticed the other two sharks circling and literally pissed my pants—which isn't a huge deal since I'm in the ocean, but it's strange because the piss sort of clears the pipes from the fooling around under the bar with Amber earlier and it feels really good which isn't usually a problem, but in that particular moment I knew I should be focused on other things.

One of the sharks stopped circling and sort of squared up on me. The rum swirling around my brain stirred up a unique hybrid of courage and stupidity so that I decided to charge the fish. My plan was to knee it in the nose because I'd heard they're sensitive there. I was waist deep in the sea, though, so my knee floated toward the shark in the slow motion of underwater movement like an astronaut walking on the moon. The shark gladly received my kneecap in its open jaws. Amber shrieked from the dock and whipped sausages at the hungry fish. I didn't know if she was trying to distract it with separate food options or if she thought the projectiles would harm the predator. Regardless, most of the sausages hit me. The dozens of teeth buried in my lower quadricep should have hurt more than it did. The shark thrashed away with furious jerky movements, trying to tear muscle from bone. I noticed its nose poking just above the surface of the water. So I dropped a few elbows down and must have hit the sweet spot because it let go immediately. Frenchie and Hulk had conquered their shark, and the third was wise enough to swim away. I became conscious of the salt water stinging the oozing holes in my leg. The three of us stumbled back onto the beach, greeted by boozy cheers from the adults and terrified tears from the few children that were present. Our Bulgarian friend had shots of rum prepared for us, and, of course, managed to snag a selfie with "The crazy shark boys."

Amidst a storm of applause, our ladies wrapped beach towels tightly around our wounds. A tsunami of testosterone replaced whatever blood we'd lost. I threw one arm around Frenchie, and with the other I held the shot of rum toward the heavens and shouted from the deepest, most primal part of my gut, "Cheers to pig shit, flying sausage, and shark fights!" Frenchie smiled for the first time that day and shouted something in French. Hulk

informed us that they were essentially baby sharks and that we should calm down. We took our shots anyway, pretending not to hear him.

What followed afterward is a bit blurry. But I'm certain it was clear, blue, rummy, and wonderfully clumsy.

Two Poems
by
Paul Hostovsky

Poem

Some pronounce it *poim*.
Like it has an *oy* inside it.
The way an oyster
has an *oy* inside it. The way
all poems ought to have
a little *oy vey*
and a little *oyez! oyez!*
inside them.

Others pronounce it *po-um*.
Like it has an *um* inside it.
A thoughtful pause.
A caesura. A possum
that got run over,
its esses elided.

Me, I always say *pome*.
Like an apple or pomme
I want to bite into
because it has an *om* inside it,
a mystic and sacred syllable
I can't wait to reach
and I have no patience
for all the diphthongs.

(from *Is That What That Is* by Paul Hostovsky, FutureCycle Press, 2017)

Jacob and Esau

My bar mitzvah portion was the story
of Jacob and Esau and the lentil soup.
At thirteen I was as smooth as Jacob:
I had learned just enough Hebrew to read
that bit from the Torah aloud, impress the congregation
and get the money. It was all a kind of fraud—
I had no idea what any of the words *meant*.
I had never even tasted lentil soup.
And when I finally did, I didn't like it. The story
of Jacob and Esau and the lentil soup
and the blind father, Isaac, as it turns out,
is a story of fraud. And thirteen isn't the age
when manhood begins—that was the biggest fraud—
though it roughly coincides with the onset
of puberty. At thirteen I could count the number of hairs
that were growing down there: approximately

thirteen. I learned about approximate equality in algebra class that same year: when any two quantities are close enough in value that the difference is negligible, you use the approximately-equal-to sign with a squiggly, which looked like one of the curling tender tendrils growing down there. So it all fit together approximately. I didn't have a hairy brother like Esau or a blind father like Isaac, but I was smooth: practically all of my friends were hairier than me. I knew this because of gym class and because of peripheral vision. I pretended not to see, but I saw. I saw I would be a late bloomer. I saw that lentil soup was an acquired taste. I saw I wouldn't start liking it until many years later, when I'd grown enough pubic hair to sport an excellent beard. A beard is technically pubic hair on your face—any hair that wasn't there before puberty is technically pubic hair, a factoid that I thought the rabbi might appreciate. So I told him during one of our boring weekly bar mitzvah lessons. He made a face like he had indigestion, then fondled his pubic hair and told me to keep reading. Just keep reading.

Spa-ntaneity
by
Meagan Noel Hart

Doris straightened her jacket and patted her curls. Potential customers filled the plush white armchairs before her, buzzing like curious flies, all lured in by her fancy *paper* fliers and the promise of free pastries. All that was left was convincing them to subscribe for Spa Today Away's Spontaneity Vacation.

That woman in the front row with the face tattoo? Doris would seduce her with the concept: vacations so spontaneous they could happen at literally any time.

The tall business man in the back row? Emphasize the bottom line. The deals on teleportation were astonishing!

The trendy but nervous elderly couple in matching hats? Flash the little golden watch that made it all possible, and remind them they could pause their service anytime.

This would be like selling air to the suffocating.

Doris had sold 999 subscriptions. If she hit 1,000 before her *own* first getaway, her entire trip would be comped at executive level. Penthouse lodging. Champagne welcome. Designer vacation wear. And, she desperately hoped, a morally fluid bellhop with strong, loving arms.

Everyone was seated except a mouse-like man stacking donuts high upon a tiny paper plate.

Doris strode to the front of the room, all confidence and clacking heels. "Welcome!"

The unseated man startled, nearly toppling his leaning tower of fried dough.

Doris cleared her throat.

The man placed another donut on the pile, then carefully took a seat in the front, placing his edible Janga on the glass coffee table.

Doris snapped, and the projection wall behind her glowed to life, "Spa Today Away: *Spa-ntaneity*, anytime, anywhere!", the words an expensive shade of green.

Doris began. "Did you know that over 900 million vacation days go unused every year?"

"But there's only 365 days in a year."

Doris started. The question was meant to be rhetorical. She spotted the speaker: Donut man. His face screwed up, chasing intangible mathematics.

Doris forced a laugh, shaking her head. "Obviously. I mean that's the number if you combine all of working Americans' unused vacation days. That's 33% of *paid* vacation that goes unused each year."

"Paid vacation?" The man's eyes were big, like the puppy on a kid's valentine's card. "Like, you pay us to go on vacation?"

"No." Doris squinted. "I mean paid leave. The days you can take off without a dip in salary?"

"I already have those."

"Right," Doris smiled at the group. "Everyone since 2050 has, but they aren't using them! Why do you think that is?"

"The Fair Works Act." Donut man beamed. "I know my history."

The old couple with the matching visors nodded.

"I meant," Doris stressed the question, "why do you think they go unused?"

"No time!" offered the tall business man in the back. "Not to mention the planning."

"Exactly!" Doris pointed to the man like he just solved a murder mystery. If this was going to be a participatory group, what the hell, she'd roll with it. "All that planning. Coordinating schedules. Predicting weather. Finding the best deal. Not to mention: When is a good time?" Doris spun, her arms wide. "Did you know that most Americans never go on vacation because they can't figure out *when* to go? Maybe next season. Maybe after that project at work."

The group was nodding.

"It is hard to get away," said the donut man, lifting a donut from his stack.

Doris leaned forward. "Not anymore." She snapped. A series of gorgeous vacation destinations danced across the screen. "We've got beaches, mountains, glistening lakes, hidden hideaways. Top notch spas at them all."

The group *ooohed* and *ahhhhed*.

"All yours at a *moment's* notice." Doris was back in her groove. She snapped, and a floating gold watch appeared on the screen. "With our new patented teleportation method you can go anytime, cheaper than airfare."

The man with the donuts laughed loudly, spurring crumbs. "Teleportation? Those are booked years in advance."

"Exactly!" Doris refused to be thrown off track. "Meaning... when someone cancels on short notice, they don't get refunded."

"Who would do that?" asked the tattooed woman.

"Suits," answered stout woman from the back row. She shot a not-so-subtle glare toward the businessman beside her.

"Yes," said Doris, stomping out the tension. "Because businesses can write it off. So it happens regularly. But what we care about are all those unused teleportation boosts. Did you know, for a very small fee, you can claim them?"

The crowd shook their heads, back in her web.

"But there's no way to plan for that," said Donut man.

"Enter Spa Today Away!" Doris snapped. The screen zoomed in on the little gold watch, exposing its complex inner workings. "With our new tracking technology, you can teleport anywhere, anytime, so long as you're wearing your gold Spawn Away Watch. For a small monthly subscription, we monitor cancellations. One opens up, and zoom! You're off." Doris snapped, and a little video of a cartoon man sitting at a desk appeared. Suddenly his little gold watch started beeping and poof! He was on the beach in his khakis.

"That sounds terrifying." Donut man stared, crumbs clinging to his open mouth.

"Terrifying?" Doris started at the screen.

"You're saying, if I wear that little watch, you can just steal me away any time. To anywhere. Against my will?"

The crowd murmured.

"Not against your will..." Doris hurried. "You sign up for the experience, you provide a list of preferred locations. I assure you it's perfectly safe. We've never lost a client or, you know, had any of those terrible accidents."

"Those were horrible," said the elderly couple almost in unison.

"Do those still happen?" a timid woman in row three asked.

"Oh no, no." Doris held up her wrist. "Look, even I use it!" She had in fact never *actually* used it, but she intended to.

"Yeah, but, I don't want to be on the beach in my good slacks." Donut man gestured at the screen.

"That's a good point," said the businessman.

"Oh," Doris laughed, relieved the conversation was shifting away from dismemberment. "That's just a dramatization. You're always teleported to one of our secure on-site facilities to obtain the proper travel wear and accessories. For a nominal fee of course."

The business man leaned forward. "I've heard this includes work coverage?"

"Yes!" Doris pointed. "We contact your company and make sure they comply, and for another fee, we can even provide a temp to cover you."

"But what if it's a bad time?" A woman in a practical top raised her hand.

"A bad time?" Doris paused, her watch had just glowed green, meaning she would receive the next teleportation. It could happen an hour from now, a day, a minute. She'd better wrap this up. All she needed was *one* sale before it activated.

"What if I'm at a funeral?" Donut man interjected.

"Sorry?" Doris' attention snapped back.

"Oh, yes," said an elderly woman.

"What if I'm *speaking* at a funeral," Donut man continued, "then poof, hot tub."

"Again," Doris took another deep breath, "that's not how it works. But, if you have an important event coming, we pause your account for a few days."

"What if I'm on the toilet?" Donut man's eyes gestured downward.

"The toilet?" Doris echoed.

"Yeah!" One of the eccentrics chimed in. "Or naked?"

"Or worse..." Donut man leaned in, placing a careful hand on top of his donut tower. The group seemed to lean in with him. "What if I'm with a lover? Would they just be left there..." his voice dropped to a nearly imperceptible whisper, "thrusting?" He sat back up. "Or do they come with me since we're, you know, connected? Like a free ride."

All eyes burned into Doris, their expressions suggesting they were imagining possibilities they never had cause to imagine before.

Doris buried her face in her hands.

"The logistics do seem..." the woman speaking didn't finish. Just stared into the distance.

Doris put her hands up as if to say, *whoa!* "We're a multibillion dollar company. Logistics have been considered. For temporary indisposition, you simply remove the watch. If your vacation becomes available, it will beep to let you know."

"So, I can just skip the vacation if I don't want to go?" The tattooed woman looked disappointed.

"No... I mean, if you haven't paused your account and you miss your vacation, you're still charged... The watch teleports without you."

"This is getting complicated," someone in the back groaned.

"I assure you it's all super simple." Doris tried to locate who had spoken. "We take care of the complicated parts."

"I don't know..." Donut man crossed his arms. "What if I don't like the place?"

"That's why you can supply us with a preference list." Doris gave her best commercial smile. "But not knowing for sure is part of the spontaneity!" Doris snapped three times, bringing the package deals up on the screen. This wasn't the next step, but this session wasn't exactly going as planned. "It just depends on the level of spontaneity you'd like to experience."

"See, that's what bothers me the most." Donut man was pointing to the screen. "The spontaneity."

"But, that's the whole point." Doris tried not to grind her teeth. "It's what the flier

promised!"

"Flier?" Donut man looked around the room.

"The yellow flier. Inviting you here?"

"Oh," he smiled, taking the folded paper from his pocket. "I just came for the donuts." He pointed to the picture of piled pastries.

Doris sighed.

Her watch beeped.

No. Not *now*.

She still had a few minutes, and she was certain that was enough to convince someone — anyone — this was a good idea.

Doris hastily took her phone from her pocket. A contract glowed on the screen ready for a thumbprint signature. "Twenty percent off for anyone who signs now." She would eat the cost, damnit.

"Oooo," said the elderly couple, standing.

"Why the sudden hard sell?" asked the businessman. "That seems suspect."

The couple sat back down.

"*Because, I'm about to go on my own fabulous vacation,*" Doris held up her wrist, "so this truly is a *limited time* offer."

"Can't you pause it?" The eccentric looked concerned.

"No... that has to be done in advance," Doris sang, pretending she hadn't just said this two minutes ago.

"Well," Donut man stood, taking his precious stack of donuts. "Your destinations do seem nice, but again, this whole anytime, anywhere—."

"What if we booked you an old fashioned vacation?" Doris nearly shouted over her watch, which was beeping faster now. "Told you when it was going to happen and everything!"

"How much?"

"Same price. I'll run it as a special." Her watch was beeping louder. Any second.

Donut man looked up thoughtfully. "Now *that* sounds lovely."

"Wonderful!" Doris shoved her phone forward. "Sign here."

Beep, beep.

The man fumbled with the tower of donuts, trying to get a free hand. Then he reached out

his thumb.

Beep, beep.

His thumb hit the screen.

ERROR. FAILED SCAN.

"Oh, sorry." The man looked at his thumb, thick with glaze. He licked it.

Grimacing, Doris pressed her phone closer, her heart racing.

Beepbeepbeepbeepbeep.

He reached out again—

Poof!

Doris teleported, the man's thumb, still sticky with glaze, landing in thin air.

Doris found herself in one of Spa Today Away's little white welcome rooms. No Champagne. No sexy bellhop.

Her watch beeped. *Welcome Doris. You were one sale shy of your free corporate getaway experience, but you can still enjoy this average experience at your nominal employee discount. Please proceed to check in.*

Doris checked in and collected her bag of custom vacation wear, for an additional fee of course. It included a parka.

Doris stepped out into the awaiting blizzard.

"You look like a disappointed Spa Today Away customer!" A man in an insulated suit greeted her with a shining smile. "Did you know if you book with Schedule the Fun Away, we carefully arrange your dream vacation in advance? You'll know your date of travel and destination, months before you go!"

Doris scoffed, yet she had to admire his timing. "How about instead, you tell me if you're hiring?"

"Actually, we are!" The man handed her a brochure. "With incentives!"

Doris smiled. "I'm listening."

Armageddon
by
George Stanworth

While waiting
for the world
to end,
I anxiously
tidied the house.

I hoovered the 'Welcome' mat
and dusted the ornamental
ampersand,
before ordering the
DVDs chronologically.

I sprayed Glade Lavender
around the dog basket,
then panicked about the number
of emails still
outstanding in my inbox.

I thought about the things
I should have done instead,
like playing more games of 'Mario Kart'
rather than worrying about the kids.

There were still mobile pictures
to be saved in the cloud,
and meals to be
uploaded to Facebook.

I would never know if
my application for
Wheel of Fortune
had been accepted,
or if my H-Pylori
was in remission.

I ironed my ties
and prayed
that I would be forgiven
for owning a Milli Vanilli single.

Pocket Monsters (Silver Version)
by
Corey Miller

The morning I am to begin my journey and receive my starter Pokémon from Professor Oak, I wake up sweaty from a dream. In the dream I am a Psyduck holding my head; yellow, dumb, and in pain. The other eleven-year-olds mock me, calling me a runt like they do in real life because I have to stand on tippy toes to reach the Pokéshop counter when I purchase ethers and potions for Mother.

What if I get a Pokémon that is similar to me and the other trainers tease our likeness? "You're such a dummy. You don't even know your father. I bet he never finished his journey."

My TV screen artificially lights my bedroom, I left my video game on throughout the night, the theme music a soothing lullaby. I slide the fingerless gloves onto my hands, readying myself to catch whatever the world throws my way. My backpack is prepped for the journey: bamboo chopsticks, a bowl, water purification tablets, tent, soap, flint, a knife. Everything I need to make it—besides my starting Pokémon.

Mother beckons from downstairs. "Breakfast is ready!"

I skip every other step on my way down. "No time, Mother. I have to get to Professor Oak's lab in ten minutes."

"You still have to eat. You can't have an empty stomach for your final journey."

The reassurance in her voice perks me up, ready to begin my slow ending. To become a Pokémon master will take my entire life to catch 'em all. I may not stray from this path—no others career options from here on out. With luck, someday I'll meet my father and see how close he is to finishing his journey.

I shovel papaya, pineapple, and blueberries in my mouth, trying to cram as much as my cheeks will stretch. This will have to last until midday when I'll forage for nuts and berries and mushrooms.

Mother clears her throat as I rush for the door. "Get back here Mister! You can't leave me forever without a final hug." She squeezes the childhood out my pores. I form pimples and black heads in an instant. She hugs me tighter until they pop and expel black tipped jelly strings. Like shiitakes captured on film fast forward. In Johto Region culture, children grow up to leave, it happens early in life. We are taught to not get attached. The act of abandon is a benchmark moment of understanding that games are for children. Only then can the child become an adult.

Mother passes me on without showing emotion, she herself has prepared for this moment too.

Now there is only my present self, reaching for the future self that is a grain of sand out of my reach. I can see him in the ether, waiting for me to arrive.

Standing in the doorway to leave I don't cry as I might have yesterday. I must show the others I am strong for the last time they'll see me.

I run for my choice.

Pallet Town doesn't have a Pokécenter or a Pokéshop. It's a starter town. A place where kids fish south towards Volcano Island if they manage to find an old rod. Then they leave north on the only path in and out. Once trainers learn to surf or fly, they can venture to other islands. But that's a skill you learn later in life—unless you cheat.

On the top of the hill is Professor Oak's lab. He is the region's renown scientist, having created the Pokédex that describes each type of Pokémon when encountered.

When I arrive, there is a line of all the town's eleven-year-olds. I am dead-last. Without a Pokémon to help me survive the woods, I may die first. If I hadn't hugged my mother I could have been here sooner.

"Look! It's the runt!" It's Professor Oak's grandson, Gary, who says this from the front of the line. "There won't be any Pokémon left for someone as pathetic as you!" The other kids support his mocking with laughter.

The laboratory door opens and Gary enters, choosing his starter Pokemon from a choice of three. It's an evolved Pokémon—a giant dragon that flies. Gary flies away and I hope I never see him again. One by one the next kids in line step inside the laboratory. One by one I see them exit with a different Pokémon. A yellow one with black stripes and an electric bolt tail, "Pikachu! Pikachu!" A blue one that squirts bubbles from inside its shell, "Squirtle! Squirtle!" A red one with a flame tail, "Charmander! Charmander!"

When it's my turn to enter. The door slams shut. I knock. Nothing. I knock again. Harder. I won't be the punchline this time.

It's Professor Oak who opens the door. "Oh, it's you." He snaps his fingers and closes his eyes in thought. "You—you—you, uh. I haven't forgotten your name. So. What can I do for you?"

"I've come for my starter. I've come to begin my journey. To become a Pokémon master."

"You're eleven years old? Oh, right, of course. You're eleven. I haven't forgotten about you. Come in."

I enter with excitement like diving into a river for a bath, unsure the bottom or current strength.

Inside are computers lining each wall. The machines showcase buttons to push in or push to retract. The more buttons a building has, the more important it must be. There are people sitting at these computers, learning from Professor Oak. I approach one and he tells me his name is Steve. Steve lovingly describes Professor Oak as the greatest man alive, that he'll do anything to please the Professor as his number one pupil.

Professor Oak scrambles, looking through machines and in drawers, opening empty Pokéball capsules. He runs to the backyard and brings back two creatures that look similar to one another, yet, different. "Ahhhh, here we are." The creatures both bark, "Dog! Dog!"

"Are these Pokémon? They're both saying the same name. I thought most trainers were to receive a choice between three starters?"

Professor Oak looks up to the ceiling and slightly to the left, his hand is on his chin. I've heard this is where people naturally look when they are in deep thought. Why is he here, in this position, mind retrieving a Pokémon that should have been waiting for me eleven years, ready to begin are journey together?

"Wait here—you." He goes over to Steve and has a muffled conversation. Steve looks disgruntled but obeys. They both head to Professor Oak's sleeping quarters. They're in there for about ten minutes. I've learned this is what adults do on occasion: shut the bedroom door and do adult things and the only thing for a child to do is wait outside. But I'm no longer a child and am ready to see what happens behind the door. However, before I decide to enter, the door opens. Only Oak returns outside to the laboratory, but with a new Pokémon. It's tall with red smeared spirals on its cheeks underneath it's glasses. It has tall pointy ears that look like the Meowth ears I wore for Halloween. It doesn't look very muscular underneath its blue jeans and shirt that says *Pallet Town Gamer Club*. It starts to speak, "Ste—," It coughs when Oak elbows it in the side. "Human! Human!" This Pokémon looks weak, unable to adapt to environments.

I study the three carefully. "Dog!" this one looks fast with strong claws to cut. "Dog!" This other one looks small for getting into tight spaces and retrieving, she's really cute and would make a great companion. "Human!" This one is lanky, awkward and nervous. I've never seen a Pokémon wearing eyeglasses for vision. It must need a lot of help—a lot of *training*.

"Professor Oak, I've decided who will accompany me on my forever journey. I'm ready to prove myself to you and the community and all of the naysayers." I point to the tall Pokémon species named Human. My finger calling out my new life companion.

The Pokémon looks surprised like a Deerling caught in the headlights. They both turn their backs on me, conversing in aggressive whispers. There's a lot of pointing, at me and at where our journey will take us, all over the world. We'll be like the wind.

The Pokémon seems annoyed but obeys Professor Oak. The Professor truly is a master, instantly taming and commanding.

We leave the laboratory and I pet my companion's head. He tries to dodge my affectionate attempts, but I show him who's boss holding his head steady while I scratch behind his ear. In school we're taught to be the Alpha, to dominate the Pokémon until we have control. When he tries to lead a different way from where we need to go, I smack him on the nose.

The path escaping the town is one I've never ventured. I never dared, not feeling ready. Now, with my starter Pokémon, I know I can overcome the world.

The grass grows as tall as my starter here. We push through the unclear path, stumbling upon a Pokémon in a field clearing. It's a little purple rodent with buck teeth. It wags its tail and says, "Rattata!" Before I know what to do, epic 8-bit music starts playing out of nowhere and the Pokémon lines up for battle. My *first* battle.

"I choose you—Human!"

Human rolls his eyes, hands on hips.

The other Pokémon looks at us with confusion, possibly attacking us without us knowing using its mind-power.

"Let's figure out the moves you know, Human. Slap it!" Human gives an audible sigh before walking up to the grass type and slapping it over and over until the grass Pokémon's eyes squiggle to a faint.

"Good job Human!" He keeps slapping it around on the ground while it's fainted. "That'll do Human." I'm gonna need a leash for him. I don't know what to do with the body of the fainted Pokémon, we weren't trained for that. I don't have a Pokéball to catch it so I leave it to recover.

We hike the entire day towards no where specific as the sun falls. I have Human gather tinder and kindling. I strike my flint with my knife, hoping for a spark. Human pulls out a pack of cigarettes from his pants pocket. He crinkles the plastic wrapper off then tosses it on the other side of the elm tree he's using as a backrest. He smacks the box to pack the tubes better, then he flicks a lighter to fire up, taking a long drag into a deep exhale. "Huuuuuman," he says apathetically, removing his shoes and massaging his feet. I continue to strike the flint as Human studies me. If I had a fire Pokémon or an electric Pokémon this would have lit instantly.

My starter watches me struggle to create a fire. He flicks his cigarette butt into tall grass and I give up. My first night away from home, away from Mother, is cold and bleak.

"I know you can't fully understand me because you're a Pokémon. But I'm scared to be out here." I unscrew the thermos Mother packed me. I must not have screwed the lid on tight enough, because it leaked the bone broth empty in my backpack. "I've never left Pallet Town let alone my mother, but she seemed to part ways with me so easily. I wish I could have held on to childhood another sip."

Human comes over and lays by me. He snuggles into the crook of my neck. We lay down and spoon each other warm. The fur on his chin tickles against the back of my neck.

During the night I wake up sweating, this time it's not a dream. Human must have started a fire for me. I wake to the plains blazing and Human snoring, kicking in his dreams like he's chasing a rodent Pokémon. This fire is giant and spreading in every direction.

"Human, Human! Wake up!"

He stirs and talks in his sleep, "Whatever you say Professor Oak. I don't mind giving you a bath." His eyes open, then sees the wildfire. "Holy shiiiiii—. I mean, Human Human!"

"We better get going."

We hear Pokémon being burned alive. Yelling out their name one last time. The burnt fur smells like electricity. People don't eat them, but I think it would be like delicious BBQ.

"At least our path is cleared now."

Human takes off sprinting, but not in the direction we were heading. He goes back towards Pallet Town.

He's not a very fast runner.

I catch up and hop on his back to make him give me a ride. He tries to shed me off, but I break him like a wild creature needing tamed. I grab onto his pointy ears, but they fall off.

We get back to Pallet Town and every building is burnt down. This is what we get for building everything out of upcycled shipping pallets.

Professor Oak is on his knees outside his crumbled lab, openly weeping. "If only I hadn't given up all of my water-type Pokémon this could have been avoided."

My childhood house is looks like two walls of burnt toast leaning against each other about to fall. I don't know where my Mother is. Maybe she finally met up with Dad on his quest.

It starts to rain, but it's too late. It's too late for a lot of decisions. The rain wipes the swirls off of Human's cheeks.

I look into his wet eyes and he looks back at mine. "I'm sorry, kid." His glasses are fogged up. His breath must be hot. "I feel bad, but I don't even know your name. What is it?"

"Does it matter?" Somehow I knew he wasn't a Pokémon, but sometimes you need to pretend a negative is a positive. Otherwise your life will become a dead battery.

"What will you do now, kid?"

"I'm on a quest. I'm not going to give up." Professor Oak beats his fists on the ground, throwing a tantrum and sobbing. "I could use a partner though, if you're up for it."

Steve looks toward the Professor as if the answer will be painted on Oak's face.

Contributor Biographies



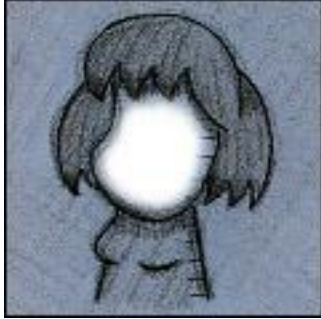
Lillie E. Franks is an author and eccentric who lives in Chicago, Illinois, with the best cats. You can read her work at places like *Always Crashing*, *Poemeleon*, and *Drunk Monkeys*, or follow her on Twitter at @onyxaminedlife. She loves anything that is not the way it should be.



Ping Yi works in public service and has written fiction, travelogues, and poetry since 1989, but is terrified to seek publication. He has lived in Singapore, Boston, and Cambridge (UK), and needs Neil Gaiman to sign his copy of *Good Omens*, which Terry Pratchett did sign.



Jon Wesick is a regional editor of the *San Diego Poetry Annual*. He's published hundreds of poems and stories in journals such as the *Atlanta Review*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *New Verse News*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Pearl*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Slipstream*, *Space and Time*, and *Tales of the Talisman*. His most recent books are *The Shaman in the Library* and *The Prague Deception*. <http://jonwesick.com>



Jennifer Spadaccia is a New Orleans-based creative writer, teacher, and artist originally from New York. Jennifer currently teaches young children at an arts based preschool while writing short stories and personal essays rooted in reflection and observations. Jennifer is a lover of theater, painting, tap dancing, and her cranky calico cat Nicole. When not attempting to type out her inner musings in an interesting and humorous way, Jennifer can be found trying her other failed hobby, knitting, with Nicole the cat nearby.



Cody Adams is an English teacher and writer from Buffalo, New York. He lives in Toronto because he fell in love with a girl that lives in Toronto. With more talent, Cody would be a wealthy author, film director, and professional football star. But yea, he's an English teacher (and loves it).



Paul Hostovsky makes his living in Boston as a sign language interpreter. His poems have won a Pushcart Prize, two Best of the Net Awards, the FutureCycle Poetry Book Prize, and have been featured on *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily*, *The Writer's Almanac*, and *Best American Poetry*. Website: paulhostovsky.com



Meagan Noel Hart is a life-long lover of stories with three story collections of her own, *Twisted Together*, *A Short Stack of Silly Shorts for the Morally Sidetracked*, and *Whispers & Fangs*. Whether they make you laugh or cry, her characters find themselves most at home in the odd, the speculative, and the fantastical. You can find her most recent work in *Daily Science Fiction*, *Fudoki Magazine*, and *Literally Stories*. When she isn't writing, she's teaching writing. She currently lives in Baltimore, Maryland, with her husband, children, and adorable pack of pets.



George Stanworth is a UK poet who has self-published numerous children's and adult satirical poetry books on Amazon. Some of the titles include *Don't Trick Or Treat A Lion*, *Your Sax Is On Fire*, and *Short Funny Love Poems*. He has also had poems published in anthologies, and had another book independently published called *A Floristry of Palpitations*. In 2014, he was also a finalist in the "Lyrics Only" section of the UK Songwriting Contest. He promotes his poetry through open mic nights around London and surrounding areas.



Corey Miller's writing has appeared in *Booth*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Atticus Review*, *Hobart*, *X-R-A-Y*, and elsewhere. He has been awarded the 2023 Literary Cleveland Breakthrough Residency. He reads for *TriQuarterly* and *Longleaf Review*. When Corey isn't brewing beer for a living in Cleveland, he enjoys taking the dogs for adventures. Follow him on Twitter @IronBrewer or at www.CoreyMillerWrites.com.