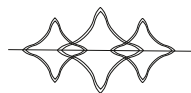


Ventoux

Issue 1



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When the Italian poet Petrarch scaled Mont Ventoux, and read from Augustine's Confessions on the summit, he felt that he was doing something singular. He seemed to believe that climbing a mountain for no reason other than to see the view from the summit was a feat virtually without precedent except in classical antiquity.

Dear reader

The careful work of later historians has shown this boast to be untrue. But we need not demand anything so dismal as sources to disprove his claim. It should seem absurd to us on first principles. The faculties of curiosity and wonder at the natural world are as integral to the human spirit as any other quality you might care to name. To suggest that they were lost to humanity during the interval between classical Rome and the Renaissance – that in seven hundred years no other forgotten souls felt that same magnetic draw of the summit – reveals a great hubris.

It has gone down in legend that when asked why he wished to climb Everest, the 20th century alpinist George Mallory replied simply: "Because it's there". And is that not the better boast by far? Certainly it speaks more faithfully to the human spirit. Petrarch must have been compelled by the same impulse as Mallory, so why did he fail to realise that his feeling was a universal one? In his own account, he recalls meeting an aged shepherd, who had climbed the same peak in his youth. However, the old man had little interest in philosophising,

remarking that all he gained from his conquest was tired legs and torn clothes. For Petrarch, this failure to wax lyrical seems to disqualify the endeavour from comparison with his own. A pig-headed belief in the novelty of one's own experience is truly the eternal conceit of artists.

Yet there was something unique about Petrarch's endeavour. Assuredly he was neither

BY JACK BYRNE

the first person of his time to summit a mountain, nor to read from the Confessions. But we can say with near certainty that he was the first to do both at the same time. Conjunctions of text and setting can be singular experiences in their own right, and indeed, for Petrarch this was so. In his telling, he opens his pocket-sized copy of the book at random, and chances upon the following lines:

Here are men going afar to marvel at the heights of mountains, the mighty waves of the sea, the long courses of the great rivers, the vastness of the ocean, the movements of the stars, yet leaving themselves unnoticed...

The aptness of these words strikes him like a lightning bolt. He is overcome by the feeling that his journey has been vain and futile, and starts at once to march back down the mountain in paroxysms of self-righteousness and self-rebuke, disregarding the pleas of his brother. How can the scale of any mountain compare to the vastness of the human soul? he declares. Why should we waste an iota of time looking without ourselves, when the only thing truly worth contemplating is ever present within?

You may find these convictions appealing. Yet by condemning his own achievement at the moment of its completion, has Petrarch not become the mirror image of that old shepherd, who also had to climb the mountain to realise that doing so was futile? And when that same shepherd tried to dissuade the poet from his own attempt, did he heed the warning? Naturally, he did not. Some things must be felt to be known; every child must touch the hot stove at some point or another.

***A pig-headed belief
in the novelty of one's own
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eternal conceit of artists***

So while Petrarch may fairly say that his journey was not a wise one, he cannot say that it was pointless. Rather, it was necessary, if only as proof of its own unwisdom. And perhaps he should have read further from that passage by Augustine, because if he had done so, he would have realised that the Numidian's theme was not the size of the soul so much as the capaciousness of memory:

...yet leaving themselves unnoticed, and not seeing it as marvellous that when I spoke of all these things, I did not see them with my eyes, yet I could not have spoken of them unless these mountains and waves and rivers and stars which I have seen, and the ocean of which I have heard, had been inwardly present to my sight: in my memory, yet with the same vast spaces between them as if I saw them outside me.

How many times before had Petrarch read those earlier quoted lines, from this book that he loved so well? Yet on such occasions they

must have seemed unremarkable to him, for had they any special poignancy he would have said as much in his account. Now, though, interwoven with the vastness of the setting and its eerie relevance to the words as he speaks them, they become powerfully impressed on his memory, to remain there for all his mortal life. It is not just as letters on a page, nor as spoken words alone, that he commits them to memory, but rather as an ineffable collusion of text, reader, and place: a crystalline instant of consciousness, entirely private and perfectly unique for all of time.

Every reader has these moments. Think back to occasions when words have moved you: how often can you recall the place, the time, your general predicament? I expect that in many cases these things come easily to mind. Frequently enough to prove that it is impossible for a reader to be a neutral substrate. It is vital to understand that texts—stories, poems, essays, and so on—do not just happen to you; you are the medium through which they gain meaning; in your absence they are but ink blots, or sound waves, or bits on the wire: in short, they do not really exist. This is, in fact, the greatest strength of literature.

***Welcome to
this first issue of
Ventoux magazine***

Welcome to this first issue of Ventoux magazine. There is no requirement that you read it atop a mountain, though you can do so if you wish. You may just as easily – or, to be strictly accurate, far more easily – read it in bed, on a train, or in a crack den. The place

where you read it may be important, in the same way that the confluence of text and setting was important to Petrarch, but equally, it may not. In part, that is because this is an internet magazine, and the internet is a location all of its own, regardless of where you're accessing it from.

In fact, the internet is not just a single location, but a terrain, with its own geography and inhabitants. Certain regions abut others; certain groups share similarities, in the manner of Greeks and Turks, though they may hate to admit it, also in the manner of Greeks and Turks. Why, then, is it impossible for us to say the word *netizen* with a straight face (except, bizarrely, when translating from Chinese)? It is a perfectly good word with serious and actual implications. The fact is that across much of the World, if not yet all of it, people are becoming more akin to each on the basis of their netizenships than their real-world nationalities. We all have an idea of what a Redditor is like, and he does not differ very much regardless of whether he is English or Estonian.

We all have an idea of what a Redditor is like

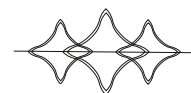
Gentle reader, whichever nation you come from, I hope you are not a Redditor (and if you are, well, Jesus saves). Having found your way to an independent magazine hosted on an independent website, you may at least congratulate yourself for not being one of the 80% of people who become puzzled, confused, and enraged when they find themselves outside of an 'app'. It is, in fact, still legal to buy your own domain name and host things on it (I know! It came as a surprise to me too), but it

feels rather like being a yeoman farmer living under the spectre of Enclosure. By engaging with projects like this one, you prolong the twilight of the internet by another microsecond, and you deserve our sincere thanks.

In this issue you can find stories, poems, and essays. Naturally, you may read it from cover to cover if you wish, but for my part I encourage jumping about at random, like the laudable Petrarch, to discover what sheer chance has in store. My sincere hope is that you find something that delights you, and if you do, it will be all the more gratifying because you won't have found it in *Granta*, but rather in an eclectic collection of texts, submitted without hope of compensation, to the administrator of an obscure imageboard. That, surely, will be a confluence of setting and text worth keeping long in the memory.

Happy reading,

JACK
Editor, Ventoux



The rain sluiced through the building tops and into the avenues
the people held static in little groups,
it couldn't last long.
I entered through a diamond door for a drink
"Don't I know you?"

Fishers of Men

BY SACHA CANTU

The old Man's shirt blends with the tavern wall.
He walks to the counter, repeating the question
Adamant that we met.
His head looks wrong, like it twisted 360 degrees
but one person is as good as another
and I'm so thirsty.
So I'll take him with me.
The sunlight on the building is fragile, brittle as straw,
The temperature drops fast as it vanishes.

Paul Middleton greeted the morning with his usual indifference.

He got up and hopped to the toilet not bothering to put his prosthetic leg on, the urgency to piss outweighing the convenience of walking properly, as he stood there gratefully reliving his bladder the feeling that something of significance would happen today was there.

He hobbled to the kitchen and put the kettle on then hobbled back to his bedroom to attach his leg. He put the little radio on and made his coffee to the sounds of the morning show on Triple M.

Something was in the air, he could feel it, he was going to do something today or something was going to happen to him but either way it wasn't going to be a normal day.

A normal day! He thought to himself, what's normal now? Nothing had been "normal" since he lost his leg in Afghanistan so many years ago now. Normality now was a prosthetic leg and a veterans pension. Normality was this grim little housing commission flat in South Plympton. Normality was attempts at "re-training and rehabilitation" courses that never seemed to lead anywhere. Normality was being on the scrap heap at age 36.

for himself and nothing but regret for his life so far. The dark place which had already claimed half a dozen or so blokes from his old Company.

He struggled to focus his mind on something more positive. He sipped his coffee and listened to the radio for lack of better ideas. The morning presenters were talking about some new event that had started up in Adelaide and how Adelaide was so much livelier now that it had been in years. "Yeah, it's a real go-ahead city these days" the presenter, who had been a champion footballer a few years back, said with a sense of real optimism for the future.

Paul thought to himself about how the city had been when he was young. How Adelaide had been a national joke and an economic basket case for years. How he'd been nineteen years old and couldn't get a better job than Macca's. How he'd thought about his future and been terrified of a life spent serving burgers and mopping floors for minimum wage. So terrified of this vision that he'd gone to the ADF recruitment session eager, so eager that he ate up all their lies, so eager that he'd put so much effort into the tests and he'd aced them all and been overjoyed when they'd accepted him.

He remembered getting on the bus on that Monday morning, looking out the window at

Nor the Years Condemn

BY LEWIS WOOLSTON

His train of thought led him into that dark bitter place again. The black hole the Army shrinks and counsellors had told him repeatedly he must try to stay out of. The mental ash heap where he could see no future

Adelaide for what he thought would probably be the last time as the bus took them to Kapooka and basic training. He thought he was getting a career, a life, he thought he was going to be somebody and make something of

himself.

He interrupted his memories and looked around the grim little flat. It was actually worse than the shithole share house he'd lived in before he joined the Army. At least that had had a garden and he'd never been lonely, always a housemate or a friend around to have a chat with. After 17 years of striving he'd actually gone backwards.

He was going to do something today or something was going to happen to him but either way it wasn't going to be a normal day

The mental darkness was taking hold now. He could feel the cold despair beginning to creep up on him. Nothing for it now but to spend the day in the ash heap. To ponder silently the diminished life ahead of him and the mistakes behind him that had led him to this point, to contemplate all this in silence all day as the time passed without purpose or value, another wasted day in a wasted life.

He forced himself to stand up. No! Fucking NO! I won't have it! I won't allow it! The determination to live, to struggle against the odds, that had been part of his life since he was young was still there, still beating a lonely drummer's refrain in his heart. I will not give in to the darkness today he said to himself.

He walked over to the kitchen and with great haste and energy he made himself breakfast as if by sheer effort and movement he could defeat the darkness. He forced himself to sing along with the songs he knew on the radio,

made a great clutter and banging with the washing up, anything to silence the darkness that threatened to swallow him now.

At length he stood before an immaculately clean kitchen and wondered what he was going to do now. He checked the fridge and saw he needed a few things, well, he thought, a trip to the supermarket will chew up a bit of time and take my mind off things for a little while, as good a plan as any.

He checked his bank balance on his phone and was surprised to see he had more money than he thought. He realised it must be the money for the course he was supposed to be doing, it came through monthly whereas his veterans pension, pittance that it was, came through fortnightly.

An idea hit him with a suddenness that could only mean it was genius or madness, possibly both.

The mental darkness was taking hold now

I have enough money to go see a hooker, he thought, it means I'll have to be careful for the rest of the week until the pension comes in but it's totally doable.

All of a sudden the darkness was dispelled and the day was opened to him like a new life.

He got showered, shaved and dressed in record time.

He walked to the Tram stop and waited on the cold metal seat with his back straight, looking out for the Tram, like a teenage boy on his first date. His eagerness written all over his face.

The Tram came and he got on and sat down in the reserved seating. He got a couple enquiring looks from people until they noticed

his prosthetic leg. His ticket to ride the pity train. The Tram headed towards the city and his anticipation was almost unbearable. How long had it been since he'd fucked a woman? A couple of years at least. He worried to himself, what if he came too quickly? Would they still let him have the time he'd paid for? What if he couldn't come at all? What if nerves defeated his biology? What if he blew his load the second a woman touched him?

A darker thought bubbled up from the back of his brain. What if they refused to service him because he was a cripple and his stump and prosthetic leg disgusted them? Even hookers had standards after all. What if, he imagined it clearly in his mind now, the hooker made some excuse and left the room and the madam came back a few minutes later with some weak excuse as to why they were rejecting his money?

He was interrupted in this train of thought by the Tram's arrival in the city. He got off and decided he'd have a coffee and a sit down somewhere before he made his way to the brothel. He found a little café that didn't look too busy and got himself a coffee and a seat where he could see the passing parade.

He calmed down and watched the people on the street. It would be fine he told himself, you'll go inside, pick a nice girl, have some nice sex and feel better about life and then later today you'll be glad you did this.

After five minutes of this he felt confident again and left the café.

The Brothel was on Currie Street and had been there for years. Probably a lot of men in Adelaide had been there at one time or another and had pleasant memories of the place. Everyone from Tradies to State Premiers had been there, the great egalitarian fellowship of

the lustful. It was clean and discreet and had managed to stay out of the news and out of the courts, all you could want in a Brothel really.

Paul pressed the buzzer by the door and was admitted inside a few seconds later. The inside was dark, barely lit by shaded lamps casting their meagre light on the dark red carpet. He walked into the little waiting room and sat down on the bench. It was exactly as he remembered it from years ago, it was exactly the same as other Brothels he'd been in various cities around the country, there was definitely a Brothel "style" and décor he thought, someone must have decided at some point that this was how they were going to look and it had stayed the same ever since.

***There was definitely a
Brothel "style" and décor
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The Madam came out, he noticed, as he always did now, how her eyes went straight to his prosthetic leg then she immediately forced herself to look him in the face and smile as if trying to not see what she'd just seen.

'And how are you today, have you been here before? You have? Oh good, so I've got two ladies available at the moment if you'd like to come with me.'

He followed her upstairs into one of the bedrooms. She gestured for him to sit down on the bed.

'Now I'll get the ladies to come in and introduce themselves and then I'll come back and you can tell me which lady you'd like to see and for how long. Ok? I'll just go get the first

lady now.'

Her forced sweetness was overpowering but in a way it was comforting to Paul. He'd been in Brothels many times over the years, mostly when he was in the Army, and the ritual had always been the same, that sameness and familiarity was a friend to him now. He would be able to perform, he was confident of that now.

The first girl came in and introduced herself as Becca, he was skinny, a little bit too skinny maybe, dyed blonde hair with the roots starting to grow out. She chatted a little to Paul and then departed.

The second girl came in, she introduced herself as Candy and Paul liked her more. She was brunette, curvy in just the right amounts in just the right places and had a friendly, smiley face. She gave off a homely, warm vibe that he found comforting. He noticed that she didn't try to avoid looking at his leg and he decided that he liked her for that. They chatted a little and she departed.

The Madam came back in.

'Okay so that's the two ladies we have on today, would you like to see one of them?'

'Yeah can I see Candy?'

'Okay I'll send her up to see you again.'

Candy came back and the warm smile on her face made Paul feel he'd made the right decision.

She asked him how long he'd like to spend with her and if he would like any extras. She listed the extras and how much they would cost on top of the hourly rate. In the end Paul settled for an hour with kissing as the only extra. It was as much as he could afford.

She took the money and asked him to take a quick wash in the shower in the corner of the room. He got undressed and took off his

prosthetic leg and let the hot water blast him. He rubbed some of the shower gel over himself in a haphazard fashion. The anticipation was really exciting him now, he reflected that this was half the pleasure of Brothel sex, the ritual anticipation of a certain thing, the comforting sleaze of it all. Like a grotty old blanket that despite its tattered condition was the best thing to have in winter.

Yeah, can I see Candy?

Candy came back in just as Paul was drying himself with a towel. He hobbled over to sit next to her on the bed with a towel around his waist. He waited for her to say what she was going to say next.

'Now are you more comfortable with your leg off or on?' She gestured at the prosthetic lying there on the dark red carpet.

'I'll leave it off for now, it's cool.' He replied and she smiled warmly at him, seemingly happy to have avoided awkwardness on the issue.

'Now I just have to do a little health check on you real quick...' Paul remembered this part of the ritual and said "sure" with a smile on his face. He undid the towel around his waist and she took his penis carefully in her hand, examining it for any obvious nasties. Satisfied that there was nothing she smiled and asked him if he'd like a massage first.

'Sounds good.' Paul said and obediently rolled onto his belly in the centre of the bed. Candy took off what little clothes she had on and straddled him, her vagina somewhere near the base of his spine, she took out a little bottle of baby oil and rubbed it into his back. Her rhythm was sooting and Paul found himself relaxing.

Candy began to chat to him, the casual

friendliness that one sees in good hospitality staff or air hostesses.

‘So do you have the whole day off or just taking a break?’

‘Whole day off, I don’t get out much these days.’

‘Aww that’s a shame, well at least you’re enjoying yourself today, that’s something isn’t it?’

‘Yeah I need to do it a bit more often if the truth be told.’

‘For sure, everyone needs to get out and enjoy themselves, it’s not good to be stuck at home all the time moping around is it?’

Paul couldn’t disagree. He felt himself relaxing more deeply. Candy knew what she was doing, knots and tension in his back that he didn’t know he had were resolving themselves gently under her hands. Worth every cent, was Paul’s thought as he surrendered himself more deeply to this woman with a fake name who he’d only just met.

She continued on for a while every movement of her hands making Paul more relaxed and happy. An appropriate amount of time must have passed because she asked Paul if he’d like to turn himself over now.

Paul complied with good cheer and settled himself on his back as Candy got a condom from a little basket on the bedside table.

‘Now I just have to put this on you so we’re all safe okay?’ She said cheerfully and Paul smiled as he replied “cool, no worries” in a voice that sounded to his own ears like a new man.

She began to suck him; Paul lost all concern with whatever it was he had been worrying about that morning. He touched her body gently as she worked on him. First stroking her back and shoulder, feeling the skin

of another human being for the first time in who knew how long. Reaching down gently and cupping her breast with his hand as she continued to suck and tickle with her tongue, how long had it been since he had touched a woman’s breast? Too long. Too damn long.

***Worth every cent, was
Paul’s thought as he
surrendered himself more
deeply to this woman
with a fake name who
he’d only just met.***

Candy continued her work with her head down while Paul lay in raptures. On some tender impulse he didn’t understand he began to stroke her lovely brunette hair as her head bobbed up and down. There was something beautiful about her no doubt, he thought as the pleasure became more intense, a real beauty, could have been in a painting if she’d been born a hundred or so years ago.

Candy’s head popped up, her hand was still gently holding his cock, she had a smile on her face.

‘Having a good time?’ The wicked grin on her face made Paul believe she was enjoying it almost as much as he was.

‘Hell yeah’ Paul replied, almost breathless.

‘Want to have sex now? Or you want me to keep going with this?’ Her hand gently rubbed Paul’s belly as she spoke.

‘Let’s move on yeah?’ Paul said and Candy smiled again. She got up and reached over to the little bedside table again finding a small tube of lubricant. She applied it to herself and to the tip of Paul’s cock. With no further ado she mounted Paul with the skill of a seasoned professional.

Paul gave a small gasp as he entered her. It had been so long since he'd actually been inside a woman. His was the relief of the man in the desert who finds an Oasis just as he'd been nearly at the point of death. Candy was astride him, gently rocking back and forth, her work of art breasts standing proudly out while her hair hung low in front of her shoulders.

Paul was in heaven. The small, temporary heaven of men when they have a woman, but a heaven nonetheless.

Candy leaned over and kissed him. Paul responded eagerly, he knew, somewhere in the rational part of his brain that this was a fake kiss, a service paid for, an extra, but he didn't care right now. It felt good. He felt alive. This lovely woman was giving him, however temporarily, her body and he was enjoying every second of it.

Candy continued to ride him and he felt himself getting nearer the happy ending. He tried to hold off, tried to prolong the pleasure, this wonderful moment that came so rarely in his life now, but his body would not be denied. He came with a great deal of noise and intensity, clutching Candy's body with his hands like she was a life preserver.

It seemed to go on for several minutes, Paul felt tingles on his face like pins and needles, he knew that he must be making a strange face but couldn't help it, and anyway, he figured, Candy had probably seen plenty of those faces before.

Candy, ever the consummate professional, was gentle with him, stroking his face with her hand and gently kissing him, helping him come down gently from the heights of his orgasm. No rough landings in her arms, all smooth and happy arrivals, she prided herself on it.

Paul's breathing eased back into something

approaching a normal rhythm. He felt himself become more conscious of his surroundings again. He smiled. Candy smiled back at him, still holding him in her arms.

'Well that was a good time' She said and the wicked grin on her face made him laugh, she laughed with him, it felt good. Like something real, just for a moment.

Candy disentangled herself, got some tissues from the bedside table and used them to remove the condom from Paul. She wiped him a little with the tissues, almost tenderly, kindly you could say, before putting the whole mess in a little bin just out of Paul's sight. She lay next to Paul as he recovered slowly.

Some needy impulse in Paul made him reach out for her. She accepted his touch graciously and they lay in post-coital bliss for him and professional courtesy for her.

'God that was good, it's been way too long between drinks.' Paul announced when he regained the power of speech. Candy giggled cheerfully in response and ran her fingers through his chest hair.

Paul lay there a little longer painfully aware that his brief, expensive moment of happiness was rapidly running out of time. He

'How did it happen?'

lay on his back looking at the ceiling in the muted light and wondered to himself how long it would be until he saw this ceiling again. He leaned his head sideways and took in the view of Candy again. His eyes greedily went over her every curve, her breasts, her hips, her brunette hair and long, shapely legs. He didn't know if he'd ever see her again. The next time he had enough money to come here she might not be working or she might have left for somewhere else. He wanted to remember her as much as he

could, soak her up with his eyes and store her image like a treasure.

'Did you want to have a shower before you go?'

Her cheerful voice cut across his consciousness. He sighed and said sure and began to get up.

He discovered that he'd sweated a lot more than he had thought so he applied the shower gel generously and got himself properly under the shower. Candy wrapped herself in a towel and began putting the room to order, ready for the next punter.

Paul dried himself off and seated himself on the edge of the bed. He began to put his prosthetic back on. Candy stopped what she was doing and sat next to him as he did it.

'Does it hurt to wear that thing?'

'Nah I'm used to it now.'

'How did it happen?'

'I stepped on a mine in Afghanistan.'

'Shit, that's awful.'

'That's war'

Her concern seemed to be genuine. She put her hand gently on his shoulder as he finished attaching the prosthetic. He put on the rest of his clothes in silence.

When he was ready she walked him down the stairs still wrapped in a towel. She stopped at the waiting room and faced him.

'You have a good day now and come visit me again sometime ok?'

'I'd love to'

She kissed him, properly, on the lips, before pressing the buzzer that opened the door and letting him out.

Paul walked out into the daylight like a stunned man. The afterglow of pleasure not yet dissipated. He walked away from Currie Street with no real goal in mind. He cut across Light

Square on a whim and headed down Waymouth Street.

They were standing in the middle of the footpath as he approached. A slimy looking arsehole in a suit, greasy, wog looking. He was talking to some Asian guy in a suit. They had their backs to the street and were intently looking at some building with a real estate sign on it.

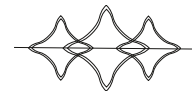
The slimy guy was talking loud enough to hear from ten metres or so away.

'This property has fantastic potential, central to everything, lot of foot traffic for your retail, quality office space upstairs for anything you'd like up there and the Adelaide City Council are very accommodating with their zoning and approvals if you want to redevelop it.

You won't get better than this in the CBD I'm telling you.'

The Asian guy was nodding and looking intently at the building like he was trying to calculate the money he could make from it down to the last cent.

Paul walked past them, prosthetic leg making a small tapping noise on the concrete pavement, they didn't notice or acknowledge him.





the constable's uniform blows in
the wind
motorbikes sail by, never,
never, never
can't there be a more rewarding
system
but stickers and money are
all i've got
there's 4 weed shops, 3 massage
parlors, 2 fortune tellers, and
a nightclub on the way
home
that's enough wind in my
hair

Gusto

BY AIRPORT





A calendar changes every so often
And the changing every so often.
People find new ways of throwing out
the old--and soon throw out that, too.

Last year, I noticed the fox no longer smoked. I once asked her how long the trip to Hexagon Mountain took and she told me about an odd two packets. Now, I notice that she holds a watch instead of a cigarette and no longer takes a puff every few steps. At night the dogs startle her, but she says she's ok with giving up old things. Plus ashes burned her tail once. 'At my age, you need to take each new thing that comes with eager paws. otherwise, your heart grows moss--see?' She handed me an apple that'd seen the full moon twice. Still tastes the same.

The Fox on Umunhum

BY NATHAN YOUNG

'Why don't we go catch something?'
Still says the same things.

We went fishing for a bit. I always laugh when I look into the water and see the six sided snails. There's some joke to this, but she's probably thought of them all.

As a child, I noticed how her body arched to the curve of the snail's shell. Now, as she dives her claws in the water and takes life, I can't help but see the way the light ripples under the tree's shade from bark to the lowest hanging fruit. Her shadow did her work, and the thought of that mixed with the cool air made me shiver.
'thinking on it,
(coming to me like a dried pine's rain)

It is a little cold for someone like you! what, you really do wait until the apples all fall to come back, don't you?

and yet, you still swim.

Me? oh, I

don't shake your water off at me!

sorry! I

what was I saying? oh, right. really, I have no need for your concern. It's that time in autumn my pelt gets thick. besides
You're not here for the rest of the year, and aren't I well..?

sorry, you know I try--

but I am quite
educated in human affairs to know that what you wear in autumn
really, early winter--is not natural!

She said this to someone who could steal her
pelt. Or maybe, someone envious of her warmth.
Well, I envy no fox:

my warmest clothes..
I'll be a gastropod,
cradle home and grave.

Ten times I watched her fill herself with fish and
toss them to the bucket. We stayed until the
pines turned minty, and she lit a lamp for my
sake. She's gotten older, but the fish have only
gotten younger. That's why she catches the same
amount of fish as she did before. Still, the
basket's weight hasn't changed, so I ended up
carrying it for her. And yet--

what did you write out there?

Her paws were still adept enough to take the
notebook from my bag and hide its shuffling in
my sandy footsteps. She flipped through..

..not anything important, huh
otherwise you'd spill the basket, seeing me read
like this. let's see...ha
you write small! let me get out my

No one takes her seriously with her small, round
glasses.

Let's see! let's see, let's see... oh
snails...and food.' She loosed her glasses. 'say,
why haven't you written a poem on me? you've
known me all these years, and still haven't
written one about me.

well
you've known me all these years and still forget
that I don't write on demand--

God it's not about what I want. You come here
for what food? guidance? Please. I'm not trying
to be mean but what I let you in my home, and
that doesn't spark the least bit of gratitude?

no, I feel it--but gratitude
isn't inspiration...

and what, the snails are? You
don't even eat them! You're just drinking their
piss, you know. mmm? maybe I'll send you back
to them, just so you can kiss your inspiration!

oh mr snail your home's so small, there's
no way I could fit!! what are you talking
about...it has six sides! That's two more than the
fox's, you little~! oh my...imagining you in the
rain!ha. haha! I said HA

AHww what, what?!!

***Why haven't you
written a poem on me?
you've known me
all these years, and
still haven't written
one about me.***

Oh! Just woke the dog's all..
jjjust? That
thing keeps me up all night--

Maybe he likes you!
no no you, yo u
swear I'll send you to the s

.
. are you? writing? at this time? the hell's
.

. a poem?
.

.
Oh god. Is it about me?

.
. I take it back. Let me see!
She came at me so fast that the dog flinched:

a shriek
enveloped in a growl,
the squirrel's tail
flickers in the night
Still cold

'wait--a squirrel?' she double-checked. 'No, no--' she tried to change it-- 'a--fox!' I held the poem above her head and looked down.

it's just what I wrote--at that moment, you seemed more like a squirrel than a fox! what it is..and anyhow, how many times have you heard the fox already? a little overused, right?

never, never--well maybe once I heard it many times, but never about me WAIT! you can't just change things when they're old and overused! what, you want to tell your muse they're not good enough to even have their species listed down correctly?!

Come on, and would you really want to be known for something like this?
for this?

for your tail.

For my tail. For my tail, for my tail...

Would you really want to be known for something like this?

We walked across for my tail the shore, and her mumble blended with dogs whose barking frothed more rhythmically ashore. We took one last look at them before heading along the beach home. While dusting off the sand from my bare feet, it was too dark to check whether the grains were hexagonal as well and for whatever reason, I was scared to ask.

She struck the match and heated up the stove. It

was the only light in her house, and we ended up surrounded by our shadows. I remember this room being bigger, the shadows seething like worlds. But now, they seem more a fence that pens us in. She stretched her paws on each skewer, sprinkled the fish with salt and still took her time, small as they were.

Once they were all gone

her paw stretched again, but now against my knapsack.

hmm...let me read it again.

still won't change it for you though.

no, you won't. but I don't need that. Right now. In fact, I don't need the paper either. just hear what I have to say.

.
.

thinking about it more, this is quite stupid. fox, or squirrel? Does it matter? not really, speaking for yourself. so
here:

a shriek
enveloped in a growl,
her tail
flickers in the night
still cold...

i've never written a word, so i'll leave that to you. but-- it sounds better to my big, sharp ears. perhaps i'm not refined enough for--?

Turned, her face was half-dark. Flames obscured her voice, and I wondered who she was--and who, the one who'd hid her all these years. Her, editing my words...I weighed the one who'd nothing much to say with the one who now pierced the heart of what I wished to show. I stood up as if behind my back now sprung a tail, showing my surprise. m
mmmm

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THE FOX ON UMUNHUM

mmmm I
think

.
.

you're right. actually, you might be~!
right?! and all it took
Was taking off my name!

I suppose, but maybe you'd hold on, let me get
them out

.
.

could I ask your opinion on all these other things
I've written? here, in my bag--

oh, do I inspire you now?
maybe as a teacher--

No! a----muse!

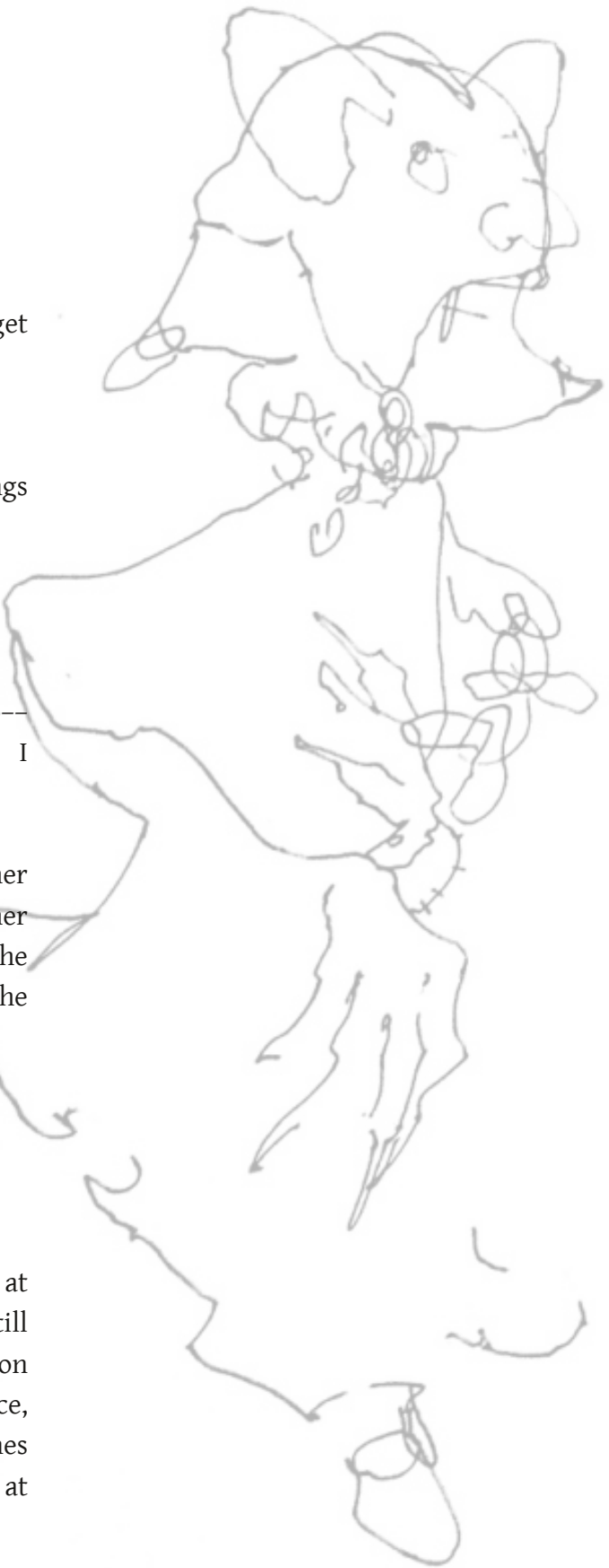
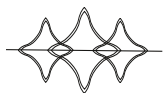
if you say so--
I

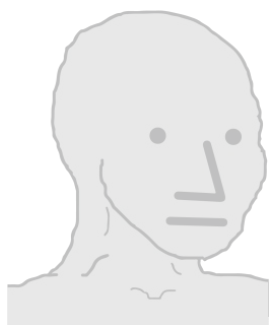
Do!

The stove cooled. In its dying light I wrote her
edit on a napkin, balled it up and put it in her
paw. She seemed more comfortable keeping the
poem after that. As her shadow blew out the
stove, the steam lingered from her cup. But

how warmer than milk
darker than shadows
drowsiness

Strange how poems like that keep you up at
night. I woke up next morning and she was still
asleep. The table was tidy, so I laid my elbows on
it. An apple-blossom was the centerpiece,
watered through the summer. I wrote those lines
on the cloth and left before the pines dried at
noon.





Soyez toujours méfiant, totalement méfiant et averse envers la médiatisation ; toute la culture-néo et la culture rétro, bref toute la « culture » prise dans son sens non pas étymologique mais le signifié spectaculaire doit être mis en arrière-plan ; pas vraiment suffisant dis-je, mettez là à la poubelle de la reproduction historique, un excrément prêt-à-consommer, avalé et rechié !

apparaître, la vocation existentielle d'aujourd'hui est identification ; identification permise et acquise par l'intermédiaire exclusive du signe ; le signe préfabriqué, dans un labo de cinéma ; labo de ARPANET ; labo d'audio-visuel et mis à la consommation instantanée. La culture mémétique est un exemple flagrant ; le wojak comme signe ambivalent et sans organe (fluide et amorphe) subit chaque fois et dans chaque instant une modification, ajout de signes et formation d'une table de schizophrène



Principe spectaculaire

PAR ANON

SIGNE (entassement et amas) pour en faire une identification et un "charme" pour une certaine niche ; les ---oomers ont pris l'avant-garde au sein de la guerre mémétique ; qu'on synthétise un ---oomer bien détaillé et mis au service de la propagande de l'idéologue et qu'on le fasse propager comme on met du feu à la paille ; poof, on s'identifie (in)consciemment au boomer, doomer, zoomer, bloomer, coomer,..... et dans des cas extrêmes et cependant pas rares et on peut dire bien communs ; le sujet prend image, la loi de l'hyperréel. Jadis était le temps de l'image prenant comme base l'activité anthropique ! ; dans notre epoch caractérisée d'un IPC (image per capita) immense, inabordable et incalculable, c'est le sujet qui prend l'imgo comme modèle à suivre.



It is no secret that in the 21st century, we, the human beings, find ourselves in a great age of idleness. The main problem of creation is not, in fact, a lack of creativity, for there are plenty of social novels yet to be written, topics that can be described as low-hanging fruit (for example, the chronic online persona that Honor Levy tried to describe in "My first book", but failed in the analysis department), yet we do not write about them. Another attempt to describe the "last" contemporary "man" was made by Tony

We have not yet got our novel, our Finnegans Wake, and perhaps one of the core problems with that is the fact that we spend more time talking about it on social media than we do actually writing a book about it. It doesn't have to be the best book, it just has to be good enough. In the words of the great Voltaire, although I use the word "great" here against my will because I'm terribly racist towards the French: "Dans ses écrits, un sage Italien, dit que le mieux est l'ennemi du bien".

On our lives and our literature

BY IVAN

Tulathimutte in his story "The Feminist", but again showed so much "21st" bias that we can consign most of his writing to the dustbin of literary history; but I digress, I suppose, because attempts are being made, but with little attention to the art. We have no great novel to refer to; even the latest Nobel Prize winner, Han Kang, shows many symptoms of our anti-literary age, especially lack of self-awareness, terrible knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, writing a novel as if it were a film script, dialogues are written at the level of a pre-school child who has just read the latest edition of "Tintin", and I suppose I could go on. Art is taken out of literature, but literature remains as a kind of cave-wall painting of hands. This discourse is sometimes "polluted" and "diluted" by a very rare and honest analysis of everyday life. A good example of this is now very old writers such as Chuck Palahniuk, but even then these writings are now going on 30, and the literary world remains lonely, just like its readers. The voracious reading of contemporary literature in this day and age can no longer be confused with enlightenment; it is all bad taste and aesthetics.

We do not need a perfect novel, we just need something that is honest to God, that comes from the heart and from the soul. Han Kang and others like her have failed us, trapped in the discourse of a bygone age that has only bitter literary relevance for us and our times.

The true literary dissection of the last man has to come in the form of a 'continental' analysis of why we are going through one of the worst bouts of procrastination that the human race has ever seen. We can point the finger at technology, but that is only half of the Faustian bargain we made in the early 2000s.¹ The other half is us. We rushed to grab our pens and boldly signed our names on the dotted line. This has led to two decades of severe procrastination, and we have not yet found a cure for it. This has led to us living depressed, apathetic and vain lifestyles; caring very little for our own future. Some have 'found' their calling in environmentalism, but recent trends show that the vitriol with which the 'new environmentalist classes' behave is nothing less

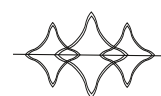
than religious zealotry. It is a rapid replacement for the void left by both the lack of religion and other remnants of 20th century ideologies. We can see that the people who are most religiously committed to protecting the climate are not fathers and mothers with a dozen children for whom the environment is being saved, but billionaires, child predators, barely literate social science students and other such maladjusted and misanthropic individuals who, when they die, will leave no legacy to speak of, so that their intentions remain dishonest and therefore quite unattractive to the thinking man.

***We are going through
one of the worst bouts
of procrastination
that the human race
has ever seen***

In the paragraphs above I have used literary examples from English writing for the simple reason that this magazine's readership will be predominantly English-speaking. Literary trends in other languages point in a similar direction. I am sure others could point to many, but I will stick to Slovenian, my mother's tongue. The writing circles that exist in this small country are much like reddit communities, terribly isolated in their own bubbles of dignity and morality; nothing gets in, nothing gets out, yet their social and economic capital allows them to publish the worst of the worst; among them the writings of a man named Davorin Lenko, who writes about gay sexual fantasies. His writings have no particular value, he cites them under his

novels, believing he is probably original, even though House of Leaves came out what seems like a century ago. There's little point reading about homosexual encounters when I can find more wild stuff on pornhub or a million other sites that satisfy the Last Man's decadent urges and allow him to pass time without a minute's exposure to his own thoughts. Analysis, as ever, is in short supply, probably in the belief that reading an excerpt from Barthes at university is enough to be a writer later in life. There are others like him. On the positive side, this year saw the publication of a collection of essays entitled "Zakaj pisati?" (Why Write?) by the famous Drago Jančar. His complaints about contemporary art, especially about the theatre, are very similar to the ones that I am writing about here. It's all slogans and agitprop, no nuance, art or skill. Say the right thing and straight to the National Theatre with you!

Generally speaking, writers tend not to suffer. Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn were both imprisoned in gulags, Orwell suffered through the Spanish War, many others too, but a contemporary writer's biggest hurdle is being called a faggot or nigger, and his whole writing persona stems from that moment. There is no learning to be had from such a mundane experience. We live in an age in which our creativity and our freedom have been taken away from us and in which algorithms rule the day, and yet there is no novel that carefully takes it all apart. Everything that is, well, almost, reads like something written by Franz Fanon after he had been raped in the ass by Sartre, and it is getting so stale to the point that even mould will not touch it.



Before he can run to the mat, Hollis's father grabs him by the shoulder. "This is it. This is everything we've been working for. You're gonna be a State Champ, kid—go out and win it."

His father is a huge man whose body is in stark contrast to Hollis's trim, lean physique. Despite that, whenever Hollis looks in the mirror, he sees his father staring back at him—their eyes burn with the same fire. Now he hears tremors in his father's voice; the heavy, jowled face hovers just inches from his own. His father's mouth tightens, his eyes narrow, and his face becomes one that Hollis can recreate on the backs of his eyelids.

His father barely says the final words. He breathes them into Hollis's ear. The breath rushes across Hollis's face, raising his hair like the sudden gust of wind before a storm.

"Wrestle tough."

Hollis turns away and jogs across the hard-packed Resilite foam, his steps making faint squishing sounds.

Wrestle Tough

"Hollis Wilson," he says to the scorer's table, and turns to see his opponent. Hollis makes a point not to study his opponents nor even to watch them while they warm up. He prefers to not even know their names. His opponents may as well be shadows. Yet, today, in spite of himself, he notices that the shadow is big, bigger than him. The shadow must cut a lot of weight to make 138.

He straps on his ankle band in the center and tries to avoid the small beady merciless

eyes. They shake hands. He feels the strong, callused grip of his opponent and immediately begins to weigh it against his memories: yes, he wrestled and beat a kid at Fargo the year before who had had a tighter grip, swallowing his hand in a vise, while now his opponent's hand only lightly crushes his own; remembering that match, the image flashes into his mind of the red finger-shaped marks he had after all down his neck and arms—

The whistle blows. His opponent dives for his ankle. He steps back just in time; his opponent's hand grasps at empty air. His opponent scrambles to get back to his level but Hollis is too quick. He pounces down on the vulnerable neck. His opponent expels oxygen with a rough, heavy sound. His opponent's head is underneath his chest. He pulls and circles, pulls and circles, pulls and circles. But his opponent grips his arm tight—keeping Hollis in front—and circles away. Suddenly, he slips his head out from under Hollis's arm. Hollis realizes what is happening just fast enough to

prevent his opponent from whipping his body around Hollis's as fast as a dancer doing a pirouette.

Hollis digs for an underhook and suddenly triggers a cascade of ties—hand-ties, wrist-ties, elbow-ties, tricep-ties, underhooks, and overhooks. Their arms are a blur; they coil and strike like dueling snakes.

Suddenly, Hollis makes a mistake. His arm gets too high, exposing his leg. He steps back instinctively and feels an unfamiliar weight; he

looks down to see his opponent locked around his leg as if he is hugging it for warmth. A heavy breath tickles his thigh. He sees his father elbow his way to the front of the crowd.

◇◇◇

Hollis's first memory is sitting in the passenger seat of his dad's work van, a machine which hums and groans and vibrates like a sleeping giant. He is too small to see over the dashboard, so he stares at the bright blue sky, imagining that he is flying over a placid, flat ocean, interspersed with fluffy icebergs.

"Know what this is? Know where we are?" his father asks, motioning out the window.

Now Hollis notices the tall three-story townhomes which encroach on the edges of the placid sea. The cold metal of the rails and terraces seems to glare at him.

"Bunch of rich assholes live here," his

***Whenever Hollis looks
in the mirror, he sees
his father staring back
at him***

father continues. "Bunch of people who never worked for what they had. Bunch of people who never worked hard a day in their lives."

Something about the big houses is making his father angry. Hollis fixates on the trimmed, glistening grass which shines through cold metal fences. These fences often have sharp pikes. From between the sharp points of the fences, the glistening grass seems to smile invitingly at him. He could reach out for the grass and prick his finger on one of the pikes. In his imagination, the blood runs down the fence and turns the dark, black metal into red, pure red.

"Not us," his father says, with pride. "We're tough. We can take pain. We can take punishment. We can dish it out when we need to. We don't stop just because something hurts.

Hollis, one day you'll be better than all of this—you won't need any of this soft shit—because you'll be tough."

Hollis's mind turns to the word. Tough. He turns it over, admires it, and tries it.

"Tough," he murmurs. The hard consonant makes a rough, heavy sound, followed by an airy uff, like something hard hitting something soft. He imagines himself striking a pillow with a baseball bat. Tough. Tough. Tough. The bright blue sky continues to hang over his father's work van, but Hollis's mind's eye is turned away from it. The inviting grass and the sharp fence posts seem to have morphed into something encompassed by the word and the action it so clearly evokes. Something hard hitting something soft. Tough.

◇◇◇

His opponent wrenches Hollis's body off of the ground. He finds himself above the crowd, staring at a smear of faces, and then feels the dull uff reverberate through his body, from his gut through his arms and legs and eventually just a tingle in his fingers and toes. But he rolls with the force of the impact—quickly, before his opponent lands on him—and catches his opponent's ankle with hands where his legs used to be.

The referee looks at him and says something, but he can't hear a word. He lifts his face off the acrid, sweat-soaked mat and brings his opponent's foot along, cradling it against his chest like a baby. He tries to rise as his opponent drives his hips down with equal desperation. After a few seconds they find themselves stuck: Hollis cannot get to his feet

and his opponent cannot extricate his leg from Hollis's grasp. They rest in this warped embrace until the referee blows the whistle.

On his way back to the center, Hollis realizes something. He realizes that his opponent likes to wrestle from ties so much that, whenever Hollis disengages, he leans forward with eagerness to get hold of Hollis's arms and wrestle from ties again. Too much eagerness. The whistle blows. His opponent grabs his right elbow, but he circles and snaps the hand away. He takes a few steps back and his opponent follows, like a dog on a leash. He grasps at Hollis's hand; Hollis rolls his wrist free. Hollis steps back again. His opponent snarls and steps forward, reaching. An outstretched arm sails over his head. A second later, he wraps his arms around his opponent's legs with vicious joy.



The sunlight falls lazily into the living room on the day after Hollis's first 10U tournament. He watches the big men with big red faces who speak in loud, braying tones. They rise in their chairs and nod their heads as his father speaks. Hollis hears his name and walks closer.

"...and then he locked his hands around the kid's waist, picked him up, and threw him on his back. Made it look easy. And the kid is crying. The kid's dad is screamin', 'That's an illegal slam!'. I looked right at him. I said, 'Don't look at me, all I saw was that my kid just whupped your kid's ass.'"

The men laugh in big inflated voices. As Hollis approaches them, his uncle stands up. "You're the man, kid. We just heard you won that tournament last weekend." He grabs hold of Hollis' arm with a meaty paw, causing a slight constricting pain, and raises it in

celebration. Hollis blushes, and winces.

"He didn't just win, he dominated," his

He finds himself above the crowd, staring at a smear of faces

father says, beaming at him. "Pinned everyone he wrestled."

"And it's only his first year," another man says, whistling in appreciation.

"Whaddya say, kid," his uncle asks. "Are you a tough guy?"

Something hard hitting something soft. Hollis doesn't answer.

"You're a tough guy, aren't you?" his uncle asks again.

"Yeah. You're damn right he is," his father says.



At the beginning of the second period, it is Hollis's choice. He chooses bottom position; an escape will reinforce his lead and make his opponent more desperate in the third. His father nods approvingly.

But his opponent bumps his weight forward off the whistle and collapses his arm. His head presses against Hollis's temple, his hair like sandpaper against Hollis's skin. A sound comes out of his opponent's mouth, low enough that only Hollis can hear it. It is a guttural syllable which emerges from the cave of his body, a sound which comes from the deepest, darkest reaches of himself.

His opponent flattens him on the mat and, as Hollis rolls his wrist free, catches a bar-arm. With his arm trapped between his opponent's chest and forearm, there's not much Hollis can do except stay off his back. His opponent periodically makes his guttural sound, sharing

his anger like a secret into Hollis's ear. As it always does when the momentum of a match swings the other way, the illusion of the shadow breaks. For the first time, Hollis feels afraid.



Hollis waits on the sidelines to wrestle his first match. There's someone watching him from beyond the bleachers, in a dark corner of the arena. Hollis is warming up, his muscles tensing and his body beginning to sweat, when he sees the man point, unmistakably, at him, his finger and malicious glare emerging out of the dark crevice. The man holds a boy by the shoulders—a boy who is also wearing a singlet, and also warming up, and big and lean and menacing—and whispers something into his ear. Out of the corner of his eye, he still watches Hollis, his eyes containing something unspeakable.

Hollis' stomach churns, like a vortex contorting a placid sea. He is suddenly nauseous and lightheaded. He scans the arena for a bathroom, glimpsing his father's anxious face in the bleachers as he looks. His burning eyes look to Hollis with a question. Hollis shakes his head. He looks for a bathroom sign. There's one next to the exit at one end of the arena—right next to the corner where the man and his caged animal are standing, still staring.

Hollis' mind recoils at the prospect of walking by them, but his body is wracked by another wave of nausea and he realizes he has no choice. He runs on shaky legs, through referees and parents, around the mats and down the side of the gym, towards the man and the boy. As he passes by, he can feel their hungry, wrathful eyes on him.

He vomits into the toilet, releasing the material stuff of his terror in an effort to

remove the terror itself. But although the nausea is gone the terror remains. Rising, he hears the door to the bathroom open. He flushes quickly and attempts to look calm and equilibrated as he exits the stall.

The boy stares at him. Hollis stares back, afraid for a moment that the boy is going to attack, jump on him, claw his eyes out. The boy's expression is like that of a cornered animal. Then the boy speaks.

"S-s'cuse me, I gotta go in the stall." He stutters, speaking rapidly, biting off the end of his sentence too quickly. Hollis flattens against the sink to let him by, and the boy hurries into the stall. As Hollis is closing the bathroom door he hears the boy retching.

From a faraway, a loudspeaker cries,

***He still watches Hollis,
his eyes containing
something unspeakable***

"Hollis Wilson, in the hole on Mat Three."

His father leans over the bleacher's guardrail and motions to him.

"Hollis Wilson, in the hole on Mat Three." As Hollis is running, he hears the loudspeaker repeat the same phrase but with what must be the other boy's name. We're in the hole together, Hollis thinks, and he feels a strange kinship, even as his stomach continues to churn.



With ten seconds left in the period, his opponent runs the bar-arm too aggressively, and Hollis uses the momentum to get to his feet. His father screams something.

Hollis wedges his shoulder into his opponent's face, pushes his hips away, and presses mightily on his grip. His opponent

responds by running him out of bounds, right as the whistle blows.

"No loss of control," the referee says over his coaches' protest. The crowd stares at him as they step aside; he glimpses a look of anger and disgust on his father's face.



Hollis is riding in the work van with his father again, the day after his last Middle School State Qualifier. A giant's enraged roar emerges from the engine. His father's hairy knuckles press white against the steering wheel. He is driving too fast. The two-ton monster-machine careens around sharp turns, the tools in the back falling and flying against the walls with loud clangs.

***"No loss of control,"
the referee says
over his coaches'
protest. The crowd
stares at him as
they step aside;
he glimpses a look of
anger and disgust
on his father's face.***

When his father finally speaks, his words come out like a flurry of snaps and ties. "You chose to lose that match. You - you had it won," his voice cracks, "and you're better than that kid!" He continues, "I don't understand why you didn't snap him down when you had him in that front headlock. Bounce his face off the mat! You know that! You gave those points away. That whole match. You didn't want it bad enough."

His father then reduces his voice almost

to a whisper, asking, haltingly, "Tell me the truth, Hollis, do you actually still want to wrestle?"

Hollis is tempted to deliver the final, indelible answer. But he sees the look on his father's face, as if he is preparing for a blow, and he cannot bring himself to do it. "Yes," he says quickly.

His father sighs and his shoulders slump in relief. "Okay. So it's your conditioning, then? It must be your conditioning."

Hollis nods.

"You been staying after practice to do your sprints?"

"N-not always," Hollis lies.

"Make it always. And also...you know what?"

His father merges onto the shoulder of the dark residential road. The work van grinds to a halt. "We're only a few miles from home. You need better cardio. You should run. Why don't you run the rest of the way home?"

The expression of pride that is already growing on his father's face silences any protest Hollis might have made. Anyway, the time for protest has already passed. He climbs out of the van onto the cracked pavement.

"I know that fucking Ramirez kid isn't doing this!" his father says. "I'll be waiting when you get home. You'll feel good when this is all over. You're tough, kid."

The van drives off down the road; the headlights glide off through the darkness, Hollis thinks, like rockets traveling to a distant planet. Hollis starts to run, following the distant lights. He drags his heavy legs down the road, feeling like he's carrying a 45 pound plate.



His opponent gets an escape to start the

third period—the last two minute stretch before the end of the match. It's Hollis's fault—he was thinking about his first move instead of being ready to move off the whistle. His opponent gets hip separation, shoves his elbows in, and turns to face him.

The score is now 2-1. Hollis is within a

Hollis is tempted to deliver the final, indelible answer

takedown of losing. They circle each other, moving more slowly now, partly from exhaustion and partly from the stakes of any committed attack.

"Take a shot! Put this out of reach!" Hollis's father yells. Hollis breathes in, another lapse in concentration. He looks down to see that his opponent's head is already nestling into the negative space under his ribcage. Hollis falls to his hip and, in desperation, grasps furiously onto his opponent's lower body, looking for some hold, any hold.

His opponent is pushing, pushing, pushing, but Hollis manages to lock hands between his legs. He uses this anchor point to keep himself upright, barely escaping takedown criteria.

Now everything slows down. Hollis and his opponent make small, measured, incremental movements, each trying to slowly increase the pressure until the other breaks. The crowd, responding sympathetically, stand and stare. Hollis is facing the crowd. Next to the mat, not two feet away from him and looking directly into his eyes, is his father.

Hollis looks away from the tight mouth and the narrow, burning eyes. His opponent has pinned his leg on the mat, driving into it with

the bone of his shoulder and slowly lifting his foot. Hollis struggles to swivel and elevate his hips. He pulls with all of his might against his opponent's crotch, feeling a sharp exhale of pain against his chest. The match is no longer a display of technique or strength or conditioning. What the crowd watches is something older, more raw, something that existed long before the Greeks codified a sport of wrestling, long before the idea of sport even existed. Hollis's father's eyes blaze with feverish need. Somehow Hollis knows that it is time for the final, indelible answer. He cannot put it off any longer. It has come.

◇◇◇

That morning, before the State Championship match, Hollis stares at his wavy, wraithlike reflection in the toilet water. It is a reflection he has come to know well. Sometimes, when Hollis has a nightmare, it is that he has become this reflection. He steps on the mat, ready to wrestle, but his leg is too small and skinny to wrap the ankle-band around. He tries to say his name to the scoring table, but no voice can exit his lips. His

"Hollis Wilson, to Mat Three," the loudspeaker calls and calls.

opponent doesn't seem to see him.

"Hollis Wilson, to Mat Three," the loudspeaker calls and calls.

"I'm right here," he tries to say. Nobody notices. His father is crying on the sidelines. He looks down, and his arms are transparent.

His father knocks on the door. Hollis shakes himself out of his nightmarish reverie just as his father barges into his hotel room.

"Jesus Christ, get out of there!" he says.
"We've got weigh-ins in half an hour!"

Hollis gags. His father's voice drops to a low, suspicious tone.

"What are you doing in there? Open the door, Hollis."

Hollis stares at the door, imagining it finally, indelibly open.

"Let me in, Hollis."

What the hell, Hollis thinks. He opens the door. His father's eyes immediately find the telltale speckles of vomit on the side of the toilet bowl. They widen.

"You're not on weight," his father says.

Hollis shakes his head. "I am."

"Then you're sick."

Hollis almost laughs at the futility of it all. He shakes his head again.

"Then what..."

Hollis lets the words flow out of him, words that have been pent up for years, like torpedoes waiting for the right target, the right time. He cannot call them back. "This happens every morning before I have to wrestle. And it has for years. I just-just get so scared."

His father doesn't say anything.

"It's not that I'm scared of losing. It gets this way even when I know I'll win. I don't know what I'm scared of."

A cold, weary, sad expression creeps over his father's face like a frost. Again, he tempts the indelible answer:

"Well, do you still want to wrestle?"

Hollis stares at his reflection again. The phantom stares back — melted, insubstantial, incapable of firmness. He can feel his father's eyes on him. Are you a tough guy? He remembers the question which was asked years before. Suddenly he realizes he is not.

"Yes," he says. "Just give me a minute."

"Okay," his father says, excavating a smile only slightly dimmer than before, like a lightbulb burned out of its highest setting. "I'll get your wrestling bag."

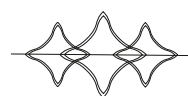
Hollis spends one more moment staring at his reflection. A sick colorlessness in his eyes. They don't look like his father's anymore.

◇◇◇

Hollis wants to say something to his father as he feels his grip start to loosen. Maybe he can ease the pain, take something hard and make it softer. But he doesn't have time to think. He hopes his eyes will say what he can't.

A car cannot drive with a faulty engine. A house built on a slanted foundation will eventually crumble. An idea with an internal contradiction, whether as small as an argument or as big as a country, will eventually fail. His grip is an illusion. It has never been in Hollis's hands.

As he stares up at the ceiling, past the referee's arm slowly, rhythmically swiping back points, the plain white paint reminds him of a placid sea.



Stumbled across the obituary at precisely 12:00,
The usual time for mid-year New Year's resolutions
As the drunkenness turns to queasiness
And the pleasure starts to sting.

26 and two days counting;
Didn't even have the glory of 27,
Just a halfway thought-out header
That read, "Showed Promise."

Showed promise for what exactly?
Capitalistic success?
Perhaps a Wikipedia page
Or picture on a restaurant wall?

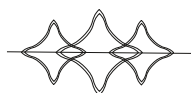
Anyhow, it didn't matter;
Whatever promise was shown had faded
Unless there was an accompanying suicide note
To inspire posthumous adulation.

Showed Promise

BY SAM HENDRIAN

Wandered to the cemetery the next morning,
Paid respects from a stranger
Which are sometimes sincerer
Than the rehearsed well-wishes of a friend.

Assured him he was more
Than what he had not yet become
And that what he already was
Was all he ever needed to be.



Eamon Francisco Schurich y Torrio blew his head off. I do not know why. Three days after the deed I went through his things with two others. One was a friend and one was an acquaintance. Both were friends of the deceased. I was not. It is not as though we were unfriendly. We simply did not know one another well.

One of my companions was Marco, Schurich's former roommate, and the other was Francis, a friend of Marco and Schurich both. I do not believe our collaboration in pilfering had anything to do with friendship. I believe it was a coincidence of habitation. Marco lived there too; he had a right to clear it out.

He interrogated the dead man's bookshelf.

"Half this shit's in Spanish," Marco said.

"Don't you read it?" I asked.

"Not well," Marco said, and held up a tan clothbound number. "Ortega y Gasset."

Batts Hall

"Might be good practice," Francis said.

"Could be," Marco said. He tossed it into a cardboard box which laid directly behind him on the carpet. He did not even look when he threw and the book landed in the box perfectly.

Schurich's next of kin were still in Santiago. You could not fly direct from Chile to Austin and even if you could it was much too short of a notice to get anything so they were still sorting that side of things out. There was no rush. It was not as though they needed to identify the corpse (his student ID was in his wallet), it was not as though he had left a note (he had not) and it was not as though an open

casket wake was in order (his head was gone).

His father Humberto is a historian. At the time of writing he recently completed a biography of Rene Schneider. It has fine academic bona fides. It is just heterodox enough in its conclusions to have provoked some debate in Chile's upper-middle brow. What these conclusions are I do not know: the book has not yet been translated into English. Death threats have been minimal. He named his son for de Valera.

His mother, Renata, is a family therapist. She gets good reviews.

My attention was focused on the dead man's desk, which was not a desk, technically speaking. It was a plastic gray folding table and a fine bamboo chair with a wicker seat and back. On the table was a black manual Underwood typewriter. Next to that was a dozen typed-up pages.

BY MAXWELL ROBISON

Truth be told I did not know Eamon Schurich well. I have already stated as much but here I will elaborate. I met him three times and at no point did our conversation bring us to the threshold in which we would begin to bond. All the better, had the man not been dead and had I not been rifling through his things.

Average height, five-eight or nine. Healthy paunch, past his early twenties. A neat little dark mustache like Pessoa or Dashiell Hammett. Pleasant enough and polite and studied and distant. He seemed to want to subtly give the impression of genius, which he very well might have been, and to come across

as a genuine (if mild) eccentric, which I have no reason to believe was the case. But I could be incorrect. I cannot gather new evidence.

I picked the dozen or so typed-up pages from the desk. "His dissertation?" I asked. I looked down at the thing but I was not reading it.

"No," Marco said. "He was only a second-year. He wasn't even done with coursework."

"What class, then?" I asked.

"None," Marco said. "Recreational."

"Theology, then?" I asked. Schurich had been in the Religious Studies program.

"Metaphysics," Marco said.

"Most of the way there," Francis said.

Always in donegal tweed and at least once in a tie. I remember that now. The tie may have been knitted. Memorable because we live in central Texas and for the better part of the year anything heavier than an Oxford shirt is obscene. Matching trousers, I'm sure. I only remember him from the waist up. We must have been sitting down. Wet brown eyes and nostrils of considerable bore. Lipless mouth capped with aforementioned mustache. And browline glasses. Either black or tortoiseshell. Maybe one and then the other. Sad wet brown eyes like a dog's. Ambient worry.

The title of the paper read "The Telos of the Image in the Age of Information." It was double-spaced with one-inch indents. It was three-hole punched with rudimentary binding done with twine. The page numbers were written in the top-left or top-right corners of each page in blue ink.

The consolidation of visual media on the internet into a handful of social-media entities has accelerated a tendency in the visual arts as a whole; that is, the tendency towards the still image as the totalizing work of art. The 'moving

picture' era, lasting from roughly the late nineteenth century to the present, is an aberration in the history of the species and we are moving out of it. The divergence of the online video form into either sub-minute pangs of stimulation (the flipbook) or hour-plus narrative essays (nootropic)

"Reads to me like art criticism," I said. "Or something like it."

"Does it read like Schopenhauer?" Francis asked. He was inspecting a rug and did not look up from it to speak.

***Always in donegal tweed
and at least once in a tie.
I remember that now.***

"I don't know," I said. "I'm not far enough along. And I haven't read Schopenhauer."

"Guy was fucking crazy about him," Marco said. "Quoted him. In German."

"Eamon spoke German?" Francis asked. He looked up from the rug and smiled.

"Not that I know of," Marco said. "I don't see any German books in here."

"Why Schopenhauer, then?" I asked.

"Borges," Marco said. Francis, back at the rug, nodded.

"Good enough reason as any," I said.

"Yeah, but Eamon was a freak," Marco said. He thumbed through another clothbound volume and threw it in the box. It was Umamuno.

"It's why he was always in Batts," Francis said. "Religious studies is in Burdine, not in Batts. But he was never in Burdine."

"I thought he was in Mezes," Marco said.

"Maybe. I don't know. But I know Borges was in Batts," Francis said.

I flipped to a different page and started

reading again.

In fact since its very TECHNOLOGICAL INCEPTION the moving picture has really been nothing more than the elaboration of the still-image through temporal means. Spatially it can capture no more than what the still-image can, insofar as a still-image can be stretched into a triptych or diorama or series of images (which is all the moving-picture is anyways). It is an elaboration in the same way that an arpeggio is an elaboration of a chord, in the way that a descending melodic line of E-D#-B-G# may be distinct in its own right melodically but as an instance of harmony it is

"Was he a right-winger?" I asked.

"I don't know," Marco said. "Could've been, I guess."

"Could've been," Francis said. He looked up and walked to the bathroom. On his way he said, "I guess I could see it."

"Guy fucking hated the LLILAS," Marco said, and pronounced it lill-ass. "Because it was full of Americans."

"I guess I get that," I said, even though I did not get it and I did not know what the lill-ass was.

I know now that it is the Lozano-Long Institute for Latin American Studies. I do not know why he disliked it. He wasn't a lefty but I have no reason to believe he was a reactionary. I do not believe that any true reactionary would seek to reference

Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969). Of course the film is about the literal end of the west by way of vignette, as below, so above, et cetera. The Mexican Revolution and the machine gun spoil the whole thing by bringing ideology and a notion of society into it. There is even a nefarious Teuton in Prussian garb, but this is beyond the point. During the climactic

battle scene (centered around a Maxim gun), the quick, stuttering cuts collapse motion into a sort of slideshow, and thus into printing, and thus into

Right-wingers of the European sort do not like Westerns. Then again I have not met any. If he disliked Americans for 1973 I would not blame him. But this is too obvious.

Of course, Austin was supposed to be the cultural capital of a hick state, even if it was not particularly cultured and even if Texas was not a real hick state, not anymore. And for all I know he could have realized this. He could have hated Austinites for pretending to be something that they weren't, or for pretending to be better than people that they weren't better than, or maybe he just hated them for being liberals. If he hated academics it was justified. Or maybe he had just assumed that Austin was like everywhere else in the state, and maybe it was and we hadn't noticed. Or maybe it hadn't sunk in after two years of being here and he was the idiot.

Maybe he was trying to be a European-type snob. Maybe he hoped that he could bury the lede with a German surname and a foreign accent and hope nobody noticed he was from the same hemisphere as everyone else. Maybe it worked. It is something bourgeois South Americans are capable of. But less so in Texas. Being next to Mexico has disabused us. Probably humiliated himself without realizing.

***Maybe he was trying
to be a European-type
snob.***

Delayed onset adolescent rebellion against the leftist father was possible. But maybe the father wasn't a leftist. As stated earlier he has

not yet been translated into English. But if it was that, this whole thing – insistence on tweeds, Schopenhauer fixation – could be explained away as naive play-acting.

Yes, maybe that was it: mustachioed stout Weimarish type. Or maybe Viennese. German surname after all. Stumbling into metaphysics backwards as a means to ingratiate himself in culture proper. Either nobody told him, or he chose not to believe, that art by way of metaphysics or metaphysics by way of art had been useless for some time. In any case his effort failed and he was dead.

But the wet eyes and tweed: the uniform of a self-imposed metaphysician. Or maybe the Generation of '27.

I never saw his legs but I am sure they were dense in muscle. I am sure he did a lot of walking and thinking about dead Germans and other things. Yes, it must have been at Tweedy's, at one of the long picnic tables by the patio's south wall. I do not like Tweedy's. I would not have been there unless someone had invited me. If he had gotten up to go to the bathroom I could have seen his shoes and trousers. Perhaps he did and I was not paying attention. No matter. I am sure they matched.

"What did he talk about," I asked, "when he was alive?" I did not look up from the paper but I was not reading it either.

"He talked to himself sometimes," Marco said. "But it was in Spanish."

"Well what did he talk about around y'all?" I asked.

"I don't know," Marco said. "I don't think anyone ever just talks about any one thing."

Francis shrugged as he walked back from the bathroom.

"Well, what was one thing he talked about?" I asked.

Francis shrugged again. "Catholicism, sometimes," he said. "But Protestantism too."

Marco nodded. "I don't think he was a believer, though," he said.

"Did he ever say whether or not he was?" I asked.

"I don't know," Marco said. "But he never went to church. Or maybe he did, but if he did, he never said that was where he was going." He picked a water-damaged paperback of Lorca off the shelf and tossed it in the box. He turned to Francis. "Did he ever go to church?"

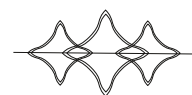
Francis shrugged again.

"But he talked about it a lot," Marco said. "The social aspect. Rosaries and, uh."

I flipped to the last page of the essay.

To reiterate, the progression of moving-picture into still-image is indicative of a broader trend within art wherein that which seeks to replicate life as it is actually experienced ceases to do so and once again becomes art which does not necessarily purport to do so, or if it does admits to do so in a limited way. One can only ever imply the experience of lived life, and seeing as how the still-image leaves the most room for implication, it will always prevail. Art is finally returning to the conclusion that life is the domain of life and art is the domain of something qualitatively different. What the difference is ought to be left to

I stopped reading there. Perhaps he had made a breakthrough on the previous page that made that bit make sense. Perhaps he would make one in the next paragraph. I do not know. I took it home and I did not finish reading it.



all my lines have vocal fryyy

and bash the libs
and scorn the chuds.
all my lines come from a pair

of disembodied, self-
desiccated, voices in lower
upper brookhanttan
(idk, i've never been to new york).

Red

BY AIRPORT

so i go for a walk around a neighborhood
rich men in richmond
with an inner monologue that sounds
like a nasally jewish millennial being
made fun of by his ex and her friend.
all while humming "The Ballad of Yoko
and John"

atleast the skies are beautiful and orange
and blue and white as the sun sets and the
moon shows and my dog is old but still a cutie
and it's a good joint and maybe i'll start a podcast
and crucifixion, on a day like this,
sounds almost pleasant almost



Here comes a Nightingale

BY WALTER BENNIX

Gus is wise Gus is strong I like Gus

oh my I'm sorry about that first post, I wrote it a long time ago when I was a little kid, I can write much better now with longer sentences, and I learned how to break up thoughts with these little squiggle marks, oh my I thought I was being so bright by saying how I like Gus but heck we all do, it's true none of us has ever seen Gus in real life like we see our hands, but I bet he's as handsome as he looks on the screen, well today I

yes I forgot to finish yesterday's writing, I was going to but Gus started riding a horse, a horse has a mane and is very big even bigger than Gus but Gus still wasn't scared,

today I promise to actually finish my post, I swear I will, so the first thing you're probably wondering about me is what is my favorite Gus moment, well that is really hard you know but if I had to pick I'd probably say when he kicked that ball from all the way over there and it went straight through the circle, now I know there are much bigger Gus moments but that's

just what I like the best, most people say their favorite moment is when Gus fixed the big food machine by pulling the lever, or some people recently have said the best moment is the horse, and he did look neat riding it, and I'm glad he fixed the machine or else who knows what would happen, but still my favorite moment is the ball going into the circle I think because of the look on Gus's face after

I'm tired so I won't write much today, I had to watch an entire movie, it was long and I didn't understand much, when I was done I relaxed by watching Gus for the rest of the day

everybody's talking about whether Gus should have left the window open because now he has a cold, I don't even watch the people who talk about Gus because they are stupid and I'd rather just watch Gus himself, I mean I check for like two seconds just to see what they are talking about and then I switch back to Gus, I think it's really mean of them to blame Gus for his own cold, we should stop arguing and just hope that he gets better, you know what's weird, I bet there are people I could get on my screen who are saying this exact thing and also

people who are yelling at them for it, it's like they are arguing about arguing about arguing, I could get on their screens and argue about their arguing about arguing about arguing, but I won't, sorry this got really confusing, Gus is asleep now so I think more when he is just lying there

today they made me watch the beginning of a movie, it was about a man who swam in pools, it was okay but it would be better if the movie had Gus in it, but I guess Gus has better things to do like pressing all the buttons that make everything work, I wonder if he gets lonely because he can't talk to machines

lately I've been thinking a lot about Gus but not in the way I used to, I used to think about his hair and what he did each day but now I think about bigger things like is Gus on this same planet as me and could I actually see him like I see my hands, oh my I know it can't be good to think such things, but then again why not, I even found other people on my screen who wonder the same things as me and much more, mainly I talk to someone named Bartho who says Gus might only be in our screens, I told Bartho what if I could meet Gus one day and Bartho said to be quiet and watch my movie because Gus would never want to meet a creebatoob like me, yes I would have to agree with Bartho on that one, I know from watching movies that people who lived before us had much harder jobs but I still don't feel like watching the movie

Bartho let me in a group that wants to search the outside world for Gus, oh my I am afraid but Bartho says if Gus is really great he will protect us, but I have never left my cubby

before and I don't even know how, I forget if we're allowed to because I never even thought about leaving before since I could always see Gus on the screen in my cubby, and who is making these rules anyway, is it Gus, oh my I have so many things I want to know, and it seems the only way to find out is to go to Gus in the outside world, I know there are times when Gus answers things from us creebatoobs but the chance of him picking one of mine is extremely low because there are so many of us and the ones he answers are always quite boring like what he is going to eat for lunch

I wonder if he gets lonely because he can't talk to machines

there is a thing called the Codex that Bartho told me about, the Codex has info about failed attempts that people have made to find Gus, I didn't even know that other people had tried, I asked Bartho what happened to the people after they wrote in the Codex, and he said nobody knows, and I said what if they did meet Gus and it was good, and Bartho said they didn't because why would they write the Codex instructions for how to find him but not say what happens if you do, Bartho said it's most likely that the people died, and I said but wouldn't Gus protect them, and Bartho said Gus doesn't exist and I cried, I asked what the last thing written in the Codex is and Bartho said the last words are here comes a nightingale

the Codex has so much info like how to build a raft, I mostly just watched as the others built it, they've studied the Codex much longer than me, but they still let me on the raft when

it was done, I feel silly about being scared to leave my cubby, it was not that hard, well it was hard to leave at first but the rest has been easy so far, bam the rimwah, tookie, we're off to find Gus

Bartho is here on the raft with me, his body looks like Gus's body at least more than my body does, they gave us orange balls to eat which tasted sour but I got used to them, the Codex says that people before us died because they didn't eat orange balls, when you're sailing across the sea you will always die if you don't eat them, if we didn't have the Codex we would have died many times I'm afraid to say, it's important that we constantly report our info so it can be added to the Codex and people who make this journey after us will be able to learn what we learned, I like Bartho but in a different way than I like Gus, I didn't tell anyone this but I hope Gus will love me and choose me

we reached dry land and got off the raft, we've been walking and my legs hurt, we stop many times to rest, I'm too tired to write much, just walking and resting to report anyway

the Codex says where to go, at least that's what the others say, I don't know if I believe them with a lot of things they say, I reached a point where I couldn't walk anymore, Bartho tried to carry me but he couldn't for very long, they almost left me but decided to rest, but I can't sleep, I want to be in my cubby again, will I ever get back there, it's bad out here, too bright most of the time and colder every day it seems

hey we found the giant wall, so the Codex was correct after all, Bartho and the others say

why would they have a wall unless there was something to protect, some reason to keep us from Gus, we used a long device called a latter to get over the wall, the first people who found this wall on their journey got all the way to the wall and had no way to climb over it, Bartho says they died, once we res

sorry about the last post cutting off, I had to stop and post it because as we were inside the giant wall, walking around from tree to tree, a bird flew toward us, we murmured it's the nightingale, and I didn't know whether to cheer or be afraid, probably afraid because now we didn't have the Codex to guide us anymore since nobody had made it past this point, but when the bird came close, it turned out to not be a nightingale, I am a bird expert from a movie I had to watch about birds once, the bird that came to us was much bigger and I don't know what kind of bird it was but it had a topknot like a quail's, maybe someday parts of these posts of mine could make it into the official Codex, the bird picked up a few people in its talons and flew away, some of the people who didn't get picked up ran to another section, but I stayed with Bartho, the bird came back and took Bartho, where to I don't know, hopefully to Gus, then the bird came back and took me, and I am flying now over the grass and shrubs and trees with a few other people in the talons too, and I better post this now because I don't know if I'll be able to post again, oh please Gus save me, help me Gus please

help me Gus save me Gus why aren't you

Sorry, I sent the last message while falling. You probably thought I pucked the farmo, but actually the bird delivered me to Gus! Gus is a human! I fell on a soft spongy surface and he was there looking down at me! At first I was scared, but he was so nice! I could barely look at him though! I had a lot of questions for him, and he answered them all, just me and him walking around his garden. He is big but not that big! He explained that it is simply his place in the world to be the only person who does things. 'Of course,' he said, 'I'm barely doing anything, as it's the machines that do the actual work.' 'So what's the point of having you?' I asked. 'Well don't you like having someone to watch on the screen?' he replied. I said yes I like watching him on the screen, and he said, 'Do you want to do anything other than watch screens?' and I said, 'No, I guess not.'

Gus has even helped me improve my writing. He taught me things like the stop mark, the question mark, and the yelling mark, also known as the excitement mark. I've seen them in movies but I never understood their meanings until now!

So I asked him, 'Do the machines do what you tell them or do you do what they tell you?' and he said, 'That is a good question but I don't know the answer.' 'Do the machines know?' I asked. He said, 'They don't answer questions like that. I just press the buttons for good things to happen and they happen. I cut grass and jump over fences and build towers, but it's all to entertain the rest of my species. It's my work the same way your work is to watch movies.'

Gus told me I'm a girl! I never considered it before. I don't look like girls in movies, so I figured I wasn't even human, but Gus says creebatoobs are humans, we just started calling

one another creebatoobs.

I told Gus I like watching him on the screen, but it isn't enough.

'What do you want?' asked Gus.

I kept saying I don't know, and he said, 'What would make you happy? What do you want?'

I was shaking when I said, 'I want to fondle and lick every inch of your perfect body.' I could not believe I was saying this to Gus!

'Do the machines do what you tell them or do you do what they tell you?'

'That is a good question but I don't know the answer.'

'Do the machines know?'

Humans used to have a sense of smell, which I guess is like tasting with your nose? It's always so weird when I see people smelling in movies. I could never smell Gus, so I wanted to touch and even taste him! And he actually said I could!

I did it, I felt and squeezed all over his body, I licked his caramel skin, I sucked on his muscles and filled my mouth with his fat. I kept gagging, and though I felt him with my hands and mouth, I didn't feel anything inside my heart. Also, maybe I shouldn't say this, but he didn't look as handsome as I remembered from my screen. He didn't have his usual glow.

Gus said he'd already met with Bartho. 'Bartho told me he'll be waiting for you like a good tookie.' It felt wrong to hear Gus use that word. But he was right, Bartho was waiting for

me when I left Gus. So Bartho and I along with the others made the long trip back to our cubbies.

Bartho told me what he learned while talking to Gus. Creebatoobs used to die when searching for Gus, because the bird, which is a machine, killed them. Gus let it happen because it was the best thing to happen, to have the most yearning creebatoobs die off. So eventually creebatoobs would evolve to lose our sense of touch, which is an unnecessary

‘So what’s the point of having you?’

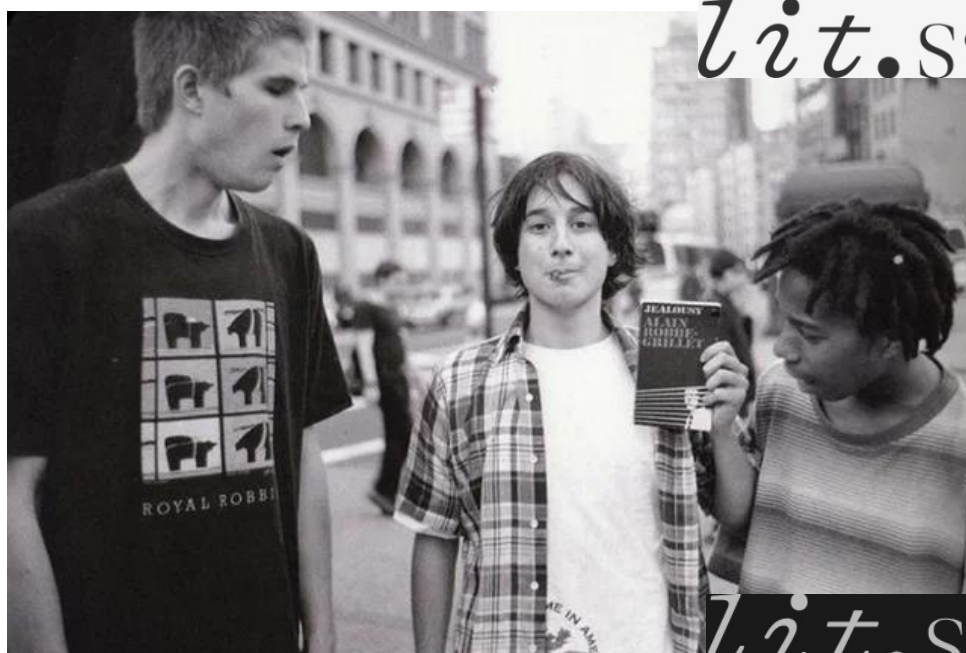
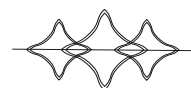
nuisance, like how we evolved to lose our sense of smell. But now the equations show it’s better for Gus to meet with the few creebatoobs who make the journey, because creebatoobs will not evolve anymore since we have stopped breeding. Our meetings with Gus were not shown on the screen for others to watch. Will the screen ever show Gus meeting a creebatoob? Gus told Bartho, ‘Maybe but probably not.’

On the way back, Bartho kept cursing himself. He said he should’ve asked if Gus

understood the equations. That would reveal whether Gus was in charge or just doing what the machines told him. Bartho said he was pretty sure Gus didn’t understand the equations. But that’s okay, he’s still really smart, way smarter than us.

It must’ve been bad lighting when I met Gus or maybe I was just delirious from stress or confusion because now Gus looks very handsome to me and I long to feel his warm skin, but the journey to Gus is too long and hard to make again, I can’t believe I ever did it, crossed the water even, what if I fell in, I can’t swim, to be honest I don’t see the point in using the writing rules Gus taught me, too fancy for a creebatoob like me, I am not a human, I am a creebatoob

of course nobody believes I met Gus, I submitted all this to be in the Codex and they said it was written by Gus himself to keep everyone from trying to find him, it doesn’t matter to me I suppose



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Goodreads
for
people
who hate
Goodreads

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Perfect April sunshine pierced her window
And filled her with unease
Since the more hopeful she woke up,
The more discouraged she fell asleep.



She searched for disclaimers in every smile
Having long ago learned to tell niceness from love,
Usually only seeing the former
And dreaming of the latter.



Enigmatic Envy

BY SAM HENDRIAN

'Cause you didn't have to think twice to be nice,
Didn't have to commit to more than a pleasant disposition
Displayed for strangers and placeholder friends
Heading toward diverging ends.



Practiced silent schadenfreude
Whenever enigmatic envy became too much:
Why do I assume everyone else is happy?
They're probably on their way to divorce and bankruptcy.



Midday clouds momentarily rescued her
From her cat-and-mouse misery,
Pausing her pursuit of escape
To let serenity catch up.



Here's the game, I pick out a book for you and you pick one out for me. Whoever picks out the better book wins and gets to choose where we go for food," Izzy said. "And \$20 limit, because I don't want you buying some book behind the glass and wasting all your money."

Izzy and Will were at a used bookshop, this unassuming little place tucked away in an alley, where the only people ever seen are chefs who adorn the exterior on their smoke breaks and the old owner who seems upset that anyone ever wants to give him money. The store had a modest front window with a faded sign hanging above it. After entering, it was a surprisingly large building. There were towering sections of poetry, philosophy, any history book one could need; every writer you could think of was housed somewhere in there. Cardboard boxes and stacks of books were littered everywhere, leaving only one path that did not end with a stray paperback landing atop one's head. Everything was unorganized, with most piles simply gathering dust before reaching the ceiling, at which point they became load-bearing columns.

Fine Arts earlier that day, her area of expertise.

Izzy was an art-history major. As they were walking around the museum, she talked about how, "This was so clearly inspired by Caravaggio, just look at the harsh contrast and shadows," and "If you liked that, you would love Rococo art." 'Caravaggio, Rococo, what the hell is this' Will thought. He had no idea what Izzy was talking about. Will pulled his phone out whenever her back was turned so that he could Google everything that she said. He managed to survive the experience without looking like a complete fool. Now that they were at the bookstore, Will had to match her knowledge and passion.

"Okay, okay, I'll play by your rules," Will said. "You already know me too well, because that copy of *Northanger Abbey* would easily beat anything that you could find, but I don't think my wallet would appreciate the win in the same way."

"I didn't know you'd read any Jane Austen. What's your favorite?" Izzy asked.

"*Northanger Abbey* is for sure my favorite. The way she uses Gothic tropes in an ironic way

Annotations on Dating

BY RONAN BURNS

Will was the one who suggested the bookshop for their date, as he somehow considered himself a reader. This was where he could finally show her how cultured he was. The pair had only been on a handful of dates, so they still had their finest projections on full display, eclipsing those unattractive portions of personality where the truth happens to lie.

Will and Izzy had been at the Museum of

is so funny, and then the chapter where she advocates for novel reading is so good," he said.

"Why did I bring up Jane Austen?" Will thought. *Northanger Abbey* was the only one of Austen's books he had "read," but that is being pretty generous with the term. He had read somewhere around half of it and SparkNoted the rest.

"I love Pride and Prejudice and Emma so much!" she smiled, "I don't think I could even pick which one that I like more. You've had to have read Pride and Prejudice; what'd you think of it?"

Will scratched his whole brain for any information about Jane Austen that he could pass off as his own. Izzy managed to flatten her lips that kept wanting to laugh at Will's frantic search. She did not care what he would eventually come up with, the effort was more than flattering.

"I read it forever ago, so I don't really have that good of a memory of it, but I really liked it! I mean, whenever you open a Jane Austen novel, you just know that you're in for a treat."

"Yeah, I'm actually starting to think that Emma is my fav--"

"Let's start the game! The place closes soon, and I don't want to be rushing, I want to be able to pick out something good," Will interrupted.

"I don't think the store closes for another coup--"

"I don't know, I don't know," Will quickly said, "I'm walking away! Looking for a book to get you."

Will shuffled to the first section he could find, fiction. He started looking for some of his favorite books. A Farewell to Arms, Johnny Got His Gun, Notes from the Underground. 'Jesus,' he thought, 'can I not find a book that is even somewhat happy. If I give her any one of these, she's going to think that I'm a morbidly depressed alcoholic.'

Will started scanning the shelf, visually stopping on Little Women, Jane Eyre, and Wuthering Heights. 'Too try-hard to buy any of these,' he thought. 'Makes it look like I thought back to every book I've ever read by a woman

and could only think of those three, excluding Jane Austen of course. Giving any of these would make me out as one of those people who doesn't read, but thinks they do, and lacks the self-awareness to realize that they don't.'

Will glanced over to see what Izzy was looking at; she was in the plays/drama section.

'For God's sake, please don't give me a Shakespeare play,' he thought, 'I don't want to be basically given a school assignment. What did you think of Act 2, Scene 3? Wasn't that sexual innuendo so funny? It only took me thirty footnotes to understand that "Groping for trout in a peculiar river" has nothing to do with fishing.'

He looked back at fiction and began scanning again. 'Should I get her The Bell Jar?' He paused for a moment. 'No! What am I actually doing. Why is this so hard? It's supposed to be a fun game. I hate dating.'

Will looked away from fiction. The game had turned into a test. 'Why didn't I come prepared with a bunch of books in mind. Should've just found a top 10 list of books to give to your uncertain relationship status girl that is romantic, but not too romantic, and shows you are cultured and read books, but not too many books.'

'No! What am I actually doing. Why is this so hard? It's supposed to be a fun game. I hate dating.'

He finally walked away from fiction and ended up in the poetry section. 'Poetry is something that everyone can give as a gift. You can say that you had a few favorites in a

collection, while giving someone a giant book. It perfectly walks the fine line between cultured and well read, but not too well read. And what's more romantic than poetry?' The first book Will picked up was the complete works of Keats. He opened the first page, and it was a poem entitled, "Fill for me a brimming bowl. And in it let me drown my soul." He instantly put the book back down. 'I'm about to quit' he thought. 'Is there anything happy in books?' He saw *The Songs and Innocence and Experience* by William Blake on the shelf, picked it up and sighed. The edition was not old enough to be good looking, it was some mid-2000s Penguin with coffee stains, a broken spine, and half the cover.

Will turned around and Izzy was standing there, waiting for him.

"How long have you been standing there?" he asked.

"What did you pick out?"

"Doesn't matter, I have you beaten" he said, trying to make himself believe it.

"Maybe you do, we'll see," she said before turning around and heading to the register.

Izzy dinged the little hotel desk bell, letting the grumpy old man know that there were people trying to check out. The man slowly walked over, annoyed, and took the book to check the price. After looking at the book for a second, he smiled.

He mumbled to Izzy, "Good pick kid."

'No way did this guy just said that to her. I've seen this dude so many times and he's always been pissed.' Will thought. 'That is the stamp of authority, an independent judge saying that she beat me, that her book is better. I don't even know what book it is and she's already won.'

Izzy took out her wallet, paid for the book,

and slipped it into her bag before Will could see anything. Will stepped up to the register to purchase his book.

'I'm about to quit' he thought.

The old man opened the front cover, saw the price, and said, "ten dollars."

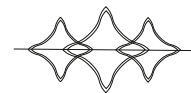
Will lowered his head, paid, and took the book.

He then raced towards the exit, hoping that Izzy was following. Will pulled the door open for Izzy and the old man called out across the story, "You have a good day now." She smiled back at him.

"That was such a good place, I'm glad that we stopped at that bookstore," Izzy said as they made their way out. "They had so many good books, I kept wishing that we were buying two or three instead of one, we'll have to do this again!"

Izzy opened her bag and gave the book to Will.

"So, what's your least favorite Italian restaurant?"



Premier Soleil

PAR OVA CAAN

La ville a commencé à changer, ou plutôt je l'ai remarqué ce matin. Le toc, toc régulier d'un couvreur à quelques rues d'ici est le premier indice. Solitaire, un de ses congénères lui répond à un autre rythme, un pâté de maisons plus loin. De temps à autre, on entend une paire de volets retardataire battre contre un mur. Le plus gros de la troupe s'est ouvert il y a quelques heures déjà. Les fenêtres sont grandes ouvertes sur les logements. Le vrombissement de la nationale au loin s'est tassé. Quelques tondeuses ronronnent dans des jardins enclavés. Des sécateurs tranchent selon un rythme indéchiffrable. L'ozone réchauffé écrase le son et le dissipe dans une vague brume à gros grain qui donne l'impression de devoir nettoyer ses lunettes.

Le campus de ville sur le point de fermer a revêtu son habit de saison : pancartes, banderoles et bennes disposées devant ses entrées. Les étudiantes, moins frileuses, ont raccourci leurs robes il y a déjà quelques semaines, dès le premier rayon de soleil. Comme souvent, les mâles plus conservateurs ont conservé leur habit d'hiver. À peine remarque-t-on une veste tenue à la main plutôt que par les épaules.

Tout l'attirail des passants est bousculé par la générosité du soleil : on chausse des lunettes de soleil ambitieuses, on raccourcit les manches, on ressort les crèmes solaires quand on a l'hédonisme inquiet, et les vêtements d'été perdent lentement leurs odeurs de renfermé.

En se promenant dans les rues, des bouffées d'odeurs de peinture fraîche bon marché se posent sur le son aigu d'une radio quelconque. Les petits propriétaires préparent les nids des futurs étudiants. Je croise des boom-box ambulantes ou vélocipèdes, qui jettent aux oreilles des passants avec joie ou défiance, c'est selon, l'hymne commercial de leur journée. De temps en temps, une merde canine invisible se fait sentir, après avoir été inodore tout l'hiver.

La promenade connaît plus d'obstacles sur les places, entre terrasses de bar qui se vomissent au soleil avec leurs clients. Sur la chaussée, les panneaux orange ont fleuri un peu partout, en symbiose avec les longues bandelettes rouge et blanche et les échafaudages. Dans les rues, les grandes migrations se préparent : de petits camions loués, garés ça et là sur les trottoirs ou en double file pour les plus audacieux, déversent leurs propriétaires temporaires qui s'affairent les bras chargés de meubles et cartons entre un immeuble et un coffre. Parfois, un autoradio fonctionne et donne un rythme sur lequel se calent les allers-retours. On rit beaucoup, on peste contre le poids d'une machine à laver, on esquive le déménageur improvisé qui déboule d'une entrée renfoncée, les mains pleines d'un carton.

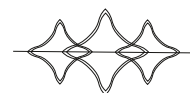
Tout ce concert se déroule tranquillement, le vonvon des bus urbains électriques s'est fait plus rare, de même que la circulation. Le sol vibre moins, sauf quand l'occasionnel marteau piqueur trouble l'ensemble. Il est 11 h, mais c'est l'heure de la sieste. Une ville qui ne vit que l'hiver s'endort au soleil du printemps, sur l'heureuse pensée que « c'est fini, l'hiver est fini

», un sourire aux lèvres face à la promesse de l'été.

***Il est 11 h, mais c'est
l'heure de la sieste. Une
ville qui ne vit que
l'hiver s'endort au soleil
du printemps.***

L'épicier tient à offrir au client pressé sa première mandarine de la saison, et présente sa main plein de d'une coupole orange découpée à la va-vite, qu'on mange en marchant malgré les sacs de course, sans s'inquiéter du sucre qui coule sur les doigts ou de la peau qui donne une amertume qu'on apprécie, pour une fois. Les rayons réchauffent et échauffent, et une petite brise rappelle que le printemps n'est pas acquis.

Comme tous les printemps, c'est l'occasion de croire qu'on peut aimer la chaleur parce qu'elle est autre chose que l'antidote du froid ; qu'on aurait peut-être pu mieux aimer le froid, si on avait pas autant rêvé à la chaleur à venir. Peut-être qu'aussi c'est la chance de savoir que demain n'existe pas, pas plus qu'hier. Probablement pourtant, on s'endormira avec d'autres au soleil, en essayant d'oublier l'hiver, en chassant la pensée de l'automne.



Green suit, gold tie, pink bloodshot eyes. Ray wasn't liking the guy in the mirror. The hair was good though. That's all that really mattered. Jet black and slicked back. Two healthy strands fell from it and overlaid his forehead. The chicks dug that look. That or the money he threw around. Ray wasn't too sure which. What he was sure of, however, was that the damn monkey down the hall was going to drive him nuts.

"Bananas, you idiot," he grumbled to himself as he washed his hands under the restroom faucet. "The monkey is driving you bananas. Stay on brand."

There was a simple rule in the corporate world. You don't have regrets and you don't apologize. Everything was going according to the plan. Even if that meant your life became tied to a mischievous orangutan with a bad habit of breaking out of whatever confines you dropped him in. Ray wasn't so lucky. He was trapped in his predicament. No escape.

A knock came to the door as Ray finished splashing water onto his face. "Ray? You in there?"

Monkey Business

"You can come in, Jessica."

"I can't. It's the men's room."

"Ha ha!" A toothy smile stretched across the junked up reflection in the mirror, "Come on in, Jessica, before I kick your teeth in!"

She entered the restroom bashfully. Jessica never was one for the eyes. Chubby. Weight in the wrong places. Lately, Ray was having a harder time looking her way. The tiny pug nose and round cheeks. Almost looked like a...

"There's someone out back saying he's here to meet with you."

"This someone have a name?" Ray asked.

"Do we really have to talk here?" Jessica asked, her nervous gaze drifted to the empty hall outside. Ray insisted yes before the sound of a toilet flushed. "He didn't give a name. Frankly, I didn't want to ask. He looked... unwell."

Ray almost looked back to the mirror at the sound of that. "Jesus, Jessica. Always get the names of people who want to see me." Otherwise I might get a bullet in the back of the head. "The monkey. Where's the monkey?"

"Otis is where you left him."

"So you think," Ray said, drying his hands with a paper towel.

Truth was, Otis could be anywhere. That was sort of his schtick. It started back when Otis was brought to the city zoo. Or more accurately, when he left the zoo of his own accord. The primate made such a show of his ability to continuously give the slip to the zoo facility, a damn fan club sprung up. It was

BY LUCAS BINEVILLE

around then Ray hatched up his idea to employ the wily orangutan escape artist. What a nightmare that turned out to be. He adjusted his tie and remembered. No regrets in the world of business.

"I shouldn't even be here," Ray muttered as he went for the door.

"Well, neither should I," Jessica cried as the big bearded fellow gawked her way upon exiting his stall.

"You hear anything on Collins?"

Jessica rushed up to walk alongside Ray, "No. The police are telling his family to 'remain realistic.' By that, I believe, they've given up looking for him."

"That damn monkey." Ray had no way to prove it but he knew for certain Otis was responsible. God only knew where exactly Collins was locked up. Well, God and Otis. "The hell do we even own the police for anyways?"

"Probably to allow these shows of yours," Jessica huffed. "The animal rights activists are really, pardon my saying, out for your blood also." And here Ray was worried she was about to say they were going bananas.

The backstage was right around the corner. Taking a step inside, peering through the jungle gym of equipment and through the slit of the curtain, Ray could see tonight's crowd. Full house. A reminder of why he put up with all this.

Resuming his march down the hall, Nina ambushed the two of them, "Ray, what the hell? Otis is on in three minutes."

Ray didn't stop, instead brushing right by her as Jessica followed like his shadow. "Bump that up to five minutes," Ray said, at least giving the courtesy to look back and wag his finger. "Tell his origin story again, should buy you the time."

"We're doing that right now," Nina said.

How do these people get hired? "Improvise, you bitch!" He still didn't stop as he shouted. The way he shook his hands at her then, they kept a small quiver as he moved along to the back exit. The crunch was setting in. Came with enough pressure to crunch him like a juicy insect snuck inside Otis' salad.

Once again he thought about how he shouldn't be here. How this was all beneath

him. Ray was a damn manager back at corporate. The literal monkey business was supposed to be Collins' job. But he was likely rotting in some forgotten storage trunk right about now. Cloaked under a magician's cape. A fine disappearing act, Ray imagined. He could have laughed at the thought were he not suffering for it. Collins was a fine supervisor. The kind that functioned like a work mule. But now he was without the mule, stuck with the monkey. And Jessica too, he supposed. The bitch.

"Shouldn't we be getting Otis ready?" Jessica asked as the exit sign neared.

"Bananas, you idiot"

"Do you have a shut the hell up switch?" He was on edge. Were he in a better mood, he knew he'd have said something more clever.

Shoving the exit door open revealed a squirrely looking vagrant. Even the tattered hood failed to conceal his shifty eyes piercing through the shadow beneath it. "There you are," the man said. "I thought you said security wouldn't give me hassle this time."

"Well, it helps to shower, Huck," Ray said. He was beginning to really feel antsy. Couldn't help but rub at his arms like he was the back alley schizo smelling of axle grease and baking soda.

"Just fork over the cash, prick."

"Ray, who is this?" Jessica asked, too afraid to step out of the building. "What is he doing here?"

Ray surrendered a small stack of bills from his coat to the hooded man. All while expertly ignoring Jessica. A natural talent on his part. Jessica, however, couldn't ignore what the man was handing over to Ray.

"R-Ray, what the--"

"Would you be quiet? This is all part of the job. Thought you knew that."

"But cocaine?" Jessica cried out—far too loudly for Ray or his friend's liking.

Ray patted the white brick in his hand, "Well, guess this proves you haven't snooped around my desk before..."

"About that," the hooded man spat. "How is it humanly possible you went through the last brick so fast?"

"Eat a dick," Ray said, in lieu of being unable to say 'have a good night.'

Jessica did her best to keep up with Ray as he stormed back down the hall, "I knew you've been on edge lately but Jesus! And is now really the time to be cracking open...that?"

"Yes, Jessica, now is the time," Ray said. He waved off Nina when she frantically poked her head out again. "Come on. Let's see if we even still have our star performer."

Ray realized all too late what trouble an orangutan who knew how twist screws off hinges could be. But he couldn't regret it. It was his idea to buy Otis and start putting him in elaborate traps for crowds to watch. Sure, there was a chance, as the obstacles became more complex, that Otis might die. Tough luck, that's show biz, he thought. The crowds loved the shark tank and where the hell was he going to sell the shark now that he was stuck with it? The zoo was out of the question. They thought he stole their star attraction now that the house was regularly selling out. But they must have forgotten the trouble Otis was worth, Ray figured. Did anyone but him truly understand the position he was in?

"Come on, Ray," Jessica said, "maybe you shouldn't touch that stuff. You already seem sort of out of it."

One hand clutching the brick of coke, the

other on the door reading 'Otis' over a star, Ray turned back to his hefty assistant, "Jessica. You stay out of it."

As expected, Otis' room was a mess. Drapes were thrown over busted furniture. Documents were scattered. The TV had a stone lodged into it. Ray was just thankful he wasn't dealing with a chimpanzee and didn't have to scrub excrement off the walls. Orangutans were at least behaved in that regard. Of course, it was still Otis he was dealing with.

The big red beast himself was sat in front of his mirror. As if he was grooming himself right before going to some swanky interview. At least he's actually here, Ray thought. He strolled up to the monkey busy checking out his reflection. "Here." He tossed the brick of coke onto the desk.

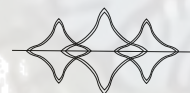
"W-What!?" Jessica stammered.

"Ooooh!" Otis cooed as he tore open the brick.

Ray laid his back against the wall, "You thought that was for me? Please. Nerves are shocked right now. A downer is what I need. Heh, I guess that's you." Otis let out another pleased ooh as his long arms worked the bag. Clearly with some familiarity. "Don't give me that look. He likes the stuff! Hypes him up for the danger."

Otis sounded off his approval. Jessica, on the other hand, was at a loss for words. Especially as she watched the orangutan make quick work of the white powder, shaping up lines with what looked like a credit card. Otis came as close as a monkey could to laughing as he plowed his face onto the surface of the desk.

It was show time.



I always try to help out the young men in the shelter, those with a first day look about them looking around, but also, trying not to make eye contact. They want someone to see them and help without being seen and when you've spent years between the shelters and church basements, people get a certain look to them. It's the unhealthy light, too burnt from sitting in the park and too much sleep in the windowless rooms where the air doesn't move except through the lungs of hundreds of other men. Controlling the light, or moonlight even, is

Young Buck

what makes a man powerful. He can cast a shadow to an ant, but all he can do with himself is squint to the sun, unless it's sunday, then the church is cool and open all day. So right when these tender new buds curl themselves into bed, and the lights go out, I'll get down from my top bunk and creep up right to them. I know how to do it because I saw the monkeys on TV. I place my cheek next to theirs, real close, so our eyeballs form an eclipse, mine are very yellow from concentration, but my cheek is smooth. When you arrive in a new shelter you don't know things, so I make sure to shave every morning and I think these new guys really appreciate that. So I wake them with a hand over their mouth because it's important, and my smooth cheek on theirs is comforting, like how a monkey on TV might purr to heal a broken tail. And I whisper in their ear about how to survive in this place. Once I see their eyes go white, I know

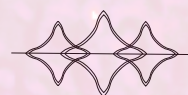
they're listening and I point to the dark corner, where the lights never come on and the men are huddles of wind under the blanket.

Look!

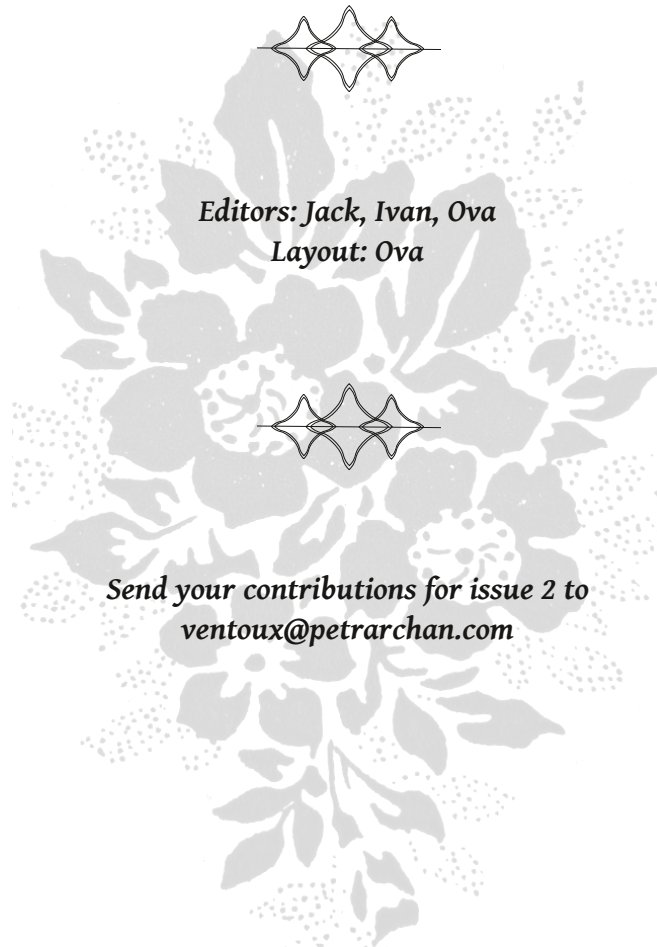
"See those men? There, in the darkness. Those men are dangerous, they only must think something, then they do it. One could walk up now and ask us, 'if I take this knife, and put it straight through your cheek, would you like that?' They have no agreement with anyone, not even each other. They're together for a while, drink, then drift away.... Who knows."

BY SASHA CANTU

I creep back to my bed and get under the covers before anyone else can see me. Some men are animals. They need women, they need their children the state took away, they have the brain of two blackberries and the body of a bear that doesn't understand anything but to feed.



VENTOUX - ISSUE I
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*Send your contributions for issue 2 to
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Anonymous : *less than a minute ago* : No.1900

[>>1840](#)

It seems ridiculous now, but the internet was once a place for people to talk to each other. No longer: its primary purpose now is as a technology for mass stultification, cynical marketing, and consent manufacture. What is remarkable is that none of this is kept hidden from us - in fact it is implicitly understood by most people, especially the young, to whom the notions of 'content creation' and 'personalised feeds' are as natural as the 'double A side' and the 'omnibus edition' were to their parents.

The internet of human beings is in its long, slow, twilight. We cannot reverse the encroachment of the gloam any more than we can resurrect a summer's day in its parting, and yet we need not accept the total conquest of the inkdark.

> An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
> In blast-beruffled plume,
> Had chosen thus to fling his soul
> Upon the growing gloom.

Join the growing community at petrarchan.com, the imageboard for the twilight of the internet. No personalisation, no notifications, no karma: just human beings.

/pt/ – Petrarchan