

# IN OUR WRITE MINDS

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For me as organiser this has been one of the most strenuous, but one of the most rewarding, semesters of Creative Writing - never before has so much been written by so many. Never before have there been so many spontaneous volunteers to produce and market a booklet (the fifth now), and organise a presentation in the Romanischer Keller on Wednesday 7th May.

With regard to the production process of the pieces, I should perhaps point out that the stories have all been read out at a Creative Writing class by the authors and have been criticized by other members of the class. As a result of the criticism a revision has, perhaps, been carried out by the author. My sole contribution has been the correction of major language errors.

I hope that you enjoy reading the pieces as much as I did.

Peter Bews

<p><b>MARJOLIJN STORM</b></p> <p><b>VIRGIN</b></p>
--

The Hofburg had been done, as had the Belvedere, the Parliament, the Museum of Ethnology and the zoo. Their behinds were now squeezed on a bench which was uncomfortable, in clothes which itched and seemed to be unsuitable for the moment. He disliked the place. Maybe he could not stand the predominant Catholicism that was visible everywhere. Alice had gasped at the beauty of the statues in the Cathedral. They made him shiver to the bone, these faces of agony and apathy, hundreds of them, in the dark, cold, strangely hollow environment. He shivered even now at the thought of it. On the bench. In Schönbrunn.

The trees, majesties cut to dwarves, their natural figures mutilated to the shapes of squares and green menhirs. The ground, a quarry of grinding teeth as feet shuffled over the gravelly alleys.

Alice had unpacked some apples; may-green and shining they lay on her lap, while she bent over to close her bag. They seemed misplaced.

"Would you like one?"

"No, thank you."

"But you haven't eaten anything since this morning. Even in there I could hear your stomach rumbling."

"Alright then."

With a sigh and a notion of hesitation he picked one up from her lap and took a huge bite. He heard the same sound he had just made when Alice bit into her apple. Water was running out of the edges of their mouths and their jaws produced the unmistakable sounds of chewing pulp.

Alice's exhausted feet started to come to life again. The prickling feeling was exciting and comforting at the same time. The September sun stood low and made the building on the hilltop radiate in a strange light. The green bushes around them threw shadows and the sculptures standing on pedestals around them exchanged their light grey skin with darker night-gowns.

"What are we going to do tomorrow?" Alice asked.

"I don't know. Do you want to see more cultural things?"

"Yes, please!"

Toby threw the core away.

"Couldn't we do something different for a change?"

"Like what?"

"Like just staying at the hotel and spending a day at the swimming pool? Or doing something with those Australians we met at the bar?"

"I haven't come here to swim."

"Alright then."

He chewed on his lips and crossed his arms.

"Just like my little cousin," Alice thought.

The canary came along. The big fat woman in a pinkish costume and a bright yellow hat who had been following them continuously since the Hofburg. Behind her were hobbling three little children, like ducklings following their heavy, swaying mother. The small flock passed and disappeared into a side-alley. Soon the last spot of the yellow hat had gone.

Toby played with his fingers and pulverised millions of imaginary ants between the tip of his left forefinger and the side of his right thumb.

"Do you see that statue over there?"

He pointed over to their right, to the figure of a woman standing on a stone as if she had been bewitched. The light played with her solid skin and highlighted different sides of her body as the clouds drifted by in the sky over the still faint, but already visible moon.

"That must be a Venus," he said.

"How do you know?"

"Well, she's naked, isn't she?"

"And that makes her a Venus?"

"Well, it's only a suggestion. Who else could it be?"

She mused for some moments. He looked at her again. She was pretty, that statue. Woman rather. Firm breasts. Symmetrical. Feet too small compared with the rest.

"Do you think she is nude or naked?" He asked.

"Is there a difference?"

"Why, yes. Don't you think so?"

"I'm not sure."

"Does she seem to be sensually naked or just naked naked to you?"

"I don't know."

"Do you find her attractive?"

What did he mean? What could she say?

He kept silent again.

The rain came suddenly. Two swans, escaped from the pond, came waddling towards them, leaving a green-white slimy trace behind them. Both kept a considerable distance to the bench and the two clothed, lost human beings. One came one step nearer, came to stand opposite the outer edge of the bench, but then turned to his companion. They embraced softly. Without joy or passion, two giraffe-like tubes, two swans' necks rubbing each other. Without a sound, accompanied by the light touch of summer raindrops.

"Do you think she's a virgin?"

"Who, the swan?"

"No," he pointed to the figure. "Her."

"It's a statue, for God's sake. What's the matter with you?"

He shrugged.

The shadow appeared. A youthful face, pale, handsome, not pretty, determined, briskly walking down the path, then, stopping in front of a pink rose, inhaling its smell. Sensually. The black dress she wore warmly coating her body.

Alice looked at her. Alice in the maze. She looked at the figure and imagined the woman who had been a model for the piece of art. Which warm, human cells pulsating, thrilling with every breath, which hot body, had stood before the artist, hour after hour, naked, seeing her counterpart become a nude.

She smiled. "I don't think she is." And then she watched the shadow slowly walking away into the night of the moon.

The canary came back. The three children ceremonially holding up three ice-creams. The wafers like torches, the ice-cream white, creamy and moist. They were heading for the exit, the children chattering like colibris, the canary bent and tired, shuffling by like a female Atlas carrying the future of the human race on her shoulders.-

<p><b>MATTHIAS MÖSCH</b></p> <p><b>A GHOST</b></p>
--

The bell rang eleven. Time to get up. Slowly the old ghost rose, and with him an air of decay. He (he'd been a male while still alive) carefully took a head out of a basket. His own. It had been sleeping there since they had been separated by the executioner. With them not having shared the same bed for ages, their relationship had grown somewhat distant. Some nights the ghost didn't even put his head on. Haunting without it wasn't easy. Shuffling around without four of five senses required some features of coordination that had taken decades to be trained, though he knew the mansion by heart. He had died here in the garden. And was bound here eternally.

The proprietors had changed. One had succeeded the other - but he had 'survived' them all. And there wasn't one of them he had not scared. That was his job. To rise every night from his hidden place and to frighten the shit out of them. He hadn't been good in life. A fact useful in death.

However, being a ghost wasn't funny. It brought hardship with it. Walking through walls, you lose your grip. Not that the ghost's fingers were soft - he could break steel with them - but haptic satisfaction was lost. In the last few days for example he had longed for some hard door knocking. An unsatisfying feeling. A feeling that forced him to ask, "Am I getting old?"

And shuffling round corners he had the creeping thought that something was awaiting him. And there really was something. Right now. A dark presence. An entity whose foreshadows each mortal faced with fear. The nameless thing observed the ghost as it descended from his solitary chamber, unaware of his secret watcher. Until a voice rose, a suicidal whisper, the sound one probably may hear under a rope.

It whispered, "Ghost." The spectre turned round. No one was there. "Who's calling me?" he asked. Then a dark figure emerged from the shadows, as black as a dead man's thoughts, as quiet as a corpse's glance. The ghost's voice trembled.

"It is...?"

"Your Master. But skip formalities, my friend."

"His highness! What hath brought him here?"

"Business, I'm afraid." The being leaned back and its empty eye sockets observed the ghost carefully. An embarrassing silence set in. However, the addressee of his highness' discreet allusion seemed far away trying to cope with the surprise and not at all attaining a state that resembled understanding. One had to be patient with older ghosts. Due to their age they seemed to have gained, over the centuries, a slightly altered impression of how words like 'immediate response' were usually defined. The master lost his patience.

"Let's face it. You're one of our old foxes. As far as I can remember you're on duty now. To our full satisfaction - let's not forget that. No complaints, never sick-leave. Your file's empty, virtually. And the crowning line that is to be found in it - I am talking of your file - will be that of your expected retirement."

After some heavy pondering the ghost looked up. "Your highness?"

"This night is to be your last. Then you're suspended until your retirement takes place. Happy news isn't it?"

The ghost grew pale. As far as one can say that of an ectoplasmic emanation. "Why, your highness? Why?"

"We're in a painful situation." The eyeless thing stared at the ghost's linen-cloth. "People aren't afraid anymore. That entertainment industry is too tough to compete with."

"My people." The ghost, who had been smiling, said, "are afraid."

"I know, friend. But are they the only ones? Our public appearance's a mess - and the rotten VIP sods that were unfortunately hired in order to improve it aren't doing their job either. Hell, they can't get rid of their nightlife. And what is nightlife to them? Sleeping past sundown to party all day. You are our best man. Period. But with our internal reorganisation we have no use for real ghosts any longer."

A slight distrust flushed over the pale face. "Master. I dare not interfere..."

"Do so, we're equal. Almost."

The ghost, now wide awake and unfittingly sullen in consideration of the listener opposite, went on. "He talks of not needing. All ghosts? Explain."

"How? Decreasing demand, less effectiveness compared to ... electronic fear makers."

"Elec...?" The distrust remained the pale face. "What does your highness mean?"

"Technical gear."

The ghost became grim. That seemed too much. His nostrils flared and sheer anger rolled over his mouth. He took breath in an endless, whimpering, gurgling howl which was so dreadful as to freeze the marrow of the bone. A couple of spiders left his ears in expectation of an approaching misfortune. Then, at the peak of the terrific sound, a dagger flashed high in the air. It flashed in the hand of the ghost, who immediately cut off his head. He raised it far above his shoulders as a voice of doom and thunder echoed to the last corners of the mansion. "I shall be damned!"

"My friend. You are anyhow." The master's dry response took the wind out of the flowing linen. The ghost put back his head.

"Excuse my tongue," he said, rather surprised at himself, "I am not a corpse of letters, but wasn't there an important dichotomy of rationalism and mysticism? Our existence proves the unexplainable. Shall we give that up?"

The master grumbled. While responding, he picked up the fleeing spiders here and there and bit them in half with a wet crunch.

"See. We must pick up people where they are. The electronic media are what they're used to consuming. Hell, I'm the last to ask for yelling, tortured maidens and ripped out hearts when it gets close to midnight, but that's the way it is. And, despite that, you wouldn't believe how the *apparatus technicus* has improved these days. Holographic haunting, resynthesized screams, vibrator walls, the field is immense."

"And what about me?"

"I'm sure we'll find some amusing occupation for the rest of your days."

With a sound of infinite sadness the ghost said. "I'm no good at anything else."

His remark remained unanswered. His highness shook hands, patted shoulders, and was gone.

Still half an hour to midnight. The ghost sat back in his chamber, lost in thought. Once again he read the sheet in his hands.

"Dear family I am not allowed to haunt this house anymore, since my employer said I cost too much. I am sorry about that. For the last two decades you have been very kind and respectable proprietors of this mansion in which it was an honour to dwell and which to leave is nearly as hard as... (that sentence wasn't finished.)

It's better this way. Perhaps you could have been less noisy during the daytime. Tonight, please keep it a secret, I am on duty for the last time. The howls, moans and sounds of rattling chains you'll hear in future will be reproductions from a so called tape recorder. But that shouldn't stop you from being frightened.

Especially the children. In case of technical problems : the device can be found in the upper left corner of the fire-place. I have to close now. Perhaps we will meet again on a ghost train one day.

Farewell.

He sighed, and tore up the sheet. He had to do his rounds.

The final creeping through each chamber started in the parents' room. Well, people weren't afraid. He would teach them. His people were afraid, no problem. But how to make others shiver? How to reach them when bound to this place? One had to gain a reputation.

He proceeded, shed some cat's blood here and there, sighed aloud, but his thoughts didn't stop. Fear of technical stuff. No one would have that. Reputation. Through fear. Fear - through murder. The ghost made halted. Had there been a sound? Only the breathing of the head of the family in the bedroom. Murder. Could one? Ghosts are damned. How could they lose their soul? ... And besides, the morality? None.

*'Family brutally murdered by mystic causes.'* He imagined the headlines the heralds would shout. Or *'Family mystically murdered. Causes - brutal!'*

He walked on. Family. It wouldn't be nice for them. But what could he do? Perhaps one, two weeks 'til he got the sack and the reputation had to be made fast. But what was worse? Four more people murdered in an unpleasant scary world or a world without fear?

He reached the children's room. He stood in front of the bed where both children were sleeping together in. And what about them? Tiny children in a big bed. In a world without fear. The ghost went on. But then came back. He watched both of them carefully. Then he did something he had never done before.

"You." he whispered. "I have something to tell you. Your parents won't hear this. It's useless for them. But to you I feel committed. I have made a decision. A decision important for you. You're expecting a fearless life. That is bad. Perhaps for everyone." And with that he took the older child by the neck.

"We need fear. It tells you what is wrong, you know? When the hangman broke my neck it didn't hurt. I can't say if you will feel pain. Sorry. My hands are numb." He tightened his grip. The child coughed slightly.-





<p><b>RUTH KIRCHER</b></p> <p><b>MEDIOCRITY</b></p>
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Looking back, it seems totally absurd that all those things should actually have happened in our backward little village in the middle of nowhere, and nothing about my life now would allow anybody to guess that they did. But when I close my eyes, I can still recall her warm breath on my neck, the paths of her fingers down my back, the trace of her lips on my mouth and the smell of her skin. Always the smell of her skin.

It was the year I'd finished school, and I couldn't wait for autumn to arrive, so that I could finally leave home, move to the nearest city and study medicine at university. That was what I'd always dreamed off: becoming a famous doctor, helping people, "changing the world". I'd studied so hard for it and tried to persuade my parents for so long that they had finally agreed, and so my whole life seemed to lie ahead of me.

But then it all began on one of those afternoons in early summer when the sky seemed like an endless stretch of blue without a single cloud, and the scent of freshly cut grass lingered in the air. I was sitting on the porch with a book open on my lap, absorbed by the sight of a handful of magnolia petals cascading through the air, the breeze blowing them up and down and back and forth like feathers. I was dreaming about my new life in the city, fantasising about all the places I would visit and the people I would meet.

It wasn't that I felt unhappy in our village, but somehow I found life there ... unsatisfying ... without being able to point out exactly why. Maybe because nothing ever really seemed to happen there: it was a small and ordinary little village, too far off the beaten track to attract many visitors; the locals knew everything that there was to know about each other, and most of them hardly ever left the place for longer than a day. But they seemed content with what they had - a little school for their children, a church, a weather-beaten old pub, and a small shop inside a cottage on a corner of the short main street. The shop was owned by a plump, middle-aged woman whose name I can't remember now, who always wore an apron and never seemed to stop talking. Whenever I went in to buy something she was chatting to somebody, and it was among those shelves stacked to the ceiling with tins of food, gardening tools and material for clothes that people met and exchanged their gossip. Later, when they returned home, they told their nextdoor neighbours everything in hushed voices, repeating each story with some new, scandalous detail. But I was weary of those stories, weary of feeding cows

and plucking chicken, and most of all I was weary of all those people I had known since I was born and who I felt I had nothing in common with whatsoever.

When the magnolia petals were slowly landing on the grass, one by one, and I was still daydreaming about all the things I wanted to do, the loud creaking of one of the floorboards behind me suddenly disturbed the silence, and when I turned around there she stood. I had always assumed that falling in love would be somewhat more spectacular, not just the daughter of our new neighbours coming over to borrow some milk; but quite obviously I'd been wrong. I stared at her for what seemed like an eternity, and when I finally cleared my throat to say hello, I was feeling more than just a little embarrassed - but she simply smiled at me with a bemused flicker in her eyes, and from then on things just happened.

From an outside point of view, what we had probably seemed like nothing but a very close friendship, and the people in our village never thought anything of it when we walked down the street arm in arm, shared our ice cream or swapped clothes, because that's just what girls do. Even when we went skinny dipping together in the river, nobody suspected anything: two girls having a relationship was something the people in my village didn't believe existed in our country, and if it did happen, then it wasn't in places like ours. Maybe in the big, sinful cities where the rich didn't know what to do with their time, but not where I lived. That was why nobody thought anything of the quiet whispers and fits of giggling from behind our locked doors; parents are used to their daughters staying at a friend's house once in a while, and all girls talk ...

It is strange, though, that most of that summer is dim to me now; only a few memories stand out from the blur in sharp, delightful focus, such as all those days we spent together roaming around in her house, reading books to each other and looking at the pictures and ornaments she and her parents had brought home from all the places they had been to.

Her parents were what the people in the village called "eccentric": they both came from rich families in the city, and they had spent a lot of their time studying and travelling abroad. They had taken their daughter to bizarre and far-flung places I had never even heard of, but now that they were older, they wanted to settle somewhere quiet and, as they called it, "picturesque". Her mother would spend hours in the garden with easel, canvas and paintbrush, trying to "capture the mood of a sunset", and her father had turned the attic of their old farmhouse into a study, where he wrote books about country life - both of which activities which the locals considered utterly useless and bordering on the insane. And although they treated them nicely, there was always a hint of frost in their voice and manner, especially on those occasions when they had visitors from the city and they walked around the village to show them everything, pointing up to rooftops, peering into corners and and saying how idyllic life out there was. Their daughter, on the other hand, the locals liked for her pretty face and polite behaviour, and although she

adored her parents more than anything, they thought it wasn't the girl's fault her family was so odd. Little did they know about the fantasies swirling around in her seemingly innocent mind ... Well, I found them all wonderfully different, and in my eyes, her slight accent, her foreign habits and the fact that she was so completely unlike anybody I'd ever met before provided her with a strange halo of seductiveness. She was a city girl who had grown up with jazz, crowds and neon lights, and she had the most amazing plans for her future. But I think what attracted me to her most were all her stories - I liked nothing better than to listen to that sweet, husky voice of hers spinning out endless tales about mysterious journeys and fantastic places.

She'd also had piano lessons when they lived abroad, and she played so wonderfully that I never got sick of listening. - I remember one of those evenings when the heat was simply stifling and there wasn't even a hint of a breeze anywhere. When I went around to her house she was playing the grand piano in their living room; she had a glass of wine on the seat beside her and already seemed a little drunk. The notes were long and lingering, melting sleepily into one another, and I spent the whole evening sitting on the floor, listening to her playing. I can still hear it now: Beethoven, slurred and fluid like a dream. She walked me home that night, and when I was standing on our porch, about to go inside, she suddenly raised herself up on tiptoe, put her hand lightly on the back of my neck, and gave me a long, soft kiss that tasted of sweet wine. That night was the first time I didn't worry about what would happen if one of my parents came out and saw us; I simply didn't care.

I felt absolutely certain that she was "the one", no ifs, ands, or buts, and so I began making plans for our future, how she would move to the city with me and we'd live together, wake up next to each other every day, share everything and have no secrets. With her around, everything suddenly seemed to fall into focus. I assumed that her parents, open-minded as I thought they were, would understand us straight away, and that they'd maybe even help us to convince mine that everything was alright. But whenever I wanted to talk to her about it, her white porcelain cheeks grew even paler and she became strangely evasive, exclaiming how wonderful it would be but never saying that she would talk to her parents about it or anything. I was sure that all she needed was time, that she felt the same way for me as I felt for her, and that at some point she would just find the courage to be open about the whole thing. That was why that kiss on the porch was so very special; it was the first time of many, and for a short while, she didn't seem to care either.

Another incident stands out from the blur: one day that summer, we'd gone for a walk along the river, and after a while we'd got to a couple of huge, grey rocks near one of its bends. We sat down to have a rest and looked around. After a while, she got up wordlessly and took off all her clothes, leaving them carelessly in

a little pile on the ground. She motioned me to do the same; then she lay back down and stretched out on the warm surface of the rocks - a delicate childwoman, infinitely fragile, her copper cobweb hair glowing in the tawny light and one of those beatific smiles on her face. We spent the whole afternoon on those rocks, side by side and motionless like lazy lizards in the sun.

It felt like the summer was going to last forever.

But then there was that morning at her house, when I'd stayed over for the night. It was early and she was still asleep, wrapped snugly in a blanket against the morning chill. I'd woken up in the middle of the night because I'd heard some strange noise outside, and as I couldn't go back to sleep I lay awake for hours, watching dawn steal into the room. Later, when the warm sunlight poured in through the windows and she lay there naked with her face half covered by a curtain of hair, her features still softened by sleep, I couldn't help thinking how beautiful she was. I reached over to tuck her hair behind her ears, and that was the moment the door opened and all of a sudden her father stood in the room, staring at us in disbelief. She'd woken up from the touch of my hand, and I will never forget the flash of terror in her eyes when she saw him. What followed, I can only remember in a blur: him shouting and pulling us apart, yelling that I was a little whore who had seduced his innocent daughter, that I was never to see her again. Then he literally dragged me to my parents' house by my hair and left me on the porch. I sat there shivering and crying, wrapped only in the thin blanket that had covered her before, until I finally plucked up the courage to go inside and face my parents.

By lunchtime, everybody knew what had happened, and of course it was all blamed on me: in their eyes, I'd always been odd, and now it didn't surprise them that I'd made the poor, innocent girl do things she would never have dreamed of. I don't know what other lies she told them about me just to save herself, but when I went outside in the afternoon, the people not only stared, but even pointed at me. My parents couldn't bear the shame; they had both lived in the village since they were born, and their life there, their farm and the respect of the others was all they had. I had to leave for the city that same day, without much time to pack or say goodbye.

For a couple of months, I did actually study medicine at university, but when I could no longer support myself and study at the same time, I had to get a full time job.

Of course, nothing was as I had thought it would be: my dream of becoming a doctor turned to dust, the only places I got to see were my own, shabby little room and the restaurant where I worked behind the bar, and instead of the exciting people I had thought I'd meet, I spent the little free time I had with the other waiters and waitresses from the restaurant.

I was lonely and I thought I had failed in everything I'd attempted to do, and so I felt honoured when the owner of the restaurant seemed to be interested in me. We went out together one night, and again, from then on, things just happened...

Now we're married with two children and we live in a flat near the restaurant; I look after the children during the day and work behind the bar in the evenings. Again, I am haunted by that same feeling of dissatisfaction, I am weary of the people and their gossip, and I just long to get out. But this time, I don't know how.

I haven't seen my parents since the day it all happened, and I don't know whether they still live in the same village or not, but I presume they do. Maybe hers are still there, too, or maybe they've gone abroad again; but wherever she is now, I'm sure she still walks around with that same look of sweetfaced innocence, pretending that nothing ever happened. I've never had the pleasure of vengeance fulfilled, and I don't know if it is vengeance that I want. Because when my husband's hands move across my body, I find myself imagining it was her, and when I close my eyes, I can still recall the smell of her skin.-

## ALEXANDER FLORY

### WAITING FOR DEATH IN THE AFTERNOON

The sun is hot in the afternoon and the sand in the arena is red with the blood of the five bulls that have died there during the last two hours. The last fight has started and the crowd is hoping for a good corrida because the five fights before were not very good. At the same time the sun is so hot that everybody wants to get the thing over with, so they can get out of the heat and into the shade of a bar to have a cold beer. But still everybody holds out because the last fight should be good. The last bull is a catedral, a very large one that has been saved for the end of the corrida. And it's a white bull, which makes it all the more special.

The torero has almost finished his first tercio with the white bull. He looks very self confident and very elegant, like a good torero should. One last pasé and then the horn sounds. The torero has made the bull angry enough and worn it out enough for the banderilleros to take over.

There is a man and a woman who don't look Spanish among the crowd. The woman is wearing a thin green summer dress and has a broad-rimmed,

Mexican-type sombrero on her head to shield her flaming red hair and delicate white skin from the burning Spanish sun.

The man next to her is wearing a tough, white linen shirt and dark blue trousers with braces. The trousers are half an inch too short and the man's shoes one size too big. He has no hat.

The woman is sitting very upright on the uncomfortable steps of the stand, a posture that underlines the size of her breasts. With one hand she's holding her hat on her head, with the other one she's waving a fan of Spanish make.

The man is sitting bent forward, his elbows resting on his knees and chin resting on the palms of his hands, while his fingers try to shield his eyes from the sides against the sun. His gaze is locked on what is going on down in the arena, where two of the three banderilleros have already put their four barbed banderillas into the bull. The black blood that flows from the four wounds in the bull's back and then runs over its white hide makes the bull look like a four-striped zebra.

The bull charges and the third banderillero jumps upwards, in that unique motion which makes him so special, and for a moment he seems to be hanging in the air as if he was attached to invisible strings. Then his arms strike down and the banderillas hit the bull's flank.

"I like that motion of the guy with the spears," the woman says. "That motion is what I like best about bullfighting. It's so elegant. The rest is only cruelty."

"Al quiebro, that's called," the man says without taking his eyes off the fight or his chin off his palms.

The banderillero runs across the arena and slips behind one of the burladeros. The bull is standing in the arena, with dark blood running over its white hide and its sides move in and out with its heavy breathing. It is looking for a new target. The horn sounds. Now it is time for the torero to show himself again. He walks in and bows to the crowd, ignoring the bull.

"What's his name again?" the woman asks.

"Cayetano Ordóñez."

"Is he good?"

"He's very young. But he's got himself quite a reputation over the last two years."

The bull charges and suddenly where the torero was there is the muleta. It floats over the bull, the bull can not stop in time and somersaults. The heavy beast looks clumsy but it gets back onto its feet quickly.

The crowd shouts "¡olé!"

"Do that again, bull," the woman pleads. "Do it again, it looked so funny!"

The man casts a brief glance at her, then turns back to the fight. "Honey, it's not going to do it again just because you say so. It's a bull and even if it could hear you, it wouldn't listen."

The woman shrugs her shoulders. "It doesn't mean I can't say it. And besides, I'm Taurus, I'm a bull myself. Maybe it will understand me."

The man wipes his sweaty palms on his pants. He is watching the fight. A man passes by, offering plastic cushions for a hundred pesetas. The woman takes one, the man does not.

The woman looks at the man. "I'm a bull myself. I always have to attack, you know." She takes off her hat, puts her fists by the sides of her head, index fingers extended, bends her head low and shoves it forwards at the man. Without looking at her the man turns his shoulders away and she misses him. The woman straightens up and pokes the man in his shoulder with her finger.

"I attack!"

When she puts on her big hat again, its rim hits the aficionado in front of her in the neck and he turns around with a frown. The woman gives him Bambi eyes and says "¡perdón!" with the sweetest smile. The aficionado nods and turns his attention back to the fight.

The bull misses the torero by a narrow margin and a murmur goes through the crowd. The man holds his breath and someone in the row behind him cries "¡joder!"

"What's so special?" the woman asks.

"Cayetano se ajusta. That means he is working very close to the bull. That's the important thing: work close to the bull but don't get hit. Then it'll be a beautiful fight. Nowadays most bullfighters can't do that anymore, but Cayetano can."

The woman pokes the man again. "I attack!"

"If you think you're a bull it's okay," the man says without taking his eyes off the fight, "if you think you're a bull and you're proud of it you're stupid. The bull is going to lose. It always loses."

In the arena the torero is standing so close to the bull that he can make it run around in circles, chasing the muleta. Then he walks away from the bull, offering his unprotected back.

The woman shivers. "He shouldn't do that, he really shouldn't. It scares the shit out of me."

The man snorts. "It's just for the show. Just to scare the shit out of little girls. The torero knows exactly that the bull is too exhausted to charge while he shows it his back. And even if it did charge, the crowd would scream and the torero could step to the side."

The woman fans herself some air and sighs. "Bullfighting is a bloody and unfair sport."

The man straightens up and stems his arms in his back. "It's bloody, but it isn't a sport. It's like life: It's bloody, it's got rules that are made by one side only and it's like a ritual, so it's always certain who'll win and who'll lose."

The woman is fanning herself some air. "I like to play by my own rules."

The man shrugs his shoulders. "Everybody would like to do that, but nobody can." He opens a bota, a Spanish wineskin, he has with him. He holds it very close to his mouth to let the wine squirt out of it because it takes a lot of practice to drink the way Spaniards do, who hold the skins high over their heads and swallow without closing their mouths. Then he closes the skin and puts it on the ground.

In the arena the torero lets the bull pass while he's holding the muleta behind his back.

The woman points down into the arena while the crowd shouts "¡olé!"

"That was a maricon, right? You see that I'm getting into it!"

The man laughs. "Close but no cigar. It's called mariposa, that's butterfly. And that now is a veronica. And what he's doing now it called citar, that means he's provoking the bull to attack. But Honey, there's no maricon, really not."

The woman pokes the man's shoulder again. "The bull doesn't have to know bullfighting language to be down there."

The man doesn't answer. He's watching the fight.

The sun is opposite now, blinding. The man puts sunglasses on but the woman has to shade her eyes with her hand. The man offers his sunglasses to the woman, but she shakes her head.

"Not my style," she says.

She nudges him.

"Hey, I've been thinking about something. I want to play bullfighting with you in bed. I'm the bull and you can be the torero and in the end you kill me. Would you like to play that?"

The man jumps up and points down into the arena. "There! Did you see that? He almost got a cornada. I've never seen a torero get a cornada."

The woman shrugs. "What's a cornada?"

"When he gets a horn, when he gets gored. I've never seen a torero get the horn!" He sits down again, breathing heavily.

"I heard a good one, the other day," the woman says. "A man is about to jump out of the window and his wife tells him: 'Of course you got to do what you think is right, but remember that I've given you horns and not wings.'"

She laughs. The laughing sounds somewhat artificial.

There's no answer from the man. He has got eyes for the fight only.

The woman takes off her hat and removes some dents. "You know, maybe somebody else has got horns, too."

The man pulls out a big handkerchief and wipes his forehead. "What're you saying, Honey?"

The woman puts on her hat again and breathes out. "I said maybe I've given you horns."



"I don't think so," the man says, putting his handkerchief away.

"Well, maybe I have. What would you do? Would you ditch me?"

The man shrugs his shoulders. "Maybe I would. Isn't that what a man's supposed to do when he's given horns?"

"And if you didn't ditch me, would you beat me? Would you beat me if I'd given you horns?"

The man groans silently. "No, of course I wouldn't. Men aren't supposed to beat women. But I think you only want me to ask you what you would do if I gave you horns."

The woman shakes her head. "No."

The man nods. "Good."

When the bull somersaults again, the aficionado in the row in front shouts: "¡la hostia, este es burriciego!"

"What does he want?" the woman asks.

"He thinks that the bull's got defective vision. That he can see distant things, but not close up. The guy's probably right. The bull looks good, but he doesn't seem to be much use in a close fight... Anyway. What were you saying before?"

The woman nudges the man again and grins. "Come on, you silly ass, you heard me all right! I said I want to play bullfighting with you in bed."

The man runs his hand through his hair.

"I think you don't get the spirit of the thing. Bullfighting is not a game. But if you want to do it, yes. We can play in bed, that's fine. There are other things that one should not consider a game, where one should not play."

The woman leans over to whisper into the man's ear.

"Would you like to tame me? Men have tried to tame me before, but they have never managed. Will you tame me and teach me how to behave?"

The man wipes his sweaty palms on his knees and leans forward a bit to see better.

"I don't want to tame you. If you're wild, you're wild, if you're tame, you're tame, but if you're wild you shouldn't become tame for someone else and if you're tame you shouldn't become wild for someone else."

The torero takes off his hat and puts it down in the sand. The crowd cheers him for his gesture.

"Why does he do that?" the woman asks.

The man takes off his sunglasses to massage the bridge of his nose.

"That means that he's going to kill the bull right on the spot where he put down his hat. Not an easy thing to do, the guy must be really sure of himself."

The woman says "aha" and lets her gaze sweep over the crowd as if looking for something. Then she points at a Spanish girl with long, black hair.

"Do you think that girl is beautiful?"

The man glances at the girl.

"No, honey."

He puts his sunglasses back on and returns his attention to the fight.

"The torero is really good looking," the woman says, "very masculine face. Self-assured and aggressive. I like him."

"You can see his face from here?" the man laughs.

"No, I saw his face on the T-shirts they're selling at the entrance. All the girls were only buying the T-shirts which had his face on them, I don't think they sold a single one with the other toreros' faces. He's really a cutie. Plus he's very tall for a Spaniard."

"Yes, I think you're right. He's really elegant. I wouldn't mind looking like him," the man, who himself is rather short, says.

The woman fans herself some air and looks a bit annoyed.

The torero is having a hard time getting the bull to the spot where he dropped his hat. Finally he manages to get it at least somewhere close to the hat. And there they stand, human and animal, their gazes fixed upon each other. It's the moment that's called *entrar a matar* or *la hora de verdad*, the moment of truth. The torero's hand is raised to deal the final blow. The crowd falls silent. The torero strikes at the bull's neck, but the *estoque* enters only half a foot. It's a very bad hit. The torero has to get some space between himself and the animal and the bull follows him, already on swaying feet, with the *estoque* dangling loosely in its neck.

Some trumpets blow.

"What's that?" the woman asks.

"That's an *aviso*. The torero is getting a warning. He's taking too much time and he's got to finish it. It would be easy for a torero to make the bull run around in circles until it's completely exhausted and then kill it with no danger to himself. But he's not allowed to do that. The bull must still be dangerous when he kills it and when he kills it, it must be a good, clean kill. It's not easy to kill half a ton of muscles and bone with one stroke. The blade has to enter at a special spot in the bull's neck so that it can go right through the heart. And the torero hasn't managed that. That's why he is getting a warning. He's got to be quick now."

"Yeah, make him be quick. Look how they're making that poor bull suffer. What a slow and painful death."

The man twists his mouth.

"This isn't a good fight and maybe the torero is not in shape. But I think for the bull it's still okay."

"Oh really? What good is it for the bull if you torture it before you kill it?"

The man clears his throat.

"At least it can fight. Other bulls just get a bolt in their heads and then we eat them. This one gets the opportunity to fight. Although it can't win, at least it can fight and die with dignity. It dies fighting and it dies upright and with pride and

the crowd cheers the bull at least as much as they cheer the torero. And probably the torero one day will die in his bed, maybe he'll have a heart attack while he is having sex, but he won't die fighting."

The woman turns her palms up.

"Oh please. I've come here because you wanted to come here but I don't want to hear those theories of yours. It's an animal and it doesn't know a thing except that it hurts."

The torero has got himself a new estoque now. He gives the bull some more passes for the show but the crowd is grumbling and the torero himself does not seem happy with what he is doing. Then he is facing the bull again, holding the estoque over his head, aiming. But before he can strike the bull's legs give way and it is kneeling in front of the torero. Only then can the torero drive the estoque home into the bull's body and it enters up to the hilt. The bull topples over to the side.

It is over. No wineskins or roses fly down into the arena, just plastic cushions.

"That was bullshit," the man says. "And I've probably even got a sunburn on the forehead from this bullshit fight."

"Don't tell me you've been cured of this stupid game."

The man shakes his head. "The corrida is not a game. And even though this fight may have been bad, I still think it must be great to be a torero. Imagine the life they have. It's only about life and death. They must be so high above normal people with their normal, everyday problems. Look at that guy Cayetano down there. I bet he'd have preferred a cornada to this. Each time this guy enters the arena he knows he's got something that's worth dying for. I admire that and I envy him."

"Maybe he's got something worth dying for. But he doesn't die. It's the bull that dies. You should admire the bull. Why wouldn't you want to be the bull in the corrida?"

The man gets up.

"The bull always loses. The fight may be good or bad, but the bull always loses. I don't think I could fight a fight I knew I couldn't win."

The woman gets up too.

"Let's go for a drink."

The two leave together with the rest of the angry and annoyed crowd.

Down in the arena the bull's body has already been pulled out by the horses, leaving a trail of blood in the sand. Everybody has left and only the torero remains, standing there among plastic cushions and small pools of blood. The torero doesn't need anyone to tell him that there won't be any trofeos, no ears and no tail for this kill. He's feeling very empty inside.-

**DILEK BATMAZ**

**NOT PERFECT**

Like a pen that does not write  
Like a day without a night  
Like a door that does not open  
Like despair without some hope and  
Like a bird that cannot fly  
That is me and thus am I

**THE PAIN THAT LIES IN THE PROCESS  
OF FALLING IN LOVE**

Afraid of your eyes  
Afraid they'll meet mine  
Afraid of news that are lies  
And afraid of feeling fine.

Afraid of your words  
Afraid they were for me  
Afraid of a word that hurts  
And afraid that you could see.

**ANNA REBECCA LOHMANN  
BOGATOV ISRAEL**

**I** am happy. I am standing on top of a palm-tree, a fading blue baseball cap on my head, a stainless-steel machete in my right hand and the Israelian sun above me.

Have you ever seen the sunrise in the Jordan valley? Have you ever sat by a bonfire at the sea of Galilee? Have you ever had a party in a bomb shelter?

I wanted to keep that moment forever.

An hour later I was covered in sweat and the colour of my face bore a strong resemblance to a freshly cooked lobster. I was working on a horseshoe-shaped machine - we called it our "Yellow Date-Machine" as a tribute to a well-known Beatles song - and I had to climb up the branches and cut off the thorns that usually grow in the middle of the tree to make it easier for my co-workers to tie the date-bunches to the trunk.

These thorns are sharp and a bit poisonous - on the first day my hands were swollen, my fingers covered with small red dots and when I jumped into the swimming pool I could feel my skin burn - and learned that you should never underestimate the interaction between small wounds and chloride.

"A day in the dates without blood is a day off" was all my boss, a stocky Israeli called David, said to me.

It wasn't that bad, though. Being unable to cut my food for 3 days actually helped me lose weight.

I loved the big trees. We sometimes had to work on the baby trees - about 7 feet high and the home of rats which jumped on my arm when I was about to cut off the branch they were sitting on. The rats weren't the problem, though. The view was. Once you've sat on a 40 feet tree you won't go for anything smaller.

I am happy. I am covered in sweat, my shirt is dirty, my face is dirty because I continuously wipe it with my shirt, I nearly cut my thumb off an hour ago and I've got three new bruises on my right thigh (I haven't had a look at them yet, but I can feel them as I climb up the branches, squeezing my legs in the little spaces between them to protect me from falling down.)

I am happy because I am sitting on top of a palm-tree. I'm 45 feet and 4 inches tall and there is nothing down there that can frighten me. And even if something down there frightened me, it couldn't reach me.

I had stepped out of a plane in Tel Aviv a month before that, caught a bus to the Jordan valley and walked, with my suitcase, about a mile till I reached Deganya Bet. The burning sun above me made me understand why it's a good thing that you never get a proper summer in North Wales. Israelian sun and Welsh skin don't seem to get on very well.

I am happy. I listen to Radio Zaffon - every morning: "Bogatov Eli" "Bogatov Israel".

I sing along to the tunes. I actually know most of them. Eli seems to have a strong liking for Tom Jones and Madonna.

I learned how to say "You're a lazy pig" "Are you stupid or what?" and "Hello, I love you. Can I get your phone number?" in Hebrew.

I got drunk on Sabbath wine, crossed the river Jordan and climbed Masada.

I burnt my leg. Someone threw a date-bunch against my head. I cut my thumb off and when I was lying by the swimming pool people came up to me and asked me what I (or hopefully not someone else) had done to my legs.

After half a bottle of Israelian Vodka I fell in love with a guy from South Africa and wanted to stay with him in Israel forever. I'm glad I didn't.

One day at work we nearly drove over a tortoise that was hiding under our machine. I saw it and saved it by screaming at my boss to "stop that fucking thing" and for two days I felt like a heroine. The Jean d'Arc of the tortoises.

Every Friday afternoon we finished early because we had to wash and polish the machines to make them nice and shiny for Sabbath. I was always wondering whether God really cared about the cleanness of a white van, a green tractor and a yellowish horse-shoe shaped date machine in a small kibbutz in the Jordan valley. I never asked my boss, though. He certainly cared.

I stood at the wailing wall in Jerusalem on a Friday night. I swam, or rather lay, in the Dead Sea and I found out that I actually get freckles on my knees.

When it was time to go back I cried for two days. I did everything for the last time. For the last time ever. I climbed up a palm-tree, I drank Sabbath wine, I ate a yellow date, I lit a bonfire by the river Jordan, I deliberately jumped into the swimming pool immediately after work just to feel the chloride burn my skin.

David shook my hand and said "Well, Anna, it was fun working with you. Have a nice life." And I walked away from the old shed, where the machines were kept, a small figure with a blue baseball-cap and skinny, oil-stained arms.-

**GIUSEPPINA AGOSTINETTO-LESLE**  
**DIMALLAH**

The body was lying on the shore, gently pushed by the waves. The sea, so rough an hour before, had finally calmed down. Only a cold breeze was still blowing. The furious power of the sea had reached the middle of the beach, and the sand was damp. Cora walked against the wind, dazzled by the sun which had come back after many cloudy days. She slackened her pace, trying to guess what or who it was that she was seeing in the water. It looked like a human body. "Can it be?"

The beach was deserted, she observed, turning her head to the left and right, looking for help. An indefinite fear was penetrating her as she made the last steps. Now it was clear that it was the body of a young man that lay in front of her. He was a North African, with the skin not too dark, the typical small face and short curly hair. "Surely an Algerian or a Tunisian," she murmured. She remembered the sunny days spent in Tunisia among people who were lively although they lived in poverty. What a contrast with this abandoned young man! She stayed at the edge of the water, which came and went, taking more and more possession of her shoes. Finally, she grabbed hold of the body and moved it onto the sand. She noticed that a piece of paper which looked like a document stuck out from the pocket of his jacket. She read his name: Rascid Bougat. It came to her like a shock that under his name was that of a place she had visited a few months before, with a group of tourists: Dimallah. Someone was approaching, so she quickly put the paper back into the pocket of his shabby jacket.

"What's the matter?" asked the man who had come by.

"Someone's drowned," she answered. "Could you call the police?" She was again alone and couldn't help looking at the lifeless body. Who was this man? What had happened to him? People came up -policemen and coast guard men. Within a few minutes the place was crowded and her thoughts were broken down. The dead young man haunted her the following days. She managed to piece together her scattered thoughts. In fact, Sicily was not so far from Tunisia, and she knew that people were trying to reach Europe this way. That he should have been alone was quite unlikely, just as it was unlikely that his fellow refugees would be willing to talk about him.

One day, she walked along the shore again, stopping at the same place, whispering to the high seas, "Rascid Bougat." Once, she even went to the cemetery to visit the place where he was buried. Only his name and the name of a place were chiselled into a stone plaque. The idea that she might visit his mother to tell her where her son was buried made her feel good.

Some years later Cora's boyfriend suggested, "Time to spend another holiday in Tunisia." At once this suggestion evoked the image of the dead body in the water. "Good idea, Antonio. But as you know, I don't like spending all day on the beach. We could rent a jeep to see some villages in the hinterland." Her thoughts were now on Dimallah and on Rascid's mother.

Antonio and Cora stayed in a pleasant hotel, and had enjoyed their first days on the beach when they began planning some excursions. It was the time Cora had been waiting for. She encouraged him to organise a journey in the course of which they would spend a night in Dimallah. She felt somewhat uneasy but considered that the time had not yet come to tell him the full story. Now, so far from home, she was anxious about what she was about to do. They reached Dimallah on the second day in the afternoon. The village seemed to nestle up against the mountains. The blazing sun, high in the sky, filled every corner. Cora was so excited that Antonio had been wondering for a while what might have been going through her mind, patiently waiting to find an explanation. He was driving the jeep carefully on the single-track road that led to the cluster of houses which disappeared or reappeared at every bend. "I've a special reason to come here," she began. "I want to tell you something before we go to look for a certain lady. Let's have a drink of something fresh first, though."

They were now sitting in front of some drinks which looked thirst-quenching in the steamed-up glasses. "You remember the drowned man who was washed ashore on our beach a few years ago? I've never forgotten his name nor that of the town. If his mother's still alive, I'd like to tell her where he's buried and that it was me who found him. I only have a name, and now I'm afraid that all this is becoming surreal." "I remember," he said, "but I didn't imagine you'd have kept his name. Go ahead and try to do what you've been meaning to do for such a long time." When their glasses were empty, he went to take care of their sleeping arrangements while she was looking for people who might know or remember Rascid Bougat or his family. "Unexpected luck" she thought, when a man sitting in a corner was able to give her a promising piece of information in his scanty French. She moved in the direction he was pointing in with his thin black finger and arrived at a modest house. She guessed - a single room downstairs. Voices came from inside, young voices. She stood in front of the entrance, waiting for a gesture to invite her in. A young woman stared at her, calmly, quite indifferent, with many children around her. A sudden silence filled the room as she stepped in. A man came, and again she tried to speak in French. He seemed to understand and gave a surprising answer: "Je suis Rascid Bougat; ma femme, mes enfants." He was smiling, proud and content. She tried again: "Un autre Rascid Bougat ici?" "Non, moi seul, seul moi," he said, beating against his breast. There was another man in the room. She had no idea which place he had in the family. Her attention was



attracted by the gold necklace around his neck. He looked threatening. Cora hesitated for a moment but then simply said, "Au revoir. Merci bien."

People were outside the house, looking with interest, and Cora passed through them as she left, feeling very uneasy. Antonio was already waiting at the car and announced with a funny voice: "You'll love our room for tonight." But his laugh stopped as soon as he saw Cora's face. "Let's have dinner," she suggested. Sitting at a table which offered attractive food, she told him about her strange discovery. "Sounds like trouble," he said between one bite and the next. Trying to reassure her, he added, "You did right, dear, but now there's nothing more you can do." Even though he spoke calmly, she could guess his anxiety. Before going to bed, they strolled through some picturesque streets. A heavy odour of herbs was in the air, sometimes pleasant, sometimes unfamiliar. A feeling of apprehension was with them, but it was clear that there was no use in speaking about it. They went to bed, putting their passports and money under their pillows, glancing at each other and finally laughing about their exaggerated precaution. "It's been a long day," she said, remembering the man and his family. She fell soundly asleep. He, on the other hand, tossed and turned in bed for a long time, trying to force himself to be quiet. Sleeping lightly and often waking up, he wasn't taken by surprise when he saw the shadow of a man on the wall. He observed what the intruder was doing, and only when he looked for something under Cora's pillow did Antonio take the flashlight he had put near his bed, blinding a black face with eyes wide with surprise. The man wore a golden necklace and vanished a second later. Cora was moaning like a child but continued dreaming. In the morning, when he told her what had happened and described the unknown man, she began crying, "Someone like this was in Rascid's house!" They agreed to leave Dimallah at once and to head back home.

A great regret was left in Cora's heart at not having been able to find the dead young man's mother to give her at least the consolation of knowing what had happened to her son.-

**NINA SECKEL**

**...GLASS BALL... BREAKING...**

When the sun shines like today she starts to wonder. It can't be true. That the trees are green already. Again. That at her friend's place they are sowing grass. And that the pink blossoms against the yellow wall stir so her with their beauty that

she could cry. It's always the same swallowing sadness summer brings. She awaits evenings when the sun will set and in whose cool shadows she will stand. With the taste of beer in her mouth, in conversation with someone she has been waiting for and who - at this moment - is there with her. She gazes at the long rays of the sun that make everything else seem black and that touch the ground at a very low angle.

She says something. It is nothing special but the words come out of her mouth and he listens. She doesn't have to say much. She likes that. Just saying something and not having to use a lot of words. Maybe finding the right words. Or maybe words don't matter, maybe they lose all meaning at times like these. And she perceives him looking at her, even though her gaze still rests on something else. He looks at her for just a short moment, confirming her existence and that she is listening. He keeps talking. what is being said seems very far away. He is, too, when he's looking at her. It is better they don't look at each other. She knows that he's here, he has penetrated the glass ball that she moves around in and that separates her from the world and the world from her. She wonders if he also has a glass ball that stands between the world and him. It could be important. Only a few people have a glass ball. The others are surrounded by brick walls and wooden fences with nails and waterfalls and soapy bubbles and cars. Cars, too. Those are the ones who don't know any better. Her glass ball is frail and transparent. Sometimes she bumps into it slightly, from the inside. but breaking it would be dangerous. It takes a long time for the glass ball to mend. It does mend, she knows that. But how and when she doesn't know. It could be changed, strange and its transparency diminished. That's what she is scared of most: The glass could become milky white and block her view of the world. She'd be trapped.

There are no rules, no laws inside the glass ball. There is just her and no time, no gravity. She can't determine whether other people recognise glass balls just by looking at them. She searches for them in their eyes, the way they move, when she hears their voices and when she sings their songs. And she hopes that someone will try to find her glass ball and succeed. She wishes for it bad on this night in the summer that is a thousand summer nights and never ends and stands still forever.

He has broken it. Slowly it fell apart. She realizes that now. She is floating and can't find her direction. She doesn't know where her glass ball ends and where her fingertip is touching it. Or where he got in, if she and her glass ball still exist, if they melted into one, maybe they were never even separated, maybe she just made everything up. The thing with the glass balls. Maybe there is no beginning and no end, all summers are one and everything is sadness and beauty.

How is she supposed to know? And how is he?

**DALE ADAMS**  
**THE WHISPERER**

*What's in a whisper? A soft sound, a sound like the sensation of a spider crawling on your skin. Just a sound? No, the very susurrations of hell!*

I was blissfully unaware of this the day I got married. I took the hand of my beloved in a churchyard in autumn, the leaves golden and red all around us, falling and drifting in a wind which seemed to caress my face. The church bells seemed to me that day to chime the promise of a new and happy future.

How was I to know at the time that my newly wedded wife heard in them the hollow clanging of the door to a tomb?

It was in our wedding night that she first awoke screaming. Until dawn she sobbed something about a *whisper* which had come to her in her dreams. From that night on her eyes were not those of the woman I had married.

Night after night she twisted and thrashed in her sleep. Sometimes she would sob, sometimes gasp for breath. Mostly she would murmur. The largest part of her fitful nightly mumbling was incoherent to me. The little I could understand, however, filled my heart with a nameless dread: "... his hollow eyes! ... His hands, oh my god, *his hands* ... !"

No doctor, and I could afford the best of them, could offer anything in the way of assistance. They gave her a strong sedative, but she was hysterically afraid of it, screaming that if she couldn't wake up, there would be no escape. I myself was loath to administer it to her for under the influence of the drug she lay rigid, her eyes staring at the ceiling as if she were in the clutch of death. The ordeal took a toll on her health. Her skin, once as white and soft as milk, grew pallid, and her once healthy figure gaunt. The terror, ever-present in her eyes, made them seem to sink into her head. Sometimes they seemed to be desperately pleading with me as she slept open-eyed at night.

About a year after our marriage, things took a sharp turn for the worse. My wife grew so weak that she could scarcely quit her bed. Nonetheless, I often found her collapsed in a heap on the floor next to it as she frequently tried desperately to stand up anyhow.

One of the worst things, however, was that she had stopped mumbling in her sleep. She had started *whispering* instead. I could never quite make out what she was saying, although it always seemed as if I was just about to. One thing I was sure of, however: *that wasn't my wife's voice!*

I was working late one evening when I got the phone call. I had been feeling quite cheerful, for my wife had been doing a little better in the previous days. She had at least been strong enough to get up and move around the house. It

was her on the phone, though, and she didn't sound well at all. There was a tremor in her voice which seemed to stab me like an icicle of fear as, sobbing, she begged me to come home. Perhaps it was that terrified dread in her voice which made me dash from the important meeting I was in and run for the car.

Or perhaps it was the whispering I thought I heard in the background.

The house was dark when I got home, completely dark without a single light burning. That was strange. I unlocked the door and called for my wife. No answer.

I ran through the house, calling her name. Calling, eventually screaming, and never receiving a reply. Then, eventually, I came to a standstill in front of the locked door of the broom closet. We normally never locked that door.

It had been suicide. The police knew that because they had to break down the door to get in, and it had been locked from the inside. The blood was on all of the walls, and the inside of the door. It had pooled an inch deep on the floor. My wife had slashed her arms, her legs, her stomach and, finally, her throat.

*Suicide*, that's what was written in the police report. There was one thing I didn't understand, though. The knife had been clutched in her right hand, clutched so tightly they broke her fingers trying to pry it loose. *So how had she managed to slash her own right arm?*

Another thing was slightly strange, too. The fingers of her left hand, torn and scraped bloody, had been jammed agonisingly into the crack between the door and the floor. It almost looked as if she had been trying to crawl underneath it.

An image came to me; one which I did my very best to bury under the sorrow of my loss, for it chilled me to the soul. It was the image of my wife, struck by an inhuman terror, locking herself into the broom closet to hide, a knife in her hand for protection. And then for some reason mutilating her fingers in a desperate, painful, futile attempt to *get out again*.

The funeral was six days later. It was late autumn, precisely one year since our marriage, the dead leaves falling on her open grave like the tears I was unable to cry. People I had never seen in my life came to the funeral, dressed in long, black coats and broad-brimmed hats which shadowed their eyes. I left my wife in the cold clutch of a ground already coated with a layer of frost, early for that time of year, and returned to a house which from that point on would always be empty and dark.

That night I awoke to find my wife lying in bed next to me.

The moonlight streaming through a crack in the curtains fell on my figure, but not on hers. I lay there, utterly unable to move, as she stirred, her hair rustling like the sound of a shroud. She rolled over on one side, raising herself on one elbow. The moonlight fell on her face. I screamed aloud, yet the sound hardly penetrated the silence of the void which had become our bedroom.

Her face was an ashen grey, a cold pallor resting on her lips. Her eyes were empty and hollow. Her mouth opened and I saw that it contained no tongue, just a ghastly black cavity. Nevertheless, words ushered from it, the sound of which I am unable to describe. It was a horrible, scraping *whisper*.

Yes, a whisper, but if ever a whisper sounded like a scream, this was it:

*"He won't let me go!"*

I awoke with a lurch, awoke for real this time. I had only been dreaming. I lay there for several moments, my heart hammering in my chest and my breath coming in torn gasps. It was only in the morning when the sunlight crept in through the crack in the curtains that I noticed the little pool of sweat and blood dampening her pillow.

From that point on I heard the ghastly whispering wherever I went. I heard it in the rustling of the wind in the trees and in the static crackle of electricity. It was rarely coherent, but always somehow balefully foreboding. On those few occasions when I thought I could understand it, it seemed to be whispering my name.

In time I grew gaunt and haggard, wild-eyed and dishevelled. People at work noted the marked difference in me and I suppose they tried to help. I shut myself off from everyone, however, trying to have as little as possible to do with fellow mankind. To this end I became uncivil and uncouth, not encouraging anyone to waste more words on me than absolutely necessary. No one understood why, of course. The truth was that I was driven by an unspeakable fear; a dread bordering on phobia, that some face I had previously considered familiar would turn toward me, its eyes suddenly hollow and empty, and begin to speak to me in a *whisper*.

This went on for a year. I had become almost unrecognisable to those I had once considered my friends, a cadaverous scarecrow of a man with sunken eyes that constantly flickered about, never coming to rest. Then, roughly around the anniversary of my wife's death, I was walking down an empty street late of an evening, the chill wind scattering the last of the autumn leaves about my feet, when my mobile rang. There was the sound of soft uneven breathing as I lifted it to my ear.

"Who's there?" I queried.

"Who I am?" A whisper replied, a sound like a spider crawling on my bare skin. "Who I am is not important. Ask, rather, *where* I am?" "Where are you, then?"

"Behind you."

I span around, my heart leaping into my mouth. There was, however, no one but me in the empty street.

"No," the voice whispered, and this time it didn't come from the mobile, but really from directly behind me." You don't understand. Whichever way you turn, I am *always* behind you. Do you miss your wife ? Never fear, I can take you to her."

I flung the phone from me and began to run. The wind seemed to echo hollow laughter as I pelted down the street. I didn't stop running until I had reached my home.

The house is as dark and empty as it has been since the awful death of my wife. My breathing, coming in gasps and pants as an effect of my panicked run, seems to be swallowed up by the gloom. Suddenly something snaps and crackles in the dark. The radio. *What ... how ... ?* It wasn't even plugged in. A voice emerges *Oh, Horrors of hell!* speaking in a whisper, speaking my name. No, *calling* my name! *Come!* It whispers.

"Leave me alone!" I scream.

*Alone ... alone ...* the whisper mocks eerily. *You're all alone.*

Spinning, I snatch the nearest weapon available, a six-inch kitchen knife lying on the counter, and stumble away from the radio. I find a place to hide, slamming the door and locking it behind me. I sit in the pitch-blackness, trembling throughout my entire frame, certain that the wild thumping of my heart is reverberating through the broom closet.

*Broom closet?* Dread piercing my chest like the knife I hold clutched in my hand, I realise just which part of my house, driven half-mad by panic, I have chosen for my hiding-place.

I feel a cold touch on the back of my neck. A voice whispers in my ear.

*"Dark in here, isn't it?"*

<b>ANDREA T. ARIMAN</b>
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### ICE-SKATING LOVE

Licked by winter, all lies frozen.  
The silent moon, full and shining,  
brightens lake and snowy hills,  
reflects itself, lights lake's surface.

The air holds breath, branches don't move,  
then, out of the bushes, two smooth shadows glide  
gracefully onto the silvery lake:  
circling like feathers in soft swirling wind.

They waltz around and around without rest,  
once dancing solo, and later as mates,  
flying and turning, then spinning and melting  
first slowly then steadily into just one.

The speed increases, the movements grow quicker,  
the shadows seem stronger against the bright night,  
they rise and fall, an act of power,  
until they are peaceful, and silent is all.

### **GLORIOUS GOVERNOR**

*While you are knitting socks to send your son  
His face is trodden deeper in the mud.*

*- Siegfried Loraine Sassoon: "Glory of Women"*

You herald eternal freedom,  
establishing growing fear;  
preach justice, triumph of democracy,  
creating culminating casualties.  
You daydream of abolishing evil,  
devouring dark-eyed desserts;  
try to convert orient into occident,  
changing children to soldiers, to corpses.  
You claim to eliminate enemies,  
wiping your butt with the bearded man's picture.  
Your clumsy lips sing the star-spangled banner  
inviting shells to splatter your brain.  
While you advocate war till peace  
we will by dying, dying till - Death.

## **BRYCE CANYON V**

Mountain ridges red,  
tree tops green and blue, blue sky  
make me pause in awe.

## **BRYCE CANYON III**

Immense stalagmites:  
most craftily crafted art  
by The Great Artist.

<p><b>CHRISTINE RITZ</b> <b>SALLY</b></p>
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She wakes up with a start, barely biting back a terrified scream. Her silvery negligée is clinging to her body, drenched in cold sweat. Heart still pounding, her eyes slowly focus on the blood - red numbers of the alarm - clock. 3.37 a.m.

'Thank God I haven't woken him' - that thought calms her down a little. She can see his silhouette against the soft white surface of the pillow, the sharp lines of his face outlined by the diffuse yellowy gleam of the streetlamps that is seeping through the blinds.

Nothing worse than to feel his cold, scrutinizing stare on her face - he does not seem to trust her anymore these days, especially after the breakdown she had a few days ago.

Tom had invited his boss and wife home that evening. He had, of course, repeatedly told her how important the soiree was for his career. His bloody career. All he could think about. Treating her like a child, putting on that infuriatingly patronizing air.

She had played along with it. Showing off her dark blue cocktail dress with the elaborate cleavage at the back which Tom used to find so sexy.

The guests had seemed to be enjoying her 'gratin dauphinois', all the while keeping up polite, entirely nonsensical dinner-conversation.

Until that carefully painted face under the blonde perm had turned towards her, mouth - ruby-red - slightly puckered, spitting out the fatal question ... .



She had only seen the red-rimmed hole moving like a fish's mouth behind thick glass, moving towards her, threatening to eat her, destroy her - her ears had suddenly filled with a piercing noise that increased steadily, unbearable, pounding, oppressive - her head like a balloon threatening to burst. She had stood up with a violent jerk, her chair crashing to the floor behind her.

Then she had begun to scream

The scene that had followed was hazy in her memory. She must have run upstairs into their bedroom, slamming the door shut behind her, while Tom, her perfect husband, had complimented the guests out of their house - undoubtedly telling lies about her 'unstable condition' and how they needn't worry, the doctor had said it was only temporary, certainly due to too much stress ...

And then his footsteps on the stairs. The door opening with a bang. His face flushed, eyes blazing, veins standing out on his neck like cables, moving in on her, slamming her against the wall, hard. Once. Twice. Yelling.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?! This was my only chance to get that position - do you think they'll want me now they think my wife's a fucking lunatic? You need to be careful, do you understand? Fucking damn ca - re - ful. If you ever, *ever*, do anything like that again, I swear to you I'll send you to the madhouse!" His breath hitting her face, his hands claspings her arms, hard, hurting her. Then he let go. Turned around and was gone. He always did that. Went to the pub to drink and forget.

She must have sat there for a long time, slumped against the wall, shivering, teeth chattering, tears streaming down her face.

At some point that night, she must have dragged herself to bed and fallen asleep, for she remembers waking up to her husband's drunk snoring.

Her husband. That term nearly makes her giggle. She bites back the hysterical laughter that is bubbling in her throat. That man she is sharing a bed with couldn't be more alien to her. Like in one of those films where the heroine loses her memory and wakes up next to a total stranger.

She gropes for the small vial on her bedside table. Her hand clasped round the cool glass, she shakes out one of the pills inside it. Hesitating. What if ... Tipping the bottle back and closing it, she gulps down the tablet, washes it down with some water and waits for blackness to come.

"It's seven a.m. Gooood Morning!" The cheerful voice finds its way through her dreams, waking her up. The splashing, mingled with a hardly recognizable version of 'I'm singing in the rain' tells her that Tom is taking a shower. She quickly puts on her clothes - she doesn't like it anymore if he watches her dress - and climbs down the narrow staircase, right hand caressing the banister's smooth wooden surface, to prepare coffee and toast.

While Tom, hidden behind his paper, is gulping down his cup of coffee, making those odd little slurping noises she has come to hate, she is contemplating

her fingernails, only waiting for him to leave. Doesn't look up when he pushes his chair back. Still not talking to her. Chastizing her as always. As if she was a little four-year-old one could just send into a corner.

When the door finally slams shut, she lets out a relieved rush of air, and like a balloon that has been punctured, she slumps onto her chair.

They had come from a friend's party that night. He hadn't let her drive although he'd had too much to drink. His irritability - always pronounced when he was drunk - had prevented her from insisting. The one time she had actually tried to stand up to him was still too fresh in her memory, people asking her about the bruises on her face and arms, her stupid mumbling about how she fell down the cellar stairs - whoopsy-daisy, stupid little me.... But that night she had been able to feel his anger coming down on her, surrounding her, threatening like an imminent thunderstorm. She had tried to draw herself into her protective shell, but his mindless accusations had still reached her, cut her like pieces of broken glass.

Shaking, she takes a sip of her now-cold coffee, tucks a random strand of hair back behind her ear.

Then the noise in her head is back. Barely audible at first. Slowly increasing. Menacing. And then her whole brain seems to be pulsating with that shrill screeching. Finally, a full thud, like a ripe fruit bursting on the ground with the impact of falling, THE THUD. Glass showering down in disgustingly merry, christmassy clinking cacophonies. Blood seeping through cracks in the windshield. The curved hump on the hood. Motionless. Clad in grey cloth. A hitchhiker who had stood on the curb.

She had been unable to move at first. Tom had opened the Renault's door and felt the hitchhiker's pulse. Then he had dragged him off the hood and, shouldering the limp body like a sack of potatoes, carried their victim to the rear end of the car. A click as he opened the boot. Another thud, softer than the first one, when he dropped the body into the boot. Then the metallic bang of the lid shutting.

When he began scraping the shattered glass of the windshield together with his shoe, she realized that he wouldn't go to the police. He had always been cunning, had always known how to avoid unpleasant situations. He must have thought that his only way out of this was to clear away the evidence, and that was what he did that lazy summer night he had had too much to drink.

She knew there was no way she could protest - he was capable of harming her in his present state of mind. So she had kept sitting there, squeezed into a ball like a hedgehog, wanting to dissolve into thin air.

He had driven to the nearest lake, got into one of the old boats on the shore and dumped the corpse somewhere - not until filling the poor man's pockets and large backpack with stones to ensure he would not float up to the surface.

Then he had driven home, instructed her - using methods that left colorful bruises to hide - to keep quiet about the incident and hidden their car in the garage, where he repaired it the night after.

She realizes that she is shaking and that she has spilled the contents of her mug on her lap. How can he live his life as if nothing had happened when she is totally thrown out of hers? As she changes her trousers for some clean ones and puts the soiled pair away, she has an odd little moment of total clarity in her head in which she knows she has to end it. And there is only one way to go about it. Suddenly, she feels as if the weight she has been nearly crushed under for the past weeks had dissolved. Her old, clear-thinking self is back. She is going to do what she has to do, and she is going to do it now.

Humming, almost surprised to hear her cheerful voice, she sets about her daily task of cooking - chicken casserole, his all-time favourite. How sad she won't be there to watch him eat it. It is her night out, the night she spends with her sewing - circle. She leaves the dish in the oven, leaves her usual note and spends the few hours she has before it is time to leave with her duties of house-cleaning and reading her favourite magazine. It is the first time she really enjoys her night with her friends in a long time. How odd, the way decisions influence your behaviour.

Her friend Jane drives her back home, and they have one of those serious talks about their husbands - Jane's keeps gambling and never comes home in the evenings - so that she is able to tell her friend about Tom's odd behaviour. She tells Jane that she suspects him of clandestinely seeing a lover. It feels good to have Jane's heartfelt commiseration, and it feels even better to know that the news of Tom's supposed romance will be spreading through town faster than you can say 'Indiana Jones'.

As she had hoped, Tom has not left the kitchen table - his head is half-buried in the casserole. The new rat poison has proved its effectiveness.

Stuffing her limp better half into a giant plastic bag is more difficult than she had imagined, and by the time she has dragged the bag to the freezer, she is drenched in sweat, but she never feels remorse - relief is all that floods through her in great waves. The soft click of the freezer's door closing is music to her ears. Now she only needs to pack away his clothes - she is going to anonymously donate them to some non-profit organisation and throw away the rest of his stuff - only leaving behind some random articles so her grief about him leaving her will appear genuine.

She takes a long shower, gets into her pink, fluffy dressing-gown (the one she hadn't been able to wear because Tom said it was childish) and settles on the sofa with a glass of red wine in her hand. She picks up the phone, dials a number.

"Hi mum, it's me. Tom left me." And faking the odd sniffle every once in a while, she settles back comfortably to her mother's consoling voice.-

**MATTHIAS REISSMANN**  
**THE ITSY-BITSY SPIDERS...**

When I look back at the days of my past, I notice that I had a decent, almost ordinary life. Which means, you must be able to call the life of a weak, skinny nerd and all-time favourite target of every bully in town 'ordinary'!!!

And no, I'm not exaggerating!

Since my first day in kindergarten, I was tortured, humiliated, mutilated and insulted with all the cruelty only kids are capable of.

Worst of all, I don't even know why.

And the adults were no better. Whenever the other kids mistreated me, they looked away, pretending not to see anything that could spoil the perfect image of their boys being the nicest young men in the world.

My own parents also did nothing to help me against the others. The only thing they always said to me was "Just let them do their work, Mickey and don't fight back. When they notice your lack of reaction they'll go away and leave you in peace."

Well, I tried to follow my parent's advice. It only made things worse. The boys, noticing I wouldn't do anything against them, had the confirmation that they could do with me whatever they'd thought up in their twisted minds.

Leave me in peace, huh?

Leave me in pieces would be more like it.

By the way, Mickey, that is my name. Mickey Dean in full.

At the age of thirteen, I had acquired an understanding for my situation.

Those boys came from families who had one thing in common: Influence. They controlled most parts of my hometown. Everything else had been left for the mayor.

On the other hand, my parents were people with as much as influence to control what they could read in the morning newspaper. They lived by the creed that when a person with more influence than you tells you to jump from the next bridge, do as he or she bids.

If that style of life was okay for them, well, fine! But that doesn't mean it would be okay for me!

Nevertheless, until the age of sixteen, my life was an unendurable hell.

But then, one hot summer day, everything changed.

Everything.....

I was walking down 5th Avenue in Burgin Hills, Texas. It was hot, nearly 100° Fahrenheit, if I recall the thermometer correctly.

The 5th belonged to the south part of Burgin Hills, which was mainly industrial area. Next to us was the big fence of the junkyard.

With 'us' I refer to Walter Gherkin, a guy of my age, living next door. It would be too much to call Walter a friend, but he was someone I could talk to. Needless to say, he had never helped me when I was in trouble, just because with one of those bullies who was having a bad day and needed to pump up his moral by beating me into non-existence.

But afterwards, he was there with a first-aid kit, due to his over-paranoid mother, who would take him into the Emergency Room every time he had a little dot of mud on his face.

But only after everyone, including bullies, spectators and possible witnesses, was gone and there was only me, him and a whole lot of blood.

Walter was ten inches smaller than me, had short dark hair, was definitely overweight and carried really over-sized specs.

I, as already mentioned, was a skinny boy with red hair.

We were still walking down the 5th and talking about the upcoming summer vacations.

"You going on a trip?" Walter asked.

"Nope. My parents got their vacation cancelled by their bosses. Extra work to be done. They even thanked them for ruining their only free time in the world. What about you?" I replied.

"Mine are sending me to a place called 'Camp Chippewa'. Somewhere in South Dakota, I think. My mother declined sixty summer-camps until she found one with the lowest percentage of injuries and sicknesses."

"Mhm."

We kept walking in silence, passing by a big opening in the fence. I have never known why we were on 5th, but that is not important anymore. Maybe just because I thought we could avoid the bullies by disappearing into the vast industrial area.

That was an illusion.

Suddenly, two pairs of strong arms grabbed Walter and me from behind. Before anyone could mutter a scream, they closed our mouths with their hands. As fast as they had surprised us, they dragged us through the opening in the fence. While I was used to these attacks already, I felt much more sorry for Walter. What would his mother say if she knew?

"Hello, Bug boy!"

Oh, this is gettin' better and better by the second.

If those bullies had a system of ranking, then this guy who had just greeted my as 'bug boy' would be their leader, their head-figure, their messiah, their.....whatever.

Brent Taylor.

Athletic, powerfully built, with blonde hair and the face of a greek statue. And he was Star Quarterback.

He was the one that chose me as the main target. Every new kind of torture, humiliation, mutilation or insult, he'd come up with it. The one who gets everything, when I get nothing, it was him.

He was also the one that started calling me the 'bug boy'. Later, I found out that in his deranged head, everyone he took as a nerd had to have a fashion for insects.

Oh, how I hated him.

I hated him with every molecule in my body.

I hated him enough to stuff his head into a micro-wave oven.

"So, trying to have some fun without asking for permission, are we?"

"Hi Brent!" I answered sourly.

One of the thugs Brent needs to have around as his personal rearguard, slapped me with a right backhand. Suddenly I tasted blood.

"It would be wiser, and more nerd-like, to answer my questions correctly, if you want to go home with all your teeth still in your mouth. That means..." he paused for a moment, "if I let you go home!" The thugs together burst simultaneously in a sycophantic laughter for a moment, then they fell silent again.

"So, again, are we trying to have some fun without asking for permission?"

Maybe it was the hot day and the situation, or maybe just simple precognition, but I knew at this moment that we weren't going to get out of this intact. So it meant 'go to hell' with surviving.

"If we are, why should we have asked you?" I said with an ironic smile in my voice.

Somehow this must have caused a kind of overheating in Brent (he can't stand any criticism); in an instant he appeared in front of me so I could smell his stomach-turning breath. "Because I'm the main man when it's about having fun. There's no party in town, no celebration and no orgy I do not know of, have organised, or am invited to as the guest of honour. That's why you should have asked me!" he said with a dangerous sound. "You have just earned yourself a punishment I have especially created for you. But this has to wait. First, I have to take care of more important stuff."

That surprised me. Normally, there was nothing more important for Brent than laying hand on me. Except for ...

Walter!

I tried to fight myself free of the thugs holding me, but I was too weak. Brent moved in front of Walter, and kicked him straight in his belly. The sudden

pain made Walter nearly collapse. He got down on his knees, his face pale with pain.

"Didn't I make it clear that no one, I mean no one, should befriend him!" Brent asked Walter while pointing at me. "Now you will face really dire consequences!"

Addressing himself to the thugs holding Walter, he said only two frightening words, "Flush him!"

No, this can't be. The last one sentenced to be flushed had never returned. Walter started to cry, but Brent kicked him again, this time in the face, which rendered Walter unconscious and made blood pour freely out of his nose. The thugs then carried him away.

Brent returned his attention back to me. "And now for the main plate!" With that, he produced a little glass jar from nowhere. Inside the jar, I could see a spider moving around, trying to escape that glass prison. "The name 'bug boy' already says that you like bugs. You like them so much you could eat them, don't you? So I'm going to make you eat a bug for free!"

That's it? That is his special punishment for me? Eating a living spider. That sucks. I had to do worse things for Brent already. Besides, a spider is not a bug, it's an arachnid. It has eight legs. Bugs only have six.

With great care, Brent took the spider out of the jar. He moved near me, but then stopped like he had forgot something. "Wait a second. Something is missing. Do you know what?" he asked his thugs.

"The sauce, Brent! The sauce is missing!" they answered simultaneously again.

"You're right! I forgot the sauce!" he said, giggling slightly. Brent turned around and went to a rusty barrel, with a symbol on it that made my heart sink. It was a barrel full of toxic waste.

Eating a living spider was one thing. Eating a living spider covered in toxic waste was totally another.

I must have passed out for a short time. The next thing I recall was Brent holding the spider in front of my face. It was covered with a slimy green mud.

"Any last words, before dinner?" Brent asked.

With something like cold fury in my face, I asked, "Why, you bastard? Why?"

Brent smiled, "Nature's law, bug boy. The mammals eat the bugs!" Then in a business-like tone, "Open his pie hole!"

Before I could fight back, the thugs had opened my mouth and Brent had put the spider in it. With a hard slap on my back, they made me swallow it. I felt it, going down my throat, right into my stomach, where the toxic waste began its horrible work. In an instant, I felt slightly dizzy, than it felt like there was boiling

lava moving around in my bloodstream. Agony beyond agony. When the pain reached my head, I passed out.

Coming back to life, I noticed that Brent and his thugs were gone, but so was Walter. If my wristwatch, which they strangely hadn't stolen, still worked right, I could only have been unconscious for not more than one hour. Somehow I survived the toxic waste. But I didn't care about anything now. I only wanted to go home.

Nothing unusual happened the next few days. Besides Walter's mother, who was hysterical when Walter didn't come home. They'd found him dead the next day in the school toilet. His mother had gone catatonic.

Brent was also surprised that I had survived the toxic waste. But he was only happy that his main bullying target had survived.

As said before, nothing unusual happened. Then one morning I was in the bathroom, looking at the mirror. I felt the urge to yawn, I did yawn - and saw eight small red dots in my mouth, forming a circle.

I closed my mouth as fast as possible, opened it again and the dots were gone. Some kind of daydream, I thought. I got dressed, ate my breakfast sandwich and left for school.

On the way there I bumped into Lavonia Ashbin, Barbie-look-alike, cheerleader-chieftainness and schoolyard-bitch. And Brent Taylor's girl-friend, by the way.

I have to say that I never had much affection for girls, maybe due to the fact that they never had much affection for me.

"Oh, hello bug boy! Did you hear that your lover wobbling-Walter has drowned, while he was trying to drink out of the school-toilet?"

That was it! Her words had awakened something deep inside me. Everything that came up next, I did and knew totally instinctively, like breathing.

With lightning-like speed I moved towards her and grabbed her shoulders. Due to her wearing a shoulder-free top, my fingernails pierced her skin, injecting a slightly paralysing poison in her body. Before she could even scream, she was unable to move.

I brought my face close to hers and, without any problems, forced open her mouth. I opened mine too-

And a tarantula-sized spider came out of my mouth. It entered hers, struggled a bit to get through her small mouth and then vanished. She started to twitch as if she had had an electric shock, then stood still.



As if it was a signal, dozens, no, hundreds of spiders of every size and colour came out from everywhere of my body, my nose, my ears, my eye sockets and of course my mouth. Somehow I knew there were thousand.

The same way they had left my body they entered Lavonia's, except for the eye sockets.

Meanwhile, I saw the whole process from somewhere above us.

The next thing I saw again with real eyes was how my body, now nothing more than skin and clothes, fell on the ground like fresh linen.

And I had taken over Lavonia's body.

The polluted spider Brent had forced me to eat had dissolved my inner organs, my intestines, my bones, veins, arteries, hell, even my brain into a thousand spiders, living inside human skin, imitating my body's functions.

Don't ask me why I know this.

Then I felt something new.

In an instant, I recognized it as Lavonia's memories. With hyper-speed I raced through her life, a life full of arrogance, richness and spoilt thoughts, it made me nearly vomit.

Then I found an interesting piece about Brent.

His name brought me back to reality. And the knowledge of my new powers.

Brent.

He had to pay.

Pay for my life.

Pay for a life he had intentionally hacked to pieces.

Pay for Walter.

Pay.

And then, like a wink of fate he came round the corner.

"Hi, Honey!" he shouted.

I smiled.

But he didn't notice the style of my smile.

Brent came near and tried to kiss me, but I held him back and asked,

"What were you saying again, about mammals eating insects, you bastard?"

Brent was stunned momentarily.

Myself, I discovered surprised, that I had spoken the last two words in my own voice, not Lavonia's.

Cool!

I could shift between voices.

"B-, b-, b-, bug boy?" Brent mumbled the first thing he could think of.

Getting hold of his jacket, I held him up in the air. "For the last time, bastard! My name is Mickey!"

"But how....?"

"Don't you remember the toxic waste covered spider you made me swallow? It had a most interesting effect!"

"What did you do to Lavonia?"

"The bitch? She ain't here no more I'm afraid. I took control! As I'm gonna do with you!"

I moved his face to the same position as Lavonia's had been. "But there is something I got to tell you. Did you know that Lavonia was only had been your girl-friend because her parents made her date you? You, son of the most influential family in town? No you didn't. And she faked every orgasm!"

With those words I opened his mouth without any problem.

"Say aaaahh....."

That was then. This is now.

It's now nearly ten years since I took over Brent's body. The following years I used it to systematically destroy Brent's life and image. At the end he had no friend nor any support from anyone and his family was hated, despised and hunted all over Texas. After that I left Burgin Hills.

I really got accustomed quite fast to my new powers and my situation. I do not pity myself. All my life I was despised, beaten and unwanted. Now, as a double repay I can live the life of anyone, with all their strength and abilities.

Until now I have already lived the live of around 600 different men, women and children. But I never forgot what Brent had said about mammals eating insects. Because it ain't true any more.

The predator called mankind, the only animal capable of killing for the sheer fun of it, had been degraded to second in rank in the food chain. They are now mere prey for something stronger.

Me.

Whenever I need to or want to I hunt among them.

I am the spider-god.

I am death on eight thousand legs.

Oh!

Did you see that blonde girl walking down the street?

Yum-yum.

*Dinner-Time!!!*



**PATRICIA GARCIA**  
**MY CHARACTER**

It started when she began to ask too many questions to the mirror.

Since she was a little child, Eve had always been attracted by shiny surfaces. She liked staying in front of any object which reflected her image. It was fascinating to be aware that if she moved her head to the right and then to the left, if she smiled or opened her eyes and closed them, her image did exactly the same without any resistance.

Her favourite place was a small lake not far from where she lived.

As if it was the most intimate part of her, she kept it a secret from anybody who could threaten the mystery of the area.

Most of the days, after school, she took her bike and pedalled energetically to reach the place. Alone. Then, she calmly approached the water, which seemed to be located there just so that she could discover something.

She could remain for hours, hypnotised by her own projection on the rippling surface. With one finger, she systematically caressed her face: her hair, her forehead, her eyebrows, her eyes, her nose, her cheeks, her chin.

Maybe Eve was just reflecting a common teenage insecurity.

Maybe it was also normal that sometimes the fragile strands that bound her to the image, broke. Surprised-paralysed-enraged.

As if she was possessed, she took the first object she could find and destroyed the image. The projection dispersed in circumferences that dilated until they couldn't be seen anymore.

After some years, the caressing process became a necessity.

Eve started to spend most of her time by the lake but this isolated place couldn't fulfil her.

So she looked for more help in order to ensure that she existed, that the projection belonged to her, that she could create it and make it disappear, that she was in charge of herself: "That's me, that's me..." she repeated in each reflection.

Soon, it couldn't be called a necessity anymore but an obsession.

The "that's me"-ritual was executed on any shiny surface: each puddle, each shop-window bewitched her. She couldn't walk calmly and relaxed through the town as it seemed that someone had put all these mirrors there to capture her image. She could see herself projected in the people's faces, which turned to her when she crossed the street.

Why are all these people staring at my character all of a sudden?

Is she not normal?

Chaos shaking in her head, threatening her integrity.

One of those days, after the early morning shower, she stood, paralysed, in front of the bathroom-mirror. She extended her index finger and deepened it into one of her cheeks.

The words came out automatically. "That's me, that's...me....," but it had never been so difficult for her to pronounce them. This time there was some resistance.

Her breath, slowly accelerating, was directing the rhythm of the eyes to dilate.

As if being lit up by a fourth mirror dimension, they opened wide and her lips crumbled. Her index finger turned round 180°, like a weather-vane: "And...that's you," she murmured caressing the cold surface. The hair, the forehead, two eyebrows, two eyes, a nose, two cheeks, a chin.

"Who are you?" "Why are you looking at me this way?"

How did the image manage to get out of my character?

This was the beginning, or maybe it had already begun.

After this first encounter, she started to get used to this image and with time it started to whisper to her. The voices appeared even when it was not visible and they were becoming clearer, meaningful.

Sometimes, when she was sitting next to the bus-window, the neon-lights would bring the image again. She stood looking at it, as if trying to recover what belonged to her, but immediately the image answered with a wink, which showed her her loss of power and her vulnerability.

Often, at night, when the streets were empty, she could see a shadow following her, the same rhythm of steps behind her, until it would dominate her feet. Then it would force her to admit her subordination.

Always, during the day, when the streets were full, she could feel someone persecuting her, or maybe not someone but everybody, and my poor character would feel under pressure from their gaze, so that finally she would admit her weakness.

Maybe Eve was just crazy.

Crazy?

Maybe?

Eve?

Somehow, she learned to live with this fear. But one day, unfortunately, someone else violated Eve's chaos.

She switched the TV on in the living-room. A man was reporting the latest news. But his speech was not distant. He was addressing her, he had been waiting for her to turn it on, so that he could have someone to talk to.

Her mum came in and discovered her conversing with the reporter.

"What are you doing?"

"He was asking me," Eve replied simply.

Isn't it simple?

Why do people want to make things more complicated?

Her mum found it alarming.

Eve was immediately taken to psychiatrists, who assured her that the TV incident was always the clearest sign.

This was the start of a nightmare for my character.

She was taken to a clinic and jailed with people who pitied her.

Living together with thousands of dilated eyes, and ingesting pills frenetically was supposed to help her to recover reality, even though she felt more as though she was losing it.

Days, months, years and the voices lost their intensity until they disappeared. She seemed to be reconciled with her image again, which hadn't made any sign of self-life for a long time.

The strands seemed to be tight again.

Everything seemed to be returning to normality.

So, when she was back home and switched the TV on and the morning show started and the man said: "Hellooo!!! How do you feel todaaayyyyy?!", she couldn't help answering aloud: "Fine."

END

*To the reader:*

*To understand my character completely, you should stay in front of a mirror staring at your image. You might notice that after a while, it loses its familiarity and becomes more and more a stranger.*

*But be careful! If your finger starts to doubt and it turns round 180°, you are going to be called a schizophrenic and if you write about it, you might not be able to distinguish the limits between your character and yourself.-*



**JENS GEORG RYMĚŠ**  
**SOMATOLYSIS**

*i'm a vampire  
you're a vampire, too*

(Pet Shop Boys)

Asphyxiation came like the tide. And as he braced himself, his stomach convulsed and he plunged into free fall. His hands grappled with the air and his chest heaved as he tried to get the load off, the weight that was pressing all the oxygen out of his body. He felt it oozing out of every capillary. Merely a thin wheezing sound left his lips as he gasped for air. Stars exploded before his eyes, which, he noticed, had been closed all the time.

When finally they snapped open, he was looking up at the window overhead, which was glowing a dim gray in the dark. Still sick with fear and with the feeling of free falling in his throat he quickly sucked his chest full of air. Images from his dream were bobbing in the half-light. He saw a familiar street again. Shapes in the dark: triangular conifers and wooden houses, with lanterns on the front porches. A driveway.

A driveway. Or perhaps some kind of back alley. Hedges reaching over a wooden fence. Sick, harsh contrasts: sodium light - or a matinee of German expressionism at the movies? Tough call. A garden at night and a tool shed. Or gazebo.

Awkwardly, like César the Somnambulist tracking his way along the walls, he tried to trace the pictures back to a spot that would make them snap into place, so it would all make sense again. Step by step he tried to backtrack from one image to another, trying to remember where the hinges and the connections were. All he got was a hopeless jumble, a loop that reiterated itself over and over, devoid of any meaning or message: freeze-frame streets, dusty parking lots, square, ducked buildings against a cloudy sky. A driveway. Or something like it. Some kind of fence, maybe?

Already, he felt it all ebbing away, diminishing. He tried to get a grip on what it was that had made him wake up in the middle of the night, tried to grasp that feeling of clarity and transparency of his asthmatic seizure, the feeling of how he had thought that it suddenly all came together.

'Some time I'll have to write it down,' he thought, sensing faint sunlight through closed eyelids.

He had spent the night with the same bad old dream. A dream that came with a vague knowledge about its true nature, coupled with a pang of helplessness. He had been half awake, knowing that he was dreaming but unable to do anything about it, caught in a dim bed sheet limbo.

He remembered walking through the city streets, past many familiar places - given always that he hadn't just dreamed that familiarity - towards a destination, homing in. He couldn't recall any of it now, except a blurry amalgamate of images: places he had seen during his night-time walk, and the shape of the girl's face. It would loom up wherever he went, rising into focus to reveal smeared make-up around the eyes like dark pits under a mass of black bed head hair.

He opened his eyes and he was still in bed where he had started the night. As if with antennas that sensed body warmth and carbon dioxide he sensed the girl lying next to him, behind his back, where he couldn't see her.

'Some time I'll have to write it all down,' he thought, when the dream had returned yet another time. He had tossed around in the dark, searching the floor beside the bed - merely a mattress on the thick carpet - trying to get hold of something to write on. He heard her stirring next to him, and he froze, taking slow shallow breaths. He smelled the stale air and the humid warmth that emanated from their bodies and the creased bed sheets. He waited until he was sure she was fast asleep again.

There was a new picture in the museum foyer. When he first looked at the photograph, it looked like a close-up of wet stone and some rotting algae. It was square, about 6 feet in height. The pattern of gray, black and green looked like a giant loogie spat against the white walls of the vestibule. He had seen the picture on placards and flyers advertising the exhibition.

He slowly took two steps to the left, eyes fixed on the photograph; he tilted his head a little and saw that it was a giant toad perched on a rock. The tiny tag next to the picture read: 'Somatolysis: blurring of body outlines. Its camouflage coloration seems to make the animal's body melt into the background, hiding it from predators and prey.'

He stepped back to the right, but the toad was still there. He tried moving his head backwards and then he walked to other side of the room, trying different angles, but the toad would not go away. He could not remember what the picture had looked like before.

When he probed the hazy muddled pictures he was left with, he sensed a slight tremor of fear. He saw himself pulling at the neck of his T-shirt, and recalled an asthmatic pressure on his chest, as if the bedroom had been drained of all oxygen.

He heard wheezing and heavy breathing, somebody suffocating and he wasn't sure if it was him or not.

One night he put a ball pen and two sheets of paper next to his bed.

"What's that about?" the girl asked.

"Nothing," he replied.

She undressed slowly and got into bed. The covers rustled as she slipped in. He cocooned himself into the sheet as he always did and rolled over to his side of the mattress. The nights were warm but he always felt cold in bed. Through half-closed eyes he reassured himself that pen and paper were in place. A new moon was shining through the window about nine feet above, shedding a soft silvery glow.

She switched on her bedside light. He knew she was leaning against the wall, her pillow behind her back, a half read book on her knees. If he turned his head he would be able to see her little nose and her chin sticking out behind black curls. Maybe her lips, too, slightly opened and from time to time moving to form silent words as she ran an elegant finger along somebody's replica.

He closed his eyes, trying to shut out the light of her lamp, which felt unnerving, inappropriate, nauseating and harsh, and he inched slowly towards his side of the bed. He tried hard to fall asleep, though he wasn't sure whether he really wanted to.

It had rained heavily when she first came to his house. He was standing on the front porch, staring out, not sure what to do with himself. It was summer, the warm rain had thinned down to a drizzle and everything gleamed with water. Leadен clouds were perched overhead.

He had known her for some time, that is, he had seen her before. In the parking lot outside the drug store. And a couple of times on the street, catching sight of her out of the corner of his eye. She had not taken any notice of him, but her eyes and lips seemed to say she knew something he didn't know. 'She must be living somewhere in the neighborhood,' he thought and the street lights turned green, he shifted into gear and she was gone. He didn't know her name.

"You play the guitar, right?" she called to him through the drizzle. She was wearing black boots, stuck in a mud puddle; the leather looked expensive. His house was on the outer fringes of town, the streets were mere dirt tracks.

"Yeah," he shouted back. She didn't answer for a while, obviously unsure whether she should come out with what she wanted or not.

"I know a guy who plays bass," she finally said. "He has a couple of songs. They're good." Her hands were jammed in the back pockets of her blue jeans, and he still didn't know how to react and what to say. He shifted his weight uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Come on under the porch," he called. "No need to stand in the rain."



She didn't budge. "We need a guitar player," she said.

"Who sings?" he called.

"I do. I'm a good singer," she said. "I think we can earn some cash. Are you in?"

He hesitated but felt somewhat square, standing on his porch, frowning with bewilderment like a lost child. "Yes, sure," he said. "But I need to hear the songs first," he added.

"Of course you do," she said. "Come on, I'll take you to his place."

"What-now?"

"Yes, get your guitar."

He shrugged because he didn't know any better response, went into the house and got the bag with the acoustic guitar.

After work, in the afternoons, he liked to sit on the steps of the museum, the guitar on his knee, picking out the chords as they came to him and singing to himself. Usually he didn't like singing in public, but the traffic on Central, a four-lane boulevard cutting through downtown, and the noise from the stores drowned every sound he made. His own voice seemed to come from a car radio waiting at the traffic lights, then moving on, stopping and going, sometimes waxing, sometimes receding. The chords he plucked were a constant drone among the murmur and the clicking of heels.

He went back into the foyer to have another look at the toad picture. The exhibition was titled 'Out Of Sight,' but the toad wasn't: it was still sitting on its rock, not making a move.

He followed the girl through back alleys and over abandoned, weedy yards. He balanced his guitar over his head when he had to skip over mud puddles and pools. He watched her legs and her back, while she led the way, and he wished she would look at him and talk to him again. Little streams were trickling off all the roof-tops, like glass beads on strings. He wondered why she was taking back streets instead of the main roads.

"Where are we going?" he asked, and she said "It's just around the corner."

The town was quiet, it seemed half-asleep. They hardly saw anyone. There were low, one-story houses, most of them in desperate need of some fresh paint. She stopped in front of a house that didn't look any better than the others. He stepped next to her on the front porch and, feeling her proximity, his pulse speeded up a pace, something in his head was beeping like radar. She turned her face toward him; her nose was small and pointed, and she smiled warmly. "Would you like to hear me sing?" she asked. He nodded.

Inside, the house was dim; the weak, rainy light seeped in through white curtains. The bass-player came out of the kitchen. He was wearing a shirt with a

black and white checked pattern wrapped loosely around broad shoulders. He said hi.

The girl walked over to him and they kissed. They didn't take any notice of their guest. Without any further ado, the two of them walked into an adjacent room and checked shirt shut the door.

The boy put down his guitar, waiting for something to happen.

He walked into the living-room: a TV set, two worn sofas, random posters on the wall. He didn't see a bass guitar. He went back and carefully knocked on the closed door.

"Shove it," a muffled voice said.

A couple of days later she appeared at his front porch once more. The roads had dried. Her face was turned to the ground.

"What do you want?" he said.

"Can I crash here?" she asked. A small duffle bag in camouflage colors was slung around her shoulders.

He leaned against the door-frame, his thumbs tucked behind his belt, but obviously not as comfortable as he wished to be. Somewhere inside his head was a voice, distant, as if drifting back through space and time from his high school days. Loud and defiant, *you've got to be freaking kidding me.*

The girl put her bag on the wooden floor.

"Sure you can," he said.

When he thought back to that day, he often wondered if that was when the nightmares had started, but he couldn't tell for sure.

He awoke when bright light from the window above stung his eyes. His heart was still racing from the exertion of a dream he didn't remember. He listened, tuning his ears into the room, and heard her deep breathing and felt her body slowly heaving next to him. He got up and, still blind with sleep, felt for pen and paper on the floor. They were still as he had left them, but the paper was full of scrawled letters, filling both sides of the sheet. He squinted his eyes and brought the words into focus. They were directions.

He got dressed surreptitiously and jammed the sheet in his pocket. As he walked towards the door he heard her stir behind him. "Where are you going?" she asked.

He quickly picked up the guitar case that was leaning against the wall by the door frame and turned around. Her hair was a shaggy dark spot in the white bed. "I need to get new strings," he said, rather feebly, and left the room.

The lounge lay half-lit, the curtains were drawn. On the way to the front door he passed a phalanx of pictures he had put on the wall: him and the girl on the

front porch, sunbathing. The two of them skiing in Purgatory, at the balloon fiesta in Albuquerque and at a friend's party, the row ran all along the wall. He wondered how many months had passed since the first of them had been taken. He wasn't sure.

On the last picture he was holding the girl in his left arm, the other was stretched out as if trying to reach for the observer. The girl was smiling into the lens. They were somewhere in the desert, maybe at Four Corners, the light was a harsh yellow. She was wearing a tank top and a panama.

He leaned forward to discern the look in her eyes, but the shadow of the hat that lay over half of her face blurred them to two dark spots. He wished that they had turned into the light before taking the picture.

Outside, he took a deep breath, got out his notes and started to decipher them. His hands were trembling slightly with excitement.

The line said something unintelligible about a driveway. There was only one in sight-the one to his house. *Turn left* the notes said and so he did. As he walked he wished he had left the guitar case at home. It was light as ever, but a chilly wind kept ripping at the notes in his hand, and he could hardly read the directions. The sun had climbed over the roofs of the one-story houses, and the sky was tinted a cold blue.

He liked to lie in his bed, looking up through the window. He had seen the sky in all shades of light and dark and blue. As far as he could tell, it never went completely black. Even on moonless nights he could discern a tinge of gray, slate or marine. On moonlit nights, everything glowed in a bright sheen. Black and silver, a Kurosawa flick.

At first she was on top of him, but it somehow made him feel uncomfortable and put down. He couldn't let himself go, so he grabbed her arms, thrust her onto the mattress and got on top. At once he realized how tense he had been, his face relaxed, his hands let go of her wrists, and he finally felt himself sliding into a steady rhythm, losing himself in the black and silver space.

But still, there was something wrong. At first he couldn't tell. He saw the rows of her teeth shining against the dark blue backdrop of her face. He knew she was out there with him, sliding and whipping underneath, but she wasn't making any sounds. He listened into the half-light but only heard the rustling of the sheets and his heavy breathing. He tried to hold his breath, but as he moved faster his grunts only grew louder, grinding in his ears, till he felt all his hair stand on edge. He tried to force a sound out of her, annoyed and angry. A voice seemed to mingle with his breathing, again as if from an old memory. *That's not how it works*, it said in a challenging tone, with the hauteur of someone who's seen it all and who saw it all first. *Don't just sleep with her, dude - fuck her.*

The directions ended at a little stooped house at the end of a one-way street. As he stepped up to the front porch he saw that it had a big back yard, lined with hedges and a white picket fence. Several, seemingly age-old, pine trees were hiding a little wooden building; it was a tool shed or gazebo of some sort. The last word on the paper was *knock*. He walked up to the front door and tried to catch a glimpse through the windows, but he was blinded by the morning sun reflected on the glass.

He knew he must look somewhat stupid and lost, standing there with the guitar in his hand. He felt his blood rushing in his ears. What would those people say when he knocked, and what was he actually going to say. 'Excuse me, ma'am, my nightmares showed me the way to your house'? *You've got to be fucking kidding*. He would probably get shot.

He knocked.

The girl opened the door. her hair was a mess, as always. She was wearing a light night gown, and she smiled when she saw that he had brought the guitar. She seemed only mildly surprised. "Hey there," she said. "Have you come to hear me sing?"

Again, he seemed unable to reply. He fought a fit of asphyxia, but remained calm this time. (*If she's here - who's in my bedroom?*) The question was whizzing around his head like a trapped insect. He forced it down, gulping it down with all the bile and acid that had been at the back of his throat for so long.

"Yes," he mumbled. He saw her smile light up a notch.

Chequered shirt appeared behind her, putting his hands on her hips. 'Who's that,' he asked sleepily, leaning towards the door and squinting into the bright sun. He stared for a moment, wondering whether he had seen the visitor before or not.

"Shove it," he said.-

<b>DANIELA SCHNEIDER</b>
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### **SQUATTING WITH MIGHT**

it was a starry night, something was being born and dying up and out there,  
a time blurry with sounds, like prowling hyenas I said to the man next to me,  
who was smiling, he was smiling like bubbly soap,  
and vistas, somber like medieval paintings, laden and thick, the night,  
what other nights could there be, could there ever be,  
he said back to me,

shaking his silly head and hair-- acromegalic simpleton,  
his voice slurring like a cat's mushy paws,  
but he was fat, too fat really;  
so it didn't matter, and we didn't matter.

a married couple had written a poem. she read it out to us,  
while he was nibbling at his fingers, the typical newcomer tic,  
mechanically looking for foodstuff under his nails,  
some livestock that  
might, oh please, have slipped his sight earlier on,  
and I caught myself stroking my chin thoughtfully  
while I listened, while we all listened :

*we chewed our meals  
like slaves on the verge  
of seeing their  
own skin slip from  
their creaking bones  
because of meagerness. the hardship  
of never ever ever  
having enough food.  
we swallowed whole,  
and ripe, and desperately,  
nurturingly, ravenous--  
because we had to. yes,  
something told us we had  
to, lest we would starve.*

we'd been looking for a place to sit and talk, and watch the stars,  
which were not not not  
NOT fat,

just really huge, just really massy out there, but too far away to need  
something like less matter or less density or a black hole to disappear in  
(like this night, oh wonder of blackness where shapes are not important),  
or something like a diet or behavioral studies or parents who told them  
that better table manners (sitstraight!forkinlefthand-you'vehadenough!) would  
make them  
(i.e. us, little, or big, fat meaty stars)  
more beautiful, easier/more bearable to look at, nicer beings, valuable life forms,  
which means : not a waste in the face of other biota,  
but they loved us, loved us whole and naked,

and we sat, weeping, and counted the stars and wanted,  
pretty much all of us I guess,  
to go home, but not to be home;  
they were nice, and our parents, and concerned, and we called them MOM and  
DAD  
--which almost rhymes with fat, FAT like most anything, if you think about it. if  
you look at things and listen to speech from our perspective.

or maybe some of us  
had hoped to bump into late-night shoplifters,  
(shops HERE being bakeries, butcheries, delicatessen, blablabla),  
inadvertantly of course, as if WE knew where and how to shoplift,  
innocent poky chubby angels, baby-fatted all along,  
from hilly hindquarters to tube-like fingers  
(we ALL bit nails, even our group leader, who was two stages ahead of the rest of  
us-

Stage Three he once told me, though I wasn't listening, but I remember  
still because I liked his voice, so much like meatballs and floating sausages,  
SAUSAGES were always floating, before my hungry mind's eye),  
we were so lush and raw even in our clothes,  
cloaking and shading what was the most interesting fact about us,  
the vital being-our-parents'-sons-and-daughters only second-best.

I went over to talk to the group leader,  
wow what a night he said yes I said back,  
watcha been eating tonight I asked, shy but sly,  
(it's in the book, that's why I know it, not because I was listening after all,  
because I wasn't, but it's in the book, and it says something like  
STAGE THREE : YOU'VE REACHED A PHASE OF CERTAIN SELF-  
ELEVATION, KNOWING THAT TO  
EAT IS NOT TO LOVE/TO BE LOVED; YOU UNDERSTAND EATING  
WON'T FEED YOU, AND FEEDING  
YOURSELF LIKE YOUR OWN FAMILY DOG WON'T GIVE YOU WHAT  
YOU NEED; FURTHERMORE,  
YOU ARE CAPABLE OF SEEING FOOD AS SOMETHING NEUTRAL, NOT  
AUTOMATICALLY AS  
SOMETHING INTRINSICALLY GOOD/BAD. >> VERY GOOD -- READY  
FOR SECTION FOUR ???)  
what's your issue, spying on your peers he joked, though I didn't get it,  
what was so funny about food anyway ?  
we weren't talking food, but life, but still

someone, one of the utter dumbasses past cure, I suppose,  
had the thrilling idea to order pizza--  
PIZZA my love my life my everything with anything and everything,  
how I hated this sermon, this self-inflicted ordeal of a mantra,  
gone sour with too much repetition and harmful meaning,  
No wailed some Yes shrieked others,  
gulping groping for words to express the NEED  
the need for nutrition;  
we voted on no 7:4, but the pizza guy had already  
tracked us down,  
the night so deep and dark and foggy I thought we had vanished from the world,  
unseen, like bulky gorillas in the mist,  
or overweight stars hiding in nebulae,  
but he had seen us, Dian Fossey with a telescopic  
pair of night-vision binoculars,  
so fat were we-- were we so fat ?

we decided to reach for the stars a little more,  
and didn't open our traps except for speaking,  
with hushed voices, tiny voices, treading mildly between  
the distances between the greasy box and the heads lost in fantasies,  
slow voices, husky, in awe before the presence of a regal pizza,  
boxed and sulking, eager to burst forth with a spray of life's finest essences,  
and I was the first, followed by others, the man next, I stood  
and walked and approached and felt my feet shiver,  
and squatted on it. on the pizza. put my ass on the pizza and sat;  
I giggled, half with fear, or stage nervousity,  
like taking a proverbial dump  
on something so worshipped and sliced.

so that night we sat on the pizza, taking ourselves out of focus,  
dreaming cherry-dreams of pillars in the woods,  
naked bodies strapped to them, pigs for the feast,  
(silky soot shmeared on those proudly abashed bodies,  
to make them tastier, to teach them something about  
TABLE MANNERS),  
the thighs and biceps so soft and full the ants would sigh,  
and I thought wow it's true,  
it was good we had each other as guides through streets  
and forced-upon patterns and dreaded gatherings of tasty anticipating saliva and  
star signs,

sitting on the cooling pizza, neglecting the smell of morning  
bound to wake us for gooey cereal-and-apple-breakfasts,  
we were not giving in no we were not giving in,  
only the stars counted, and we counted them, and one of the tiny girls  
said look it's way too many,  
and took a broad giant's pulpy hands,  
as if to say you got more muscles than me and more guts-- can you also digest  
more, say ?  
and the man next to me fell asleep,  
snoring on my shoulder, my heavy heaving burdened shoulder,  
but I said to myself : well better a shoulder burdened with another human being's  
tired head  
than a shoulder burdened with its own mounting flesh;  
and I thought I felt quite okay,  
burdening the pizza under my flanks  
and not, for a change, myself.

### ON BLAKE'S BOTANY

O rose thou art sick  
thine pride & prime fadeth fast & quick  
he broke thine shining stem & stick  
yon rotten prick

### HISTORY AS A THINNING-OUT MAN

Gandhi in a fever dream feels himself striding down Hollywood Blvd. (the city  
misty behind his dim old glasses), utopiaic, searching (his wife ranting on about  
the sun, the American sun, the big fat rich American sun) for something along the  
lines of a wig (growing bald before his time), - his sweat breaks like reed, a  
nuisance to his sleeping body at stern rest, - his dream body in crisp motion, a wild  
inch short of punching the clerk's face (his eyes goggle at the thick man's affront -  
*naw, sirrrr, skin too strange..., erm, dark*)

Danny Boone's blank ass in the swampy shithouse behind the barn, jolting in the  
cold dark morning air, - the narrow-chested form in buckskin, smelling of old hay,  
jerking off at the compelling thought of his blunderbuss, his two wonder weapons  
miraculous images in his early daydreams, compulsive with booming powdery  
efforts against others' blank asses, gals' and hinds'.



Christ in Mary's womb, picturing the weight of her young breast and one stoned hooker's waist measurements, hoping no one will see his puke behind the taverns, listless about coming to life and facing his dusty rise and last-minute fall, eager for the real fleshy scent of pork and of rivers sweaty after rain.

Hitler's flat face in the bunker, blenching into reason at the foresight of comforting suicide, Eva Braun's stygian hands dawdling in his, defying the time of day.

George from somewhere in the US's eyes water at the loud NO all around. He fakes a healthy sneeze.-

<p><b>HANS-PETER SCHÖNI</b> <b>A DECEMBER MORNING</b></p>
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It was cold - freezing cold. On a postcard the snow would have looked great, but the wind was uncomfortably chilly. Nevertheless, the old man kept on shovelling the pavement free of snow. His furrowed, wrinkled face bore a defiant expression. He was determined to finish the strip in front of his old-fashioned, suburban house - come what may. He wouldn't yield to the bitter cold - he never had. Snow gathered on his bushy eyebrows, but he didn't mind. He had seen winters far worse. In 1944, in the Ardennes they would have been happy if they had been allowed to shovel the snow off all the city streets instead of playing a deadly game of hide-and-seek with the Germans. He remembered those days in bloody detail.

Sometimes it was easy to kill the enemy. When they were still far away, you could easily put a bullet in their head with your rifle, watch the body fall down, and move on to the next target. When they came nearer to your hide-out, it became more difficult, because you were able to see their faces. Some of them young, some old and wrinkled, but all worn-out, hollow and without any hope left. They had been the last defenders of the Reich and briefly he had been able to see them as human beings like himself. This impression lasted only for a short moment, of course, until they were near enough to pose a serious threat. Then the adrenaline kicked in and the only thing that mattered was to kill or to be killed. But even so, he still remembered their pale faces, especially on cold winter days like this one.

Well, it wasn't really cold, was it? This was merely a cool winter day with a bit of snow. Slowly, but steadily the old man continued to free the pavement from this knee-deep bit of snow.

He was halfway done with his work, when his young neighbour passed him in her sports car. She waved to greet him and he smiled and raised his hand in return. He paused for a moment. This young lady (well, young from his point of view at least) reminded him of the happier winters that had been - above all the winter of '57, when he first met his wife Kate. The weather had really been horrible that year. There had been no real snow, only plenty of slush, hail and rain. He had driven his new car all over the state in order to persuade shop-owners to buy his "new" and "improved" kind of soap. On the way back, just outside town, a hailstorm had caught him by surprise. In no time, his car had been covered by small hailstones and he decided that it was safer to stop at once. Even though he hadn't been able to see anything, someone had been able to see his car. A woman knocked at his side window, while trying to shield her face from the hail. Quickly he made a gesture for her to come in and moments later she sat at his side shivering. "Bah, what a stupid time to be outside," she said, shuddering with cold. He couldn't really remember the conversation that followed. But he knew that they had only stopped talking when a passing car sounded its horn, because they were standing on the road for no apparent reason, the hailstorm having long since passed. He took her home, gave her his address and phone-number and in the following years every problem in his life seemed to melt away like the hail on his car. Yes, there had been good times in December. He really missed Kate. He decided to put a new candle on her grave today, and started shovelling again.

Finally all the snow on the pavement was gone. As usual he had shovelled the pavement in front of both his neighbours' houses, too. Those young people were always so busy, while he had too much time on his hands. It was a good deal for both parties - and, well, their Christmas presents were also very nice. He took some steps back to admire his house. Pavement and path were cleanly shovelled, while the lawn lay under a perfect, undisturbed blanket of snow. The holiday decorations were in all the right places and he had only to touch the switch in order to light his whole house like a Christmas tree. He really liked Christmas. When, if not now, was the season to be jolly? Humming "Joy to the World," he began gritting the pavement. Suddenly, a sound of times long bygone made him drop the bucket of salt he was carrying. It was the sound of a German Sturmgewehr 44. From that moment onwards time seemed to pass a little bit slower, his muscles tensed, and reflexes long since forgotten by his conscious mind took over. He dropped flat on the ground, taking cover behind a heap of snow he had created only minutes before. He knew that the snow offered little protection, but with a bit of luck, the Jerries wouldn't see him behind there. Then he realized that this wasn't WW II and these weren't the Germans. He was at home!

But then - what was this all about? Who the heck was shooting? Some madmen snipers, like in Washington? A crazed Marine with a weakness for Nazi weapons? Or some anti-government terrorists on a killing spree? As the shooting continued, he realized that there were two guns. They were taking turns, but not long enough to actually reload the blasted things. They couldn't possibly have that much ammunition, could they? He realized that they were drawing nearer, but at the same time something changed. No longer were they rattling menacingly like the German guns. They seemed a bit too high-pitched and a bit too soft.

And then he heard the children's voices "Got you! You're dead!" "And you're dead five times over, fathead!" The "gunfire" continued, but the old man was finally able to relax. He slowly rose from behind the snow and saw the two boys on the other side of the road. They failed to notice him and continued their battle, running, shooting and shouting. He shook his head. Either he was growing old and deaf or the toy industry had been given some advice by arms dealers. Well, it wasn't really important. He had a job to finish. Slowly, he picked up his bucket and continued to grit the pavement.-

<p><b>VIOLA NORDSIECK</b> <b>HANNAH'S DAYS</b></p>
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You look a sight, as usual."

"Hello Mum, how nice to see you."

A veritable witch against the winter sky. Her hair dyed some reddish colour, clashing with her coat, her face wearing an expression of disgust. He smiles up at her from his table. Meeting in a café where nobody is going to throw things seems to be the only safe way these days. Underneath, her face is of the same prettiness as always, but hidden under a crumbly layer of old, soft skin that's hanging down from her neck. He kicks a chair away from the table as an invitation for her to sit down, while looking for the person he really wanted to see. Here comes Carrie, racing towards him. Too grown-up now to throw herself in his arms, she comes to a stop and walks the last bit with dignity, beaming at him, and then punches him heartily in the ribs.

"Orange juice is fine with me." He specially enjoys pointing out his mother's drinking habit by not drinking while she does. Usually, he seldom says no to a beer. Not that Carrie might mind or anything. She talks non-stop anyway, which doesn't prevent her noticing small things like the tomato stain on his

sweatshirt that didn't come out or the fact that he is properly shaved for once. "You looked really stupid with that beard," she points out. "What are we doing today?"

"You can keep her until tonight. I won't be in." Mum lights a cigarette and watches him out of narrowed eyes. "How are things? Do you still have that dumbass job, wasting what brains you've got left, or are you back on the Social again?"

"I'm still studying, beloved mother, believe it or not. What do you care, anyway?"

"Sure, spending your time on drugs and whatever. But not my money, to be sure! We're past that, most definitely." Her drink is gone by now, so nothing keeps her. "Listen, she's to be in bed at ten. She's got her own housekey. Don't you take her to your place or any of your junkie friends! Carrie, try not to talk nonsense all day. And look after your things!"

Thank someone, she is leaving. Can't wait to get the kid off her hands. He congratulates himself on his stoicism. "Fucking bitch," he murmurs after her red coat, which disappears onto the street, looking as discontent from behind as from the front. Which sends Carrie into a giggling fit. She slurps her milkshake from the bottom of the glass and practically dances on her chair. "Listen, what are we doing? Where are we going? My coat is warm, we can go for a walk, and then to the cinema, all right? I've got money, too," she adds with a frown. He smiles at her, throwing his leather jacket over his shoulders. "Don't worry about that. I'm loaded. Now, whatever the lady wishes."

Seven hours later, she is gone. He walks away from his mother's house, which he has, of course, not entered. He has given the kid a quick kiss which landed on her hair and then sent her off inside, turning to leave at once. His hand feels empty of her small fingers, which is why he chainsmokes his way to the pub.

Joe and Leon are already there, others arrive. Leon gets him a beer - "for having had a hard day." The pictures of the day are starting to swim, get dizzy at the edges, then float softly away to hide behind others: the Dostoyevsky he finally has to read; the working shift at the drug store tomorrow he mustn't forget; a bit of dope he is going to buy from Joe; the answering machine with Linda's call on it that has not been deleted yet; a girl across the room that might be fun. No, on second look fun isn't exactly the word. His throat is starting to close. His pictures are usually made up of words, letters, even full-stops and exclamation marks; words linked together, forming faces and landscapes he remembers, seen in the description, imaged by way of telling. But this girl's image does not have a single word to say to him, violently cut off from any mental connections; though he starts describing it in his mind at once, startled by and almost afraid of its intensity out of all context.

The girl's hair is very dark even behind the upwards floating smoke, which seems to paint soft grey circles in the air. The pub is crowded, but she

somehow moves through it as if there weren't bunches of people blocking her way. She is on her own. She doesn't seem to mind. And she shouldn't be allowed to be in here at all. Can't be older than fourteen, possibly fifteen, but maybe even younger. Though she certainly doesn't look it.

To avoid looking at her, he takes up his beer and desperately attempts to find some entertainment in Joe's bad jokes. His mates are not nearly drunk enough to leave and go elsewhere, either to some club if they still have money or to somebody's place to get stoned. He doesn't care which, as long as he gets away from here. Soon.

He goes to take a leak, staring at the wall and hoping for someone to come in and offer him cocaine, a job, gay sex, anything he can turn down to keep his mind off things. But nothing happens, only a thin nervous guy sneaks in and washes his hands for minutes, so as not to have to try and piss standing next to him.

Back to the table, which they are all crowded around, everybody having a great time. He's not yet halfway through the smoky little room when he stops dead, just to walk on the next moment, smiling as if nothing's wrong. Shit. She is there. She has somehow managed to get at the fucking table right in the middle of his fucking mates, standing between Joe and Leon, smoking, smiling, laughing, talking, feeling quite at home. She looks good, no denying that. Maybe to someone else she would not have been that pretty at all, maybe her eyes are too big and her chin is too pointy, but she does look good. Fully made-up, of course. You wouldn't see her real age unless you looked closely at her big eyes, the corner of her mouth, watched them until a kid's laughing face appeared in front of you and was gone again in a turn of her head - a woman. And unless you looked at her tits. Not the way you usually might look at them, but from a kind of a scientist's point of view, so as to see they are going to be different in a few years. He wants to be sick.

Her name is Hannah. He doesn't know how he knows, having abandoned his still half-full beer next to Joe and started an animated conversation with Stan and Sally on the other side of the table, lighting a fag a minute and listening to Sally with so much determination that he feels Stan starting to get nervous at his side. But somehow, her name has leaked through to him, has reached him and softly nestled in his ear, right in the middle of Sally's story about the last show she went to. Hannah.

It's dead cold outside. All the time he has been meaning to leave, but has stayed until now, when they all walk out, complaining loudly about the cold. He has tried to get drunk but hasn't managed. And yes, it is dead cold. Definitely. Did he say that out loud? "Eh? What did you say?"

"I said it's really cold outside," the girl repeats patiently. "Have you been talking in your sleep?"

They are walking a bit behind the noisy crowd of his pals, and the clear, frosty air, cutting into his skin, is suddenly divided by the first little white snowflake, coming out of nowhere from the dark, invisible sky, so soft and tender it seems almost ridiculous. It's melted away long before it has reached the street, but there are millions to follow. Everybody is putting up hoods, pulling at scarves and trying to grab other people's gloves. Leon makes the others scream with delight at the sight of his red, hand-knitted gloves which are attached to each other with a string, like those of a little child. "So I won't lose them. Clever idea."

She doesn't seem to have any warm clothes. Her hands are buried deeply (as deep as they go, which is not very as her garments obviously aren't meant to be at all practical) in the pockets of her stylish leather jacket. All of a sudden, she has gone very quiet. He can't blame her since there's definitely nothing talkative or inviting about him. He's trembling, like a trapped animal, feeling helpless and dangerous at the same time. Or maybe it's just the cold and the sad silence of the snow. He can see the outline of her small, pale face without really looking at her, registers her dark, heavily mascara'd eyes trying to melt holes into the icy air.

This time, he has almost got away. Almost, but not quite. Standing in front of Joe's place, he looks up and down the street, deserted as you would expect it to be at one in the morning. The walls of the house look even shabbier than usual against the clear-cut contrast of the deep black sky and the white, white snow that covers everything now. When the door opens, the burning end of his cigarette has nearly reached his fingers and he throws it away with a muffled curse. He should have just walked away, but he did not do that.

When he had sneaked out a few minutes before, everybody was sitting on the floor around Joe's old scratchy record player, Joe crumbling dope all over the floor and trying to pick it from the fluffy carpet that had not been cleaned for ages. Nobody noticed him leaving, moving silently through the flat. Hannah's voice came from the kitchen, flat and dry, talking to Joe's girlfriend - that is, not exactly talking. Pleading, would be more accurate. She did not hear him leaving, but now there she is, standing at the door like a child about to be sent out of the house. She looks very small now, her hair tucked behind her ears, the black mascara smeared around her eyes with tears. Some of it has even got to her neck, a black smear on white skin, looking like a weird kind of lovebite. All possibilities of pretending he wasn't there squandered, he looks at her helplessly, feeling a stupid, hot anger rising from his stomach. She has been crying, but her voice is quite steady.

"Hey," she says. She has a soft voice, cool and white. "Can I come home with you."

She looks up at him with her child face, but her look from underneath that little tear-smeared mask is quiet and amused, deeply dark - a woman's look.

They don't talk on the way, and now there are no more pictures. They seem to be lost in a million snowflakes, in front of which his mind has gone

mercifully blank. All of them alike, disappearing in the big white coat of snow, trodden under his feet and squashed to mud.

When he walks through the door of his flat, everything has got an almost dreamlike quality, one of those dreams when you know you're asleep but don't try to wake up. Nothing matters because this can't be real. He throws his jacket on the floor, narrowly missing a pile of papers. Then he slowly takes off his sweater, to give her time to look around. She doesn't move from the spot, but turns slowly around, taking in the messy room with its wooden floor, posters and pictures on the wall, the few pieces of furniture - desk, mattress on the floor, some shelves on the wall stuffed with books, clothes in bags or simply lying around in heaps. Dusty plants that have never been watered, but stay miraculously alive. Tiny kitchen full of dirty dishes. Candles, TV, empty crisp bags and full ashtrays. When he's emerged from his sweater, he turns to her, and as this is a dream anyway and he is past regaining control, he allows himself to look at her as much as he wants to for the first time. The pale skin that might melt if he tried to touch it, the somewhat scruffy black hair that would feel soft and strong under his fingers, the fluttering eyes and unbelievable mouth like a little rosy shell on the beach, the narrow fragile shoulders, the whiteness of her shoulder blades cut by the dark blue lines of her almost non-existent top. The round soft line of her small face. Within a few seconds, he can see new images, images of how she might be if not caught in this black-and-white winter beauty, not the sad and frozen child trying to be this mysterious girl all in black. Images of her eating drippy ice-cream with a spoon, walking along a sunny street with a bunch of kids, in a cinema seat with the film's colours playing over her colourless skin, hanging around reading with her hair dangling over her face and, for some weird reason, playing some ball game wearing cut-off jeans and a T-shirt, a shirt too big for her, and falling right into a spot of wet sand. He does not remember any of that later, but then, in a dream he doesn't need to.

It's her who puts her arms around him first, determined, and in a wonderful way both softly sexy and like someone seeking shelter. The last thing he sees before he buries his face in her hair is the black smear on her neck, not like a lovebite now but more like something from the inside, a trace of decay in her freshness, a wormbite maybe.

It takes a long time. She enjoys taking off his clothes, stroking his tall, thin body until the beauty he sees in her gets so overwhelming that he seems just as beautiful to himself. In between this delight, he would not be able to remember whyever he tried to get away from her; or what could be more important than having her so close. Having her in his arms and feeling her cuddle towards him, hide her face at his neck and give him little kisses. Having her everywhere on his body, his skin burning and prickling, touching the softest of skins. Having her under his lips, his tongue and fingers. Having her. At one point, when excitement is

nearly cramping her body, he feels as if he's holding in his arms a warm, furry, trembling little cat, holding her protectively, at the same time making every effort to push her over the edge.

Later on, she's nestling in his bed, half asleep, with her nose sniffing in the pillow. He is watching her tiredly, his thoughts playing along the lines of her body, his fingers rolling the approximately seventy-third cigarette around in his ashtray. His bed-ashtray - the funny red one with the picture of a cemetery and the slogan "Come to Marlboro Country". At least, he'd thought it was funny when he painted it years ago. She dismissed it as a kiddie's joke, which did not disturb him much because she said it in the middle of licking his chin which, properly shaved in the morning, now feels like sand paper. She liked that feeling on her tongue and giggled softly beneath his face.

"We should get some sleep now," he says unconvincingly. "I have to go to work tomorrow."

She gives a "mhhh" with some contempt.

"What about you? When do you have to leave?"

"I don't." Why be surprised, her face seems to say as she rolls around into a sitting position, covering herself with the blanket.

This is still a dream. "What do you mean, you don't? Surely, you have to..." Go home, he doesn't say. Fourteen, maximum fifteen. Possibly younger, wasn't that his estimate? Yes it was, something screeches in his ear. A good estimate, that one, seldom do you get things so accurately. You've just screwed a schoolgirl, and the fact that it wasn't the first time doesn't change any of that. You did get *that* accurately. The only thing to do before you panic is to chuck her out and try to forget all about it.

"I'm not going home," she says, her eyes so dark he can't see the iris. She takes one of his cigarettes. "I won't. If you don't let me stay I'm gonna sleep on the street."

And that was that.

In a way, it is a dangerous thing to live within word-images, like (as he supposes) most people do. Leave out a few words, maybe a number or a but, a small fact, a now or a here. And there you are, painting pictures that are not of things that ever existed, but of other pictures. Some people call them dreams. He feels haunted. What are we doing today? What? We? Today?

He doesn't get his sleep that night. For some reason, the first thing that comes to his mind is food. It's like she just turned magically into a starved little stray cat or something, so feed her. He pads around bare-footed, just short of sticking his foot on the sharp prick of a corkscrew lying on the floor, and makes tea and heats up a takeaway and brings bread and cheese and apples, heaping it all upon the mattress next to her like some weird kind of offer for the gods. She stays under her blanket, sitting up naked in bed and watching him out of her too big



eyes. She doesn't seem particularly upset. In fact, she is quite cool for someone who should expect to be kicked out into the night - or dawn - at any moment. He decides that she just doesn't care what happens to her anymore. Though, of course, she knew exactly what was going to happen, all along.

The last thing he puts on his heap of offerings is a big white T-shirt which she could use as a dress, it is so long. "You can sleep in that," he says curtly, and with an amused smile she puts it on and starts eating an apple. When he comes back into the bed next to her with a big mug of hot tea he is pressing between his aching fingers, the cold blue light of first dawn throws an icy beam into the room, reflected by the snow.

"It's all gonna be a bunch of mud in a while."

He looks up from tying his shoelaces. She is pressing her nose to the window, both hands on the glass, squinting through the shades like she was playing hide and seek with someone out on the street. The white snowlight from outside paints her body dark beneath the thin white cotton of the shirt she is still wearing - without anything else, as is clearly revealed. He wants to take her in his arms, wants it a lot. His voice is harsh. "Thought you might be commenting on the situation," he says. "It's a bunch of mud most definitely. Does it occur to you at all that you got me into shit up to my eyeballs?" He grabs his jacket, then a scarf. It's cold outside, and his hair is wet from the shower.

She turns round to him. "Actually, I thought it was me who had a problem," she says with a smile. Of course, he feels like a prick now. "When are you going to be back?"

"Dunno. I'd appreciate if you could be gone by then."

Sitting at the counter of a drug store is just about the shittiest job you can do on a Saturday afternoon. He usually takes a book with him because he is always behind with his reading schedule, but not today which is fine because there are so many people who think they have to do their shopping on Saturday afternoon that he doesn't get around to anything. Not to a lot of thinking, either, which is also fine. He works mechanically, drawing things over the scanner and demanding money. He would draw dead rats over the buzzer today if somebody put them on the counter. He is not even hungover which would account for being slightly out of step, nor is he worrying that Linda might come in, looking for him. He just wouldn't care if she came. He would even like to see her face, even if it was bitching around and accusing him of letting her down. But she doesn't show up. Stan does, though, around five. He lives around the corner and has nothing to do anyway, so he quite often comes round on Saturdays to talk to him. After that, they sometimes both go to the restaurant where Sally works to have a drink and maybe a meal from which she knocks off a few quid. Today, he sends Stan off on his own. It is sort of nice to have him around, to have someone steady, normal, sane next to you who is just the same today as he was yesterday - well, comparatively steady

and normal. Stan can be sort of crazy, though he has relied on him quite a few times now, for example back when his mother not only threw him out of her house and cut his money supply, but also reported him to the police. That time, Stan really was helpful and whatnot. But he doesn't really want to talk to him today. He wants to get back home.

Whenever his concentration tries to focus on anything, he finds himself looking at his hands and remembering what he did with them, a few hours ago. Or he feels the lack of sleep making his head light as a bubble of air, and thinks: *This is because I didn't sleep, and I didn't sleep because of Hannah.* Or he looks at Stan and thinks: *if you knew*, and in that there is horror as well as delight.

After a while, he finds himself starting to imagine her parents, her home, her life she wants to get away from that badly. Hannah, still a picture incomplete because of the silence. A face which doesn't talk. He even starts wondering about her name, whether it is her real name. Would it be a name you invented when you were on the run? Wouldn't she call herself something more spectacular? Hannah, one of those names that work both ways, that can be read backwards. Maybe that was why she chose it. If she did.

A voice cuts through his thoughts while they trot along stupidly, bewildered like a deer in the light. He looks up to a red fur coat, a woman putting her stuff on the counter, heaps of obscure bottles with amazing charms inside to make you young and beautiful. She could use it. She is talking to another woman, in one of those shrill but monotonous voices, unpleasant like little stones flying against the windshield of a beloved car. Witchlike claws put yet another bottle down, this one pure white with a single purple diamond and, under the brand name, the sort. He knows that stuff, every sort has a different colour and is supposed to do a different miracle to your hair. Middle-aged women buy them by the million. This middle-aged woman doesn't stop talking to her friend for a second while she pays for her stuff, and the short look that goes over him is nothing short of disgusted, even afraid in a vague way. She seems worried. Suddenly, he is in a strange, crazy way almost positive that the amazing dark eyes in the hag-like face of the woman in the red coat belong to Hannah's mother. *You'd want to get away from home, too, if you had that voice in your ear all day long*, he hears himself thinking. This shift better be over soon before he goes crazy.

He doesn't stop for his usual smoke when he comes out of the store but starts walking at once, headed home. The pure white snow that changed yesterday night into a dreamland is now, well, a bunch of mud. The grey-brown mass squeaks under his shoes like shot-out brains in bad splatter movies. Long before he reaches the old worn-out staircase with the graffiti and the empty beer-bottles which leads up to his flat, he is deeply convinced that she is gone. She has gone home, of course. She has come to her senses, what little she maybe possesses, has stopped playing that stupid, impossible game she has picked up from some idiot

film or other, and has left and probably taken with her whatever there was to take - he can't think of anything right now, can only think that she will be gone when he comes back.

He knows he is wrong as soon as the door opens, and his relief shames him too much to be enjoyable. "Hey," she calls from the floor, where she is sitting cross-legged between piles of his records and cassettes she has obviously been going through. "Some Linda called for you." She has made herself quite at home. His mood, frustrated by his own stupidity, is not softened by the dishes she has cleaned and put away so he almost doesn't recognize his own kitchen, nor by the dark blue jogging pants she has dug out of some bag and put on, together with the white shirt so that she now looks like she has dressed up in her father's pyjamas. "I thought I told you to..." Then he gets what she has said. "Did you pick up the phone?" He feels near panic.

"No, of course not. Do I look stupid? I listened to her talking on the answering machine. Is she your girlfriend?"

"No, she's not my girlfriend. We broke up, if you need to know. Listen, you have to..."

"She sounded right sad. I suppose she wants you back. She said something like, you didn't explain her a thing, why you don't want her and stuff. She sounds really frustrated," Hannah adds with a smile nothing less than content, cruelly mocking Linda's complaints. He doesn't really want to talk about Linda now. He is still standing in the middle of his very own room, like someone who doesn't know if he is supposed to sit down. She has drawn the shades to the darkness outside, so the yellow light of his desk lamp can't be seen from the street. Her small pointy face, unknown to him until yesterday, among all the stuff he lives with seems to be easily the most familiar, the most intimate of all pictures. He kind of hates her, or so he guesses. "I washed the dishes," she says, and for the first time now since she stood in front of Joe's house crying, there is some uncertainty in her voice and eyes. "Thought I'd mention it. Won't you come and say hello to me?" She stretches out both arms to him from her place on the floor, and he nearly laughs when he walks to her, bends down to take her in his arms. Now that's a way to put it. *Say hello to me.* He kisses her. He lifts her up from the floor. He starts to breathe her in.

"All right. Here's the rules. You don't answer the phone. You don't leave the house in the daytime. You don't open a fucking window or do anything stupid like that. Get me?"

"Oh, shut up. I can take care of myself."

"Yeah, but who's gonna take care of me afterwards? I mean, it's not all about you. Not anymore."

"Ye-es." It sounds like chewing gum. Sweet sticky stuff that's plastered about things Hannah is not going to talk about. He feels as if he has known some things about her forever. One moment, the fragile construction of her shoulder

blades, sticking out like delicate wings when she is lying on her stomach and on her elbows, is like a strange and exotic animal's body to him, one which is most likely just fantasy and could never have lived, let alone flown. A magic bird with bones like glass that would have been broken by a touch. Then again, the next moment, the line of her neck seems to him like the lines of his own hands, seen thousands of times but never really considered, and when he looks at them: *oh, yes, that's what they look like. Of course.* That long flowing line of her neck is so familiar to him that he never knew it until now. He puts a hand in her hair, stroking it forward, away from her neck. Under the dark stream, there are soft little fair hairs on her skin, like the first hair of a baby. "You don't have black hair really, do you?" he says, pulling her to him. "You dyed it."

"Fuck off."

"Looks good on you, though. Like a right little bitch."

She turns to him, brings her face very close to his, and sticks out her tongue.

At least once he wakes up because she is crying. He doesn't know what to do, doesn't really think about it because she has sobbed him awake from real deep sleep, and he only feels some dull, sleepy, muffled terror. He doesn't say anything. He just pulls her close almost automatically, the warm wetness of her tears somehow reminding him of the feeling he had as a small boy, when he didn't quite make it to wake up and go to the toilet. A feeling of *oh help, I didn't get this.* A dull, sleepy, muffled feeling that he missed something terribly important, that something is very wrong. He just holds her until her body has stopped twitching and sobbing, and when she has gone quiet again after a while, he slips softly back into sleep, the wet pillow getting cool and then dry.

Mid-afternoon, and Hannah is bored. She has skipped through his video cassettes, dismissed everything as either pretentious French shit, boring blah-blah pieces or sick action stuff, checked on his music files on the computer, listened to Marilyn Manson for a while, then cut him off in mid-shriek, read the first twenty-eight words of *Alice in Wonderland*, made retching sounds, looked out of the window in perfect silence for six minutes, and now she is standing behind him, breathing in little warm puffs against his neck. He is not getting a single word of that hateful Dostoyevsky book. "Listen," she says.

"Shut up. Go play in the traffic."

"Shit, I'd *love* to, if you wouldn't, like, go nuts when I go near the door," she grumbles, and then, standing on her toes very close to his back, she whispers in his ear: "*I want to go out.*" Her lips are sending shivers down his spine, so close to his ear that every single hair on his head is prickling.

"Great," he says. The book would have been shorter had that guy simply drawn the consequences and killed himself on page 30. "And where you wanna go? Stroll down Lower Main Street?"

"Oh, don't be so *stupid*. This is a goddamn big city, and nobody's gonna care, or even *see* me. I'll go crazy if I stay in here one more day. I mean it, I'm gonna set this dump on fire."

He puts the book down, shoving his glasses up into his hair, and leans back in his chair. She seizes the opportunity to sneak onto his lap, her legs on either side. He stares at her. "You've got some nerve. This *dump*, I should think, has been quite useful to you. And I can't get a scrap of work done while you're wailing around. *And* I had classes today, and I'm tired."

He has brought home a few things for her which he couldn't afford, a tight blue shirt she's crazy about, but now she doesn't wear it because nobody sees it - nobody meaning him, who would have liked to see it. Though he doesn't mind her hanging around with nothing on but some old shirt of his, the cotton worn so thin he can look through it. And he loves her smell, even more before she showers than afterwards. Now her cold little hands are wandering around under his pullover. He wants to shrink back and press against her at the same time. "Listen. Please? I can't stay in all the time. You know I just can't."

He tells himself he's exaggerating. "Sure, I understand that." Her eyes are sad and empty behind dangling streaks of hair. "Hey, it's okay. You don't need to put on that tragic look. We're going. Say around eight?" He grins. "You can dress up until then, you've almost four hours left."

He has been to the club a few times before. It's rather small, a bit run-down, mostly great music but little room to dance and no big selection of drinks. The idea is, more or less, to drink beer or hard stuff and to get crushed on the dancefloor. It's easy to get lost. After an hour or so, he has realized that nobody is going to grab Hannah and pull her out of his life by the hair, nobody is even going to think a moment about her. She didn't have any problems to get in, either. She looks much like she did when he first saw her, cool, smooth, made-up, pretty. Distant. He comes back from the bar with two more beers, looking for her in the smoke and changing lights, and watches her for a moment, dancing all by herself like she was alone in her own room, without any sign of self-consciousness, strangely beautiful and self-contained as though there weren't bunches of people closing around her. He is still watching her when Linda's face swims into view, like one picture put over another. He hasn't seen her for weeks. Linda, partying, in a red top, and even smiling at him as if she'd never accused him of putting her down and not explaining anything.

"Hey!"

"Hey, Linda. I didn't know you come here."

She has a bunch of girl-friends with her, but they dissolve into the dancing mass of people, and Linda stays alone with him at the corner of the bar. He feels cold, almost frightened. Not about her making a scene or anything, but about Hannah, of course. But Linda doesn't seem inclined to a scene anyway, she is quiet

and friendly, and she only shouts at him because the bass is like the growl of a lion with a microphone. "I come here sometimes." Then she turns her head to see what he was looking at before. "Is that your sister?"

"What?" he calls back, his ears ringing.

"Your sister!"

He follows her eyes. He sees a little girl dancing, a sad and frozen child under a magic spell, performed by cheap make-up and make-believe. Coldness spreads from his stomach in a numbing wave, all the way into his fingertips which go white clinging to the beer bottles.

"Yes," he shouts in Linda's ear. "That's Carrie. You haven't met her before, have you?" Of course she hasn't, you dumb fuck, or your luck would run out right there.

"No, you just told me about her. I thought she was younger."

He is not listening anymore. He feels so cold all through his body that he thinks he might faint, or maybe be sick. Get out of here. He turns to the door, then back to her. "Linda," he calls. "I'm sorry."

Then he starts on the endless way to the door.

All the way home, he seems to be neither breathing nor thinking. He has to keep the words away. The same words that were missing when he saw her first, leaving the image of her swimming lonely on top of everything instead of linking it into a chain of images which is the way the story is told, a story he didn't want to hear. The same words that were left out of the description, leaving him with a picture of nothing at all, leaving him with a dream he has taken for real, a dream which has haunted him. He keeps the words away, and though he manages all the way home without turning back, he starts waiting for her the moment he enters the flat. She is going to come, of course. What else could she do? She has nowhere to go.

In the morning, he starts looking for her. He should go to work but calls in to say he's sick. It's not really a lie. The snow is gone, but it's cold and rainy, the streets are muddy and grey. He walks along the street in front of Joe's place, afraid Joe or Diane might come out and meet him. He walks along other streets, aimlessly, because he doesn't know where to look but can't stop himself from trying. It feels even more unreal than anything felt before. How can it be that she got lost? Through the numbness which seems to be still in him, he feels distantly sad and angry at himself, no longer denying that it was stupid nonsense to go away as he did. At the same time, he knows he only managed to do what he should have done at the beginning: just go, resist and leave. Chuck her out and try to forget all about it. The numbness diminishes as he walks through the streets, giving way to his growing panic and sense of loss. Either way, as he stayed and as he went, he was guilty as hell and knows it. He can't imagine where she might have gone, and it doesn't matter a bit whether she went home in the end or ended up ... somewhere

else. After a while, he doesn't really look for her any longer. All the people on the street, everyone walking along in the muddy weather, might be her, but nobody will be. A girl is standing in front of a shop window, dark hair showing under her red, hand-knitted cap, big dark eyes wandering slowly over something he can't see. *Yes, he thinks, of course. That's what she looks like. I might say hello to her.*

He is cold to the bones when he finally finds himself walking in the direction of his flat. The street is still a bunch of mud, slimy with the remains of what might have been the last snow of the year. He is very tired, his eyes are heavy balls in his head that might roll out from under his eyelids if he's not careful. Somehow, though, he still feels a bit more anxious with the idea that she might well have turned up while he was away. Hannah could be sitting on the stairs in front of his flat, still dressed in tonight's clothes, she might have got lost and come back to wait for him, because if he wouldn't let her stay she would have to sleep on the street and she knows he will. And if he really believes that she won't be there, then maybe she will, and the story might turn backwards like her name. But when he comes up the stairs, almost running though trying to calm down, there is, of course, nobody there. Only the phone is ringing inside the flat, and though he never gave her his number, he hurries to answer it. He has trouble getting the key into the lock because his hands are shaking.

"Hello?"

"There you are, at last," a voice says, shrill and monotonous, unpleasant like little stones flying against the windshield of a beloved car. "I thought you were never going to pick up the phone."

He closes the door behind him, very softly. He is knocked out.

"What do you want, then?"

"A nice thing to say to me, most definitely! I really shouldn't bother with you, but I thought you could do something useful for a change and look after your sister on Saturday. I have plans for the day."

"Ye-es, I think so." He sits down at his desk, squinting through the shades out of the window. "What time should I pick her up?"

"Around eleven. Wait, she wants to speak to you. Just a moment, though, Carrie! This costs money."

He leans back, his eyes closed. He is not sure, but maybe he's going to cry.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Car. How are things?"

"Boring! Really, there's just nothing to do. I miss you, really. Say, what are we doing on Saturday?"

**UTE GROSSKOPFF**  
**FROZEN SNAIL'S SHELL - BURNING**

First there was the big dullness that eats up human souls. And this time it was very hungry. She had no strength to struggle against it. She just found it easy to sink into a great dark hole where nobody hears your cries. Days passed. Weeks passed. Suddenly she was gone. The person people used to know wasn't there anymore and would certainly never come back. She had been destroyed by grief. And then the young woman who still lived in the average apartment on the first floor of the average house in Calais Road realized that she was alone. That the man she had been engaged to for five years was dead. Gun - boom - gone. Blood everywhere. Blood on their double bed, blood on him, bloody clothes, bloody face, bloody note: "I can't live anymore."

She sat in the huge arm-chair, wearing her pyjamas. Her parents came, people came, people called. She couldn't speak. She had to think but she wasn't able to. "Poor girl, we're so sorry! If we can do anything for you..." Who did they speak with? She wasn't present. She couldn't hear them. She couldn't hear Frank - her lover. Silence. Loneliness. "I can't live anymore." "You can't live in that terrible house. Come out of your snail's shell and stay with us." She didn't move. "Annie, darling, come home. We will manage together. You'll smile again!" She couldn't hear. She wasn't there. Loneliness.

She lies on the bed in her wedding-dress. Eyes open. They had planned to marry in spring but the winter hadn't agreed. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of November she found him here, lying in his blood. Blood - flesh - death. But she still hasn't found the man of her life. She has to keep on searching. She breathes in short breaths. "I can't live anymore." No explanations. No reasons. Do there always have to be reasons? For everything? She switches on the TV. A talk-show with quarrelling couples. She switches it off. Switches it on, switches it off. She drinks a cup of tea and drops half of it on her white dress. She cries.

She had to work in the office again. She didn't want to but she needed the money. She dialled the number and was frightened to hear her own voice. It wasn't her voice. A stranger spoke. "Hi, this is Annie." "Annie, how are you?" A loud, shrill voice barked out of the receiver. "Annie, how are you? I'm so glad you're calling. We have all been worrying about you but I hear you're alright again. You can start working again whenever you like. We're rather busy at the moment so the sooner you come the better. I have to stop now but if you feel like talking to someone just



call me, then we can go to a café or..." She sat there with the receiver in her hands and listened to the "toot toot". She closed her eyes. "Frank," she whispered. Silence. "Toot toot".

"Good evening!" She dropped the telephone receiver. She hadn't heard the woman entering. She knew her. "Hello, Sarah!" "I was just walking by and noticed that you'd forgotten to switch off the light of your car. Your door isn't locked. Is everything O.K.? I didn't mean to disturb you." *Seconds can turn into years, metres into worlds.* Her look scanned Sarah's face and body. She'd known the young woman for many years, but as Sarah lived just a few streets away she 'd never really noticed how green her eyes and how white her skin were. A blast of cool wind scratched her face and tore her frozen mind back into reality. "Ah ... yeah ... thanks." *It's raining. It hasn't rained for weeks but now it is.* "Would you like to come in?" She was really surprised that she found these words. "Sure, thank you." *Damn, she looks so nice and friendly. I know I look worse than a mess.* "Give me your jacket. This is the living-room. It's untidy as usual. I'm sorry." Had she ever looked as satisfied as Sarah? "I'll make some tea. Strange weather today." *Poor attempt at a conversation.* When she returned with two steaming cups of tea Sarah was sitting on the left half of the sofa. Frank had always sat there. "Thanks, that's very nice of you." Sarah smiled. She couldn't bear this grinning, beautiful face. Sarah looked pretty cute. *Certainly she has a boy-friend or is she already married? .Courtesy - jealousy. Courtesy - jealousy.* "The tea's very good." "What?" She suddenly felt the need to get drunk tonight. Sarah looked at her. This pretty, self-confident woman didn't take her eyes off her. "I just made you a compliment about your tea." "Hmmm, thanks." *Courtesy - jealousy. Courtesy...* "You know... what I wanted to ask you... if I may... ah... are you coming along?"

The world stopped for a moment and she pulled all her strength together to prevent her eyes from imitating the rain outside. "Yeah, sure, it's... I'm fine - yeah, I'm fine, I..." Sarah's look absorbed her. She was captured. Captured by an overwhelming superiority of truth. She noticed that she was crying but she didn't try to stop it at all. "I..." Her tongue was paralysed. Suddenly she couldn't stand her living room anymore. *Does everyone put such ugly pictures into their rooms? Small, well-made paintings with some happy-looking people on it. Unbearable!*

Her eyes closed like a closing curtain which terminated the tragedy of an ordinary life and left her behind in a vast, dark auditorium. She loved the darkness. At night everybody was helpless. She felt so pleasant. Warm. Secure. There were some arms tied around her neck. Smooth arms. Arms that held her, that rescued her. Tender fingers passed lightly over her cheeks, her nose, her lips. She didn't dare to breath - scared that those magic fingers could disappear. Her hair-lace was untied and her long hair was carefully laid upon her shoulders. The affectionate fingers gently touched her back, her belly and then - very slowly, nearly shyly - her

breasts. The air trembled. *Don't stop! Don't stop!* The magic didn't leave off. The love caressed her whole body, conquered it, stimulated it. *Who are you? Who am I? Don't stop! Don't stop!* The fire flamed and she burnt. She hadn't burnt like this since...

She quickly opened her eyes. The room was dark. She was alone. A glance at her watch: 11.30.. How long have I been sitting here for? Where's Sarah? Her tea-cup was still on the table in front of her. There was no second one.

"This is the answering-machine of Lydia and Kevin Smith. Please leave a message or a number - we will call you back." "Mom? This is Annie. I'm coming home. I'm coming tomorrow. I'm coming to a new life."

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OLIVER PLASCHKA</b> <b>FUTURE DAYS LOST: THE TIME SELLERS</b></p>
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1

Inspector Gerard had been anything but a beginner in Section 17, that very particular department of the New Francisco police that dealt with all the happenings just too weird to leave to the others. And he had done a good job keeping the capital clean of fanatics, mad scientists and the usual alien scum - but not until the case of Dr. Reed-Sung and the Time Sellers had he begun to understand what Section 17 was all about.

\*

Of course he had known the official version as it was told in internal reports, or a pirated copy like the ill-famed compendium *From Future Days Lost*. It went something like this:

The first decades of the 22nd century had been a difficult time for most people on earth. Earth had finally been admitted to the Western Galactic Prosperity Sphere (largely due to the agreement of the Mandarin Grand Empire to trade traditional Terran artefacts and Pacific salt water for alien luxury goods), and along with the long-awaited economic aid came all the industrialists, the criminals, the scientists

and the missionaries, and finally the sex tourists. Mankind had at last adopted to the annoying truth that Earth was just another developing world in the backyards of Galactic Politics, and millions of people travelled abroad into the depths of the West-GPS in search of new work or new husbands.

The sellout of approximately six thousand years of known Terran history took only a few years. Abonaerian archives covered about a thousand millenia of meticulous information which could prove not only that Earth was absolutely a sinkhole in the flux of psionic energy, thereby disproving everybody from Hubbard to Christ, but also that all cultural achievements mankind had ever been proud of had been achieved earlier and more skillfully by somebody else. Most people therefore converted to the more assuring (and proved) teachings of Boophusianism, and saved money in order to visit the Abonaerian Prisma Palais or the lunar carvings at Kol-Ho at least once in their short lives.

The real trouble started when more and more aliens came to Earth in search of holidays or cheap investments, and the first Halfbreeds were born. The Abonaerian knew the psionic flux would someday sweep over Earth, but as usual they didn't bother to tell anyone. It had to be the Earthlings themselves that had to find out. At this point, however, the time-space continuum around the solar system had been so bent by the untrained use of psionic powers and devices that you could hardly walk to the next supermarket without taking the shortcut via the asteroid belt, and so the Global Emergency Government of the 23rd century somewhere in the future decided to take measures *before* the whole trouble started a hundred years ago.

That was what Section 17 was all about - or at least, that was what they had told him. But as everybody with some experience in temporal science might have suspected, the truth was never *that* easy.

Majestically, the GEG Logo danced above his desk. The future, Inspector Gerard wearily thought. The future demanded answers of him.

So he started writing his report.

## 2

Inspector Gerard flicked his half-smoked cigarette into the corner and regretted he had no sim recorder with him. Everything was perfect: the rain outside, the dimly lit apartment, the ventilator on the ceiling stirring the old, stale air; his trenchcoat and even his headache, and finally the half-naked and overall rather dead young woman in the bed before him. He could have made a fortune with this Raymond Chandler stuff, and he felt an irresistible urge to behave like one of his heroes. His holopist would have been very excited about this, but Inspector Gerard didn't give much for this new *General Reality* approach; holo-this, holo-that, and sometimes it

just meant it tried to cover almost *everything*, and sometimes it meant the other guy was a battery-powered trillusion based on some synchronised photon bundles. Either way, it was all useless nonsense.

"So what about the cause of death" Inspector Gerard asked the Lieutenant. He made no secret of being tired and annoyed by all this; however, the exact reason for his annoyance was unclear. *Was it because of that dead woman? Was it because she was a rather attractive looking dead woman? Was it because you would expect some queer kind of Poeish complication to emerge from the combination of deadness and half-naked attractiveness? Or was it because he had long abandoned any emotion in his job and didn't feel very complicated anymore about anything except his daily morning search for washed socks?* He didn't know, nobody knew, and this strange kind of charisma was one of the main reasons for the respect brought to this otherwise insignificant man with the greyish hair. You just knew *something* really annoyed Inspector Gerard.

*Always.*

"You wouldn't believe it" the Lieutenant said. He was an over-eager young lad fresh from the academy, and Gerard didn't like the look of his eyes. They were much too curious.

"I never do. Just tell me what we *know*."

"Look at this," the Lieutenant said and handed him some 2way-inscriptors, his eyes blinking trustingly. "The medical stuff."

Gerard nodded and lit another cigarette. He frowned as he read through the inscriptor. "Yani A'ynti-Heimbergen. Mother Mandarin. Father unknown, probably from the Tel'pheer Cluster. Heart stopped. So what? What are we doing here?"

The Lieutenant fanned excitedly with the other inscriptors. Voluntarily slower than you'd expect an Inspector to be, Gerard had a look at them.

"See." It was the report from the GEG contech department. Most people never figured out exactly how the term "con" described all that 23rd century crap. Gerard was one of the few enlightened ones who had reason to suspect it only meant "confidential."

"You have the timesniffer here?"

The Lieutenant nodded and handed him a small streamlined object with a single display. The display was blue in a way only people one hundred years from now could perceive as pleasurable. Gerard sighed.

"Time bendings. Lots of them."

"Something happened," the Lieutenant agreed. "Global Emergency Government will want to know about."

"Go on."

"She had a *Life-Ease* Anti-Accident device," the Lieutenant explained. "Expensive stuff."

"And it didn't go on?"  
The Lieutenant shook his head. "Total burnout."  
"No Anti-Burnout security system?"  
"Offline."  
"Emergency generator?"  
"Drained of all power."  
"No automatic Rep-Me Call?"  
"No phones."  
"And the Com-Uni-K/T-Vision unit?"  
"Ditto."

"I see." In any other century, the heart attack of any woman, even of an attractive, half-alien, half-Chinese chica, bare of all clothes, would not have stirred too much attention. Some odd jokes at the most. But in an automized world where machines were supervising machines whose jobs were to guarantee the function of other machines mainly designed to ensure human survival, this seemed just *too* much off an accident for Inspector Gerard to accept. Especially with a display deeply future blue on the timesniffer.

"It seems it was somehow just her time to die," the Lieutenant suggested.  
"No chance of avoiding it."

"Know what I think?" the Insepctor asked. The Lieutenant, absolutely unaware of the Inspector's inside, shook his head in awe.

"I think," Inspector Gerard said, "this is exactly what happened."

### 3

Inspector Gerard was no great idealist when it came to time travel and the paradoxes involved. He knew that nothing he'd ever do would actually change anything; it could, at the outmost, generate some additional futures if the consequences of his actions didn't fit within the time matrices of one of the already existing ones. He also knew that none of his bosses one hundred years from now would ever come across the sensation of seeing his world change as a result of Inspector Gerard's deeds or omissions. All they could tell was whether the totality of all timelines was more or the less as they wished them to be, or more or less unpleasant. According to Non-Einsteinian teachings, the cross-section of all existing timelines deserved to be called "the real," but could only be comprehended by three known forms of intelligence in the charted universe: the pantheon of dead creators which slumbered beyond the dark portals of Kol-Ho; the Emerald Entity, which had moved her home world outside 4dimensional space some trillion years ago (to the deep regret of the Abonaerian priesthood), and the renegade AI that controlled the Brizzlig Nebulae. Considering this, it was not hard to understand that Inspector Gerard, like any sensible man, would do what he did for two

reasons only: *abareth*: blackmail and *besoreth*: a safe pension in hard 23rd century union dollars.

Just now, he was sitting at the bar with that particular expression that only some rare street dogs or middle-aged terran men provided with tobacco and whiskey could cultivate: adopt or at least shoot me, it seemed to say, or else fuck off and run into some *Goliath* street-cleaner bot. His trenchcoat hung across the seat next to him so that nobody would try to sit down behind him. His eyes focussed on the siconarian half-bred table dancers whose eyelashes and nipples were shiny from the ooze of *kaliki*, lasciviously hip-swinging to the groove of the retrojazz.

"You don't like them, do you," the Lieutenant said when he had finally managed to squeeze his slender body through the dark ranks of the peeping Toms and found that the Inspector had been ignoring him for a reasonable timespan.

"Is it kind of an occupational disease," Inspector Gerard asked without raising his voice or directing his basset look at the young puppy, who indeed was his only reason for looking in some other direction.

"What do you mean?" the Lieutenant asked, rattled.

"Your eyes," Inspector Gerard said, emptying his whiskey. "They are as blue as those damned timesniffers."

"Oh no," the Lieutenant giggled with embarrassment and shifted from one foot to the other. "It was my wife. She somehow liked that colour. Said it reminded her of a guy called Klein from the pre-contact centuries. So I changed them."

"Ah," Inspector Gerrard said and lit another cigarette. "Remember my words son, but if any woman again wants you to change your eye colour for the sake of some *Klein* guy, tell her to get some lad from the Castor rings; if she likes darn oddities, she can have them all, abroad... you understand me?"

"Yes sir," the Lieutenant nodded. At least the Inspector was now looking at him.

"Now what do you have for me."

Glad to change the subject, the Lieutenant rummaged through his pockets until he produced a little card. Oldfashioned tree-paper, not the usual pseudo-stuff, very expensive, set with a classical two-dimensional hologram field. He handed it to the Inspector.

### **WISH & PROMISE**

*" All The Time There Is "*

777-13875049

"Found that in her handbag," the Lieutenant explained. "First didn't think about it, then remembered there was a similar one with the guy slain by a teleport-pole two weeks ago."

"I see," Inspector Gerard said.

"Then we looked the thing up in the semitronic, and know what? This com number doesn't exist, at least not officially, and to make it even better, it changes like roughly every quarter of an hour. Phone them, and some bot voice wants to know your club member ID."

"Must be a very exclusive kind of club."

"We sat the semi-tron on a neuronal cross-scan on Yani and the other guy."

"Wouldn't it be more helpful to get our hands on some living club member..?"

The Lieutenant's eyes were flashing with joy.

"Yeah, and guess what? We got one."

"Really?" Inspector Gerard said. "Who?"

"You won't believe it," the Lieutenant tried to extend his moment of triumph. "Doctor Reed-Sung, the famous scientist just recovered from Carradyne Syndrome."

"How's that" Inspector Gerard asked and frowned at his whiskey.

"When we ran the usual programs through the semi-tron, we came upon two interesting facts. *Abareth*: there had been a lot of unusual, or, to put it more precisely, *improbable* deaths during the last few weeks, all involving halfings or full aliens with ties to psionical potent areas of the West-GPS, like Abonar or the Tel'pheer Cluster. And *besoreth*: there had also been some very improbable *savings*, like the millionaire they fished out of the oldtown bay, and also Doctor Reed-Sung, who fell into a coma just before he could finish his long-awaited formula on transmolecular corrosives, and re-awoke just recently to the total astonishment of his doctors. The scale on the timesniffers in those cases where we had a chance to check had been mostly the same... there *has* to be something weird going on, and the 23rd century wants us to do *something* about it."

"You sound like a cheap police advertisement, dammit. Give me some good old-fashioned clues, man."

"Okay," the Lieutenant said. "Yani Heimbergen was assistant to Dr. Reed-Sung in his laboratory. Unfortunately, he has disappeared, but we're working on that."

"Why didn't you say that from the very beginning," Inspector Gerard said, emptied his glass, stood up and reached for his trenchcoat.

"I want to sell," Inspector Gerard said after the femalized computer voice had accepted the codebreaker derived from the semi-tron. It hadn't been easy to

reconstruct it from two already long-dead brains, and it would have been a damned shame if it had proved useless.

"So you want an audience with Mister Promise," the voice said unconcerned.

"If that's the way to go," Inspector Gerard said and brushed back his obstinate hair. His eyes were sunk deeply, and he was still wearing his trenchcoat.

"If you want to sell, you see Mister Promise. You want to buy, you see Mister Wish," the voice reminded him patiently.

"Obviously. I want to see Mr. Promise, then."

"Have a seat."

Inspector Gerard sat down in one of the sepia-coloured cocktail seats and was only vaguely aware of the fact that he looked like a bacillus in a sterile environment while he lit another cigarette. He also tried not to think of the fact that there were ten inches of Abonaerian steel between himself and the outside world, that probably this whole giant Hover Unit with its indirect floor illumination and its timeless expensive furniture was no longer in the same city he had entered it, and, even more probably, that this whole hoax with the faked ID would last maybe half an hour at the most. Any beginner in his job would have started getting nervous.

"Please do not do this," the gaunt man in the dark clothing who had silently entered the room said. He pointed to Inspector Gerard's burning cigarette.

"I always smoke, if you don't mind."

"It would just be a shame to reduce your market value," the gaunt man said with the knowing smile of a gravedigger. He wore an oldfashioned three-piece, had a sharp haircut and almost black eyes at both sides of a hawkish nose. The shiny chain of an even more anachronistic pocket watch had into his waistcoat.

"I'm Mr. Promise."

"You don't keep your customers waiting, do you."

"So stupid if I did," Promise smiled.

"A pleasure to meet you." They shook hands.

"Nice you should think so."

They had a little walk down the corridor. The light-tubes in the floor made both of them lose their shadows, and Inspector Gerard felt slightly uncomfortable about this.

"So you're the one who buys."

"I like to think of myself as the one who accepts customer's wishes."

"Ah, that's fine with me."

Mr. Promise opened an invisible door in the ivory-coloured wall and begged Inspector Gerard to enter. The interior was very much as Inspector Gerard would have imagined a late Victorian drawing-room. An enormous table made of



real-looking wood with a green broker lamp on it dominated the rear area, and big leather seats around an open fireplace the left. The gaunt man begged Inspector Gerard to sit down at the table while he went to fetch some drinks, and for the first time, the Inspector felt a little distressed.

"So who recommended you to us, Mr. Gerard?" he asked and handed the Inspector a glass. "I don't think we have met before."

"I'm a friend of Yani Heimbergen."

"Oh, I bet you are," Mr. Promise said coolly. It seemed as if his long, graceful fingers were going for something in his waistcoat, and it was most certainly not the pocket watch.

"I'm not here to file any complaints," Inspector Gerard said and thoughtfully took a nip from the dark golden fluid in his glass. Then he looked at the other man with a sharklike frankness that some lawyers aim for but only murderers achieve. Mr. Promise relaxed.

"That's good. You see, sometimes some upset life-companion would try to act out some old-fashioned idea of revenge or such like."

"You know Yani had nothing close to a life-companion."

"Indeed I know," Promise said slowly, "and I wonder why she never mentioned you."

"She didn't have to advertise me, as she knew I would come." Innocent and confident as a lamb, Inspector Gerard regarded a gallery of paintings on the wall by the fireplace, stretching from Goya via Rossetti and Dali to the conservative pre-unionist art of the late 21st century and some wild paintings he couldn't classify. The hidden door had long closed behind them. The room had no window. Only a big shut-down screen at Mr. Promise's back showing the Magellan Nebulae.

"What do you have to offer me, Mr. Gerard?"

"Well, I think, mostly the same as Yani had."

"How generous of you, Mr. Gerard. I... *promise* your good will will pay off."

"I came to understand that time is a very precious thing to sell."

"Of course it is. It is the thing most often demanded."

"Well, see, I think I've got enough of it. Just too much time, you know."

"Our business needs people like you, Mr. Gerard."

"So what do I get?"

"Well, in your case... it's a classical AOD contract: All On Demand. We pay you any price you like... and you... *promise* to give us all - all of your time - if we demand it."

"I'd be interested to know how all this works," Inspector Gerard said.

"That's none of your business" Mr. Promise said. "It won't affect our contract."

"And if I wanted the information as part of my payment?"

"Well," Mr. Promise explained, slightly annoyed, "it's sufficient to know that it's a kind of superior alien technology that allows us to take, trade and exchange individual time spans. Especially well with psionic talented subjects, but we're improving on that."

"I have no psionic powers."

"Oh, most people already have, although they are not aware of it" Promise smiled. "It's already in the genetic pool, and increases all the time."

"Strange thought."

"These are strange times, aren't they."

"So who will be buying my time?"

"Ah, that is very confidential." His eyes were glittering with a fire that a more poetic soul than Inspector Gerard's would be tempted to describe as unearthly. "And we don't know yet anyway, the possibilities are so unlimited..." He raised his glass in a theatrical gesture. "Any obsessed artist hoping for the big throw. A scientist! A loving father... Any rich person fearing death. Imagine!" He bent over his table and fixed the Inspector's eyes. "Ten years to find your true love and to marry her. Just a year more to go see the Tel'pheer cluster! Just one more month with your beloved ones. A week to finish a painting... *Only one last day for watching the sunrise*. Just imagine how precious every additional hour can be! What if it is the hour you will find peace at last...? As I have said... unlimited." He took a deep breath. "We sell our customers all the time they demand. Just all the time that they need. Just all the time that there is."

"That sure is very interesting," Inspector Gerard said and decided it was time for the Lieutenant to do *something* to get him out of here.

"Say, how do you ensure the solvency of your customers?"

The gaunt man's eyes were very narrow by now, and his broker lamp illuminated his tall face from below.

"We make them sign a very special... kind of contract." He produced a golden pen from his waistcoat. "So everybody gets and gives exactly what was paid for."

"See. So I will go have a bit of a thought about my payment, right? I'll need some more time... but I promise I'll be back in few days."

"I fear this won't be possible anymore," Mr. Promise said smiling and his eyes glittered again in this very unusual manner. "Please sign. Will you?"

The flashing quicksilver light of the energy screen preventing Dr. Reed-Sung from falling 135 storeys deeper washed in a ghostly fashion over the apartment walls. Reed-Sung was a minimalist, as many eccentric scientists are. Apart from the

anthrazete gobelins, a dimly lit diamond sphere, two heavy Ming vases and a Sharan III pseudo-palm the apartment was pure metal, cheap but heartbreakingly beautiful Siconarian platin-cover. A desk with a computer unit stood near the energy screen. Blinking Anti-G-Cars and Hover Units outside the screen and the occasional flicker of the New Francisco Sky Train chasing through its plexiglass tube at frantic speeds gave their personal contribution to the incomprehensible meshwork of illumination. In spite of this, it was almost dark in the apartment.

Inspector Gerard took a deep pull on his cigarette and knocked the ashes on the floor, where they were blown away by a faint windfield. His bones and jaws were still hurting. Some days had passed.

"So you found out," Doctor Reed-Sung said without turning towards his visitor. He was a dark and insignificant silhouette against the flickering energy screen. Except for his voice and the windfield, the apartment was absolutely silent, but membranes in the walls compensated for all natural echo.

"It wasn't that difficult to guess" Inspector Gerrard said and took a step closer. "With Yani being your assistant - and more? - and both of you being members of *Wish and Promise*. Only the exact kind of your relation gave me some pains. And your hideout here, of course."

"But tell me" Doctor Reed-Sung said in the low, polite manner of all Mandarins, the same kind of speech that had driven westerners insane since the dark ages, "how could you understand? A lot of improbable things happen these days. But even with my education, I found the underlying concepts of *Wish and Promise* quite... intriguing."

"A lot of people steal your time" Inspector Gerard said. "It was only a question of time before somebody would start *selling* it."

"Everything has its dealers" Reed-Sung agreed. "And I just needed some more... you understand?"

"What is the uselessly spent time of some simple lab assistant compared to your work," Inspector Gerard whispered.

"Exactly" Dr. Reed Sung replied. Finally he turned round and smiled amiably at Inspector Gerard. He was a small man with a friendly face. He had probably worn the same smile when sleeping with Yani, and when finally buying her up, the Inspector thought. And it was going to be the same smile for every question he would ask him from now on; he already knew that.

"Dr. Reed Sung, I am Inspector Gerard from the New Francisco police department, and I have come to arrest you."

"Of course you have," Doctor Reed-Sung said with his patient and satisfied smile and pushed a button at the computer. The device silently shut down and sank in the metal grave of his desk.

"My work is done. No more time that I will need, and not much more that will remain. Let's go."

The GEG logo silently disappeared into thin air, and the Lieutenant entered the room. He held up two cups of Shanar III coffee. Inspector Gerard looked up, tired, and once again wondered about the unusual eyes of the younger man.

"What did they say?" the Lieutenant asked and took a seat.

"They were glad we eliminated Mr. Promise and are not very amused about the escape of Mr. Wish. Obviously they are both time travellers messing around with forbidden 23rd century technologies. Contech, that is."

"They knew them?"

"Worse than that. *Wish and Promise* seems to be one of the most successful enterprises of the forthcoming century, and guessing from Dr. Reed-Sung's sudden death two days ago, they're still in the biz in most of the timelines out there. Ever wondered why everything seems so broken up in their world? Here you've got an answer."

"They are stealing each other's time, aren't they?" the Lieutenant asked and took a mouthful of coffee. "They're running out of it."

"They just have too many wishes, and are eager to give too many promises" Inspector Gerard said. "Trying to get their hands on just anything."

"And they are all mixed up with alien DNA already, aren't they? Slaves to a network of physics they don't understand, and just swept away by the waves of time."

"You are a poet" Inspector Gerard smiled.

"I'm just concerned."

"Why are you bothered by our future?"

"It's our job, isn't it?"

"Yes, but there's something more to you. I have an eye for it. *You* have kind of an eye for it. I mean, forget about that Yves Klein shit. *Nobody* would run around with that colour nowadays."

"Ah, yes, maybe."

"By the way, I don't remember your name, Lieutenant."

"Don't worry about that."

"I don't," Inspector Gerard said. "I really don't worry about much these days."

The two men sat silently at the table, drinking coffee.

"So you're alright again."

"I'm alright."

"That's fine."

"You heard about Reed-Sung getting the Nobel Prize, posthumously?"

"I heard about that."

"Ah."

Silence again.

"Well, maybe there's something I really can't stand" Inspector Gerard said.

"A lot of people were already wondering."

"If you can keep a promise" Inspector Gerard smiled.

"If you wish."

"What really bothers me," Inspector Gerard said, "is my name. I mean, it's a French name, you know."

The Lieutenant nodded. "I heard about that. It used to be called 'France', didn't it."

"Damn right," Inspector Gerard said and emptied his coffee. His eyes were more vivid than ever. "They sold themselves to the Mandarin Grand Empire, five years before I was born. And they had such a beautiful past, didn't you know? Centuries of kings and of revolutions and handcrafted artwork, and they sold all this to the slit-eyes, and they again sold it right away to the royal sale-room on Abonar Prime. Nobody reads much about history any more, but actually this used to be the foundation of Western Eurasia, and it's hardly forty years ago. Sometimes you know I think we're really preoccupied with the future, and I hate having a Chinese name, cause I'm not a Chinaman. Never was one, and never wished to be. I'm a New Franciscan, you know."

"Why didn't you change it?"

Inspector Gerard considered this for a while.

"Because it is me," he said. "And I'm too old for changes now. Indeed I'm much older today than you would think."

"Ah, well. Really, I think you used to have a wonderful world down in the 22nd century" the Lieutenant said.

"This is the 22nd century, you know."

"Oh, I know" the Lieutenant replied warmheartedly.-

**VICTORIA CLAY**

**JACK**

He had no friends, but Jack was not alone. Never. There were Michael, Tom and Susan who went everywhere Jack went. Sometimes they had a lot of fun together talking and laughing. And now and then they argued. He could not remember how he had met his three companions; they had suddenly appeared.

First Michael, a tall handsome guy, who was very funny and sporty appeared at his side. He had a charming and boyish smile, which showed his

perfect white teeth. Besides he was always a little tanned and his blond hair was bleached by the sun. They spent many sunny days playing football and taking long walks through the forest, which was close to the house where Jack and his mother lived. Of course, Jack was always a step behind, always running more slowly than Michael. Jack had a tardy, unrhythmical way of walking. He seemed to think about every step he took and where it would be best to place his foot. Not so Michael, he ran as though he knew every single part of the ground. Jack admired Michael's frank personality although they could not talk together for more than a couple of minutes because Michael only seemed to be interested in sports and girls. Neither of which Jack had any experience of at all.

Then there was Tom, the more silent and thoughtful one, who often sat by Jack's feet staring into some far distance. Once in a while he started talking but at the next moment he fell into silence again. Jack liked Tom. He liked the way Tom sat there thinking and not moving at all. He wished he could be more like Tom, more calm and not so nervous. In fact, Jack was very nervous. He could not just sit there. He kept moving, strolling up and down his room like a tiger in his cage. When he tried to sit just as still as Tom his fingers started beating on the floor, his knees began to shake. Jack often watched Tom with his stiff bearing but could not find the slightest movement in his face.

Susan was more like a sister to him. She was a bit younger than he, had long red hair and a funny little nose. Her eyes were steadily on the move and seemed to touch everything they could in as little time as possible. She used to hold Jack's hand and tell him some story while her pale blue eyes were restlessly moving around. Jack loved listening to Susan's stories, which were obviously made up. But he did not mind. She told him about the birds in the sky and the little insects that were hiding in the grass. Jack used to close his eyes while Susan was talking. Everything she told him appeared in front of his inner eye and became realistic. He could imagine each shade of the bird's feather and every noise an ant made by pulling a crumb of bread behind her. He dived into a little world, a world only belonging to him Susan and him. When they were disturbed, either by the two others or his mother knocking on the door, he felt as if he had only woken up from a beautiful dream in a foreign world.

His mother did not talk to his friends. She worked as a nurse and did not seem to care much about Jack's playmates. When they sat together at the table she ate her dinner and asked Jack about school and what he had done that day. He did not like to talk about school, simply because he hated it. His mother ignored it when he told her about his companions, she was too tired from having worked the whole day.

At first he had felt happy to have somebody he could talk to. But now he wished he could wake up in the morning knowing he was alone. Then as soon as

he looked around his room he noticed either Michael, Tom or Susan sitting or standing somewhere. Waiting for him to wake up and talk to them.

Sometimes the four of them played games they had invented themselves. Michael was always trying to be best. He was very loud and he acted as if he was the chief of their little group. Jack did not like this. He knew he was too irresolute to be the leader of any sort of group, he admired Michael's behaviour and tried to copy it. But he always failed. This annoyed him but he got more angry because Susan seemed to adore Michael. Michael in turn was not at all interested in Susan. He was fond of more "mature" girls. Jack was unable to gain Susan's attention. He did not want Susan to fall in love with him but to look at him like a big brother. He felt the desire to look after her, to protect her from the outer world, which seemed too dangerous, too wide for Jack. He often caressed her like a babydoll or a pet he had always wanted but never got.

One day Jack and Michael were alone, talking about sports. Which meant that Michael was talking and Jack was listening. Michael was showing off, always pointing out how good he was and how much fun it was to play football with his dad. Jack could not stand this. He had no dad to play with. He suddenly started to shout at Michael, saying all the things he had wanted to say for such a long time. Everything he thought gushed forth, he could not censure anything. His burst of eloquence was interrupted by Michael hitting Jack. Jack became silent from one second to the next. He also started to hit Michael, who being the stronger, subdued Jack within a few seconds. Michael had hit Jack so hard that he lost consciousness and lay on his back on the floor.

When he woke up he looked into the friendly face of a white-dressed nurse. His mother was standing next to his bed. He looked around. There was another person dressed in white with a name card which said Doctor Coleman. Many thoughts were rushing through his mind. Where was he? How had he come here? What was his mother doing here? Why wasn't she wearing her white coat? His next question was answered as he turned his head and looked at the other side of the room. There they stood. All three. In the corner looking at him with concern in their eyes. He noticed that Michael had the most sorrowful glance in his eyes. The next moment Jack remembered what had happened. He had had an argument with Michael. Now that he was remembering what had happened he felt the pain in his head. He looked at his mother again, who was talking to Doctor Coleman, who was just telling her about the problem Jack had. He heard him say: "I'm so sorry Mrs. Thompson I have to tell you that Jack sees people who do not really exist. Our therapy has not yet had any effect on his multiple personality."

Jack again looked over to Michael, Tom and Susan. He smiled.-

# MARJOLIJN STORM ET AL

## CHRISTMAS PARTY PROJECT: CREATIVE DRIVEL

as performed by members of the Creative Writing class at the Christmas Party 2002  
**written by Marjolijn Storm**  
 with contributions by Christine Ritz, Dilek Batmaz, Daniela Schneider, A.R. Lohmann  
 and the members of Creative Writing

### INTRODUCTION

1a)	ting	ting	ting	ting
3)	1 - 2 - 3 - 4		1 - 2 - 3 - 4	1 - 2 - 3 - 4
			tong	tong

1a)	ting	ting	ting	ting
1b)	1 - 2 - 3 - 4	1 - 2 - 3 - 4		
3)	tong	tong	tong	tong

1a)	ting 4x	...	...	...
1b)	1 - 2 - 3 - 4	...	...	...
2)	ting 4x	1 - 2 - 3 - 4	creative	
3)		creative	1 - 2 - 3 - 4	looooooove?

1a)	...	...	ting 4x	
1b)	...	...		ting 4x
2)	creative	creative	creative	creative
3)		looooooove?	wri	

1a)	...	...	...	...	
1b)	...	..	...	...	
2)		creative		creative	pause
3)	wri		wri	wri	

tutti: creative writing!

1b) + 3) : we'd like to write like

1a) + 2) : we'd like to write like:



Tennyson, Chatterton, Morrison  
Ayckbourn, Blake 'n' Bacon  
Chesterton not Wellington  
Kipling, Fielding, Golding 'n' Browning  
Fleming and Godwin  
Ibsen, Bergson, Austen  
Kureishi -

Bless you!

Thank you.  
Melville, Boswell, Sitwell do't well  
Crusoe, Rousseau do so too  
Beckett, Bennett, Byatt and Doyle

Dante?

Danke!  
Shakespeare and Schlegel  
Swinburne and Hegel  
Tolkien and Wallace  
have all been before us  
and Shelley

Really?

Even twice!

## **CHAPTER 1: WHAT WE WRITE ABOUT - LOVE, DEPRESSIONS, CRIME**

### "The Rose" (by Christine Ritz)

Oh rose, your fragrance tells  
Of stories too wonderful for our tongues  
To turn them into words.

Oh rose, your colour is more intense  
Than anything on earth - yes, vivid like the  
Pounding heart that waits for her aimé.

Oh rose, your slender figure is  
so elegant, so touching  
and yet so fragile, breakable in careless hands

Oh rose, your thorns can hurt  
like needles our skin  
Were you but born without them,  
how tender love would be!

## "Depressive Poem" (by Dilek Batmaz)

I feel so bad  
I am so sad  
My mind goes mad  
I am so passive  
It's all so massive  
It would be less if  
My mind wasn't depressive

The reader dies.

soloist screams: She's dead!

tutti: dead? dead? dead? ... Who did it? When? How? What? Why? ad lib.  
Who is the murderer? Who is the murderer? Who is the murderer? Who is the murderer?

solis: The butler? The gardener? The nurse? The broker? Peter? The cop? The mother? The  
uncle? The daughter? The teacher? The tailor? The soldier? The housemaid?  
The cook? The butcher? The professor?

soloist, shocked: Aaaaah! The murderer .... the murderer is .... the writer!

## CHAPTER 2: ODE TO A PETER

### "Ode to Mista Peta Bews" (by Daniela Schneider)

Mista Peta Bews  
seems to think his use  
- as a teacher, mind you -  
is to be jolly like a smirf  
and to offer us and serve  
tea and sherry  
and to provide  
opportunities and facilities  
to joke and smoke  
and to ignite  
the creative fire  
- no, not of flute and lyre,  
but of pen and paper.  
The man who peeks beyond the vapor  
of merely carnal things  
and strives for literature's cosmic strings

is Mista Peta Bews;  
and if you ever muse  
Where the frolic heck is Peta ?  
well, then he's out there somewhere,  
making photocopies.

### CHAPTER 3: EXAMPLES

On cue, everyone starts reading their own texts out loud. Each in a different mode, according to the mood of their text.

#### "All writers great and small" (by Anna Rebecca Lohmann)

I'll tell you now / to spare you confusions / if you want to be a writer / give up your illusions. / James Joyce was a drunkard / and Bukowski a swine / and Kafka was way / past the thin red line. / Sartre was ugly / so was Henry Miller / and Faulkner / looked like serial killer. / Anything Keats did / he did it for fame / Burroughs shot his wife / at a party game. / Klaus Mann was a sissy / De Beauvoir was a hen / and Hemingway / just a dirty old man. / My definition of a redneck? / I'd say: Arthur Miller / A sad old bugger? / Sounds like Friedrich Schiller. / Roth's a cynical bastard / Brett Easton Ellis is gay / Henry James drank / 4 bottles of Jameson's a day. / Nabokov's sexually frustrated / Kundera's a fake / and both of them were / as pathetic as Blake. / Heine was syphilitic / Jane Austen a bitch / and Agatha Christie / really looked like a witch. / Dostojevsky and Puschkin / were melancholic and sad / due to the amount / of Vodka they'd had. / Capote's dandyism / was over the top / And Paul Auster / is just an intellectual snob. / There are many dark spots / in Thomas Mann's Vita / and Shakespeare himself / was a liar and cheater. / So, go on, enjoy drunken comas / just like Dylan Thomas / Be snobbish and sneer / like Oscar, the queer. / Be a dandy like Wodehouse or a scoundrel like Brecht / or like Thomas Mann, all stiff and correct / Cause you know, in reality / weird as it sounds / it's a writers personality / not his writing that counts.

When the conductor holds up a sign with a Peter-sentence on it, everyone pauses, repeats the sentence on the sign, and then goes on reading.

Peter-sentences:

"She was just 22."

"Grandma has scented soap."

"The night we sat on the pizza\*."

Crescendo and decrescendo of readers, fade out with "ting"s.

Tacet.-

## THE AUTHORS

### MARJOLIJN STORM



current additions:

Milk Buttons, Dicky Dick Dickens, gift shops, the charm of old Ealing films, Youp van't Hek, words like "conundrum", "skedaddle" or "Schrumpfbegriff", Stephen Fry, Gilles de Geus, Kinky Friedman, La Cathédrale by Barrios, Mark Tavener, Tango apple flavour, Robbie Coltrane's accent and Maggie Smith's feet.

current hobby:

trying not to forget things

### MATTHIAS MÖSCH

I started writing with some Ringelnatz rip-offs the chicks in primary school were to be impressed of. Poetry is like that. A change to drama brought modest success, first production with 19, some years in theatre ensembles, the Munich Film School. But the ultimate improvement came with participating in the Creative Writing group. It works! Try it yourself.

The following was my contribution for last year's CW Halloween event.



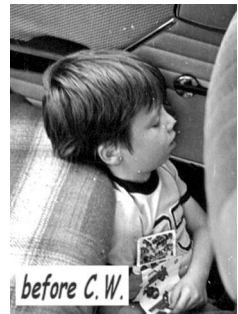
### RUTH KIRCHER

Ruth doesn't like having her picture taken.



### ALEXANDER FLORY

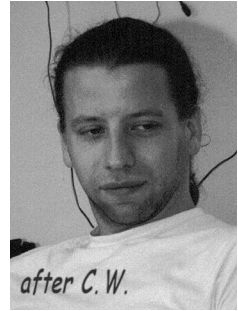
Alexander Flory started the course in 1995 as test subject in a long-term study conducted by the Faculty of Medicine to investigate the noxious effects of creative writing. Over the years he has consumed an estimated 1200 cigarettes as well as 25 litres of medium-dry sherry during course-time, and listened to 960 pieces of writing. Tobacco and beverages consumed in the weekly post-course pubbing excesses are excluded from the calculation, as are potentially harmful pub-discussions.



Up to now the study has shown the following side effects of creative writing:

headaches (common), allergic reactions to certain words or phrases (common), disorientation (frequent), insomnia (rare), nausea, diarrhoea, and/or emesis (very rare), uncontrollable laughter (extremely rare).

Alexander Flory is still alive, but not well.



### **DILEK BATMAZ**

- wouldn't mind if I grew a little bit taller so that I could be a better volleyball - player
- sometimes too enthusiastic about questions so that you could get an answer without asking anything
- still Turkish - supposed to be German

### **ANNA REBECCA LOHMANN**

There are basically five things one has got to know about me:

- good things come in small packages
- if Wales was flattened out it would be bigger than England! [and it doesn't matter whether they're winning or not: the Welsh Rugby team is the best team in the world! and don't say anything about sheep!]
- freckles are a sign of beauty
- chocolate might not be a staple food for you. It definitely is for me, though
- don't start on a topic I know something about. I will go on for hours producing extremely uninteresting historical details and you might miss your bus or be late for dinner



### **GIUSEPPINA AGOSTINETTO-LESLE**

Giuseppina Agostinetto-Lesle was born in Italy; she has lived in Germany for many years.

## NINA SECKEL

...borderline in every way. after dipping into psychology and philosophy finally found her vocation in literature. crazy about horses and cats.



## DALE ADAMS

Born in Singapore, have Australian nationality, grew up on board a ship, and am currently living in Germany. (Don't ask)

Have been studying for I forget how long and am finally! finishing.

## ANDREA T. ARIMAN

Andrea loves traveling, dancing, open mikes, and writing. She took a prose writing workshop with Arthur Golden and a poetry writing class with Marilyn Nelson, Connecticut Poet Laureate at the time. Andrea draws inspiration from nature, books she reads, movies she watches, music she listens to, stories she hears, and people she meets. Some of her work has been published in *Long River Review*, *Conundrum*, and previous volumes of *In Our Write Minds*. She would like to thank all those who have listened to her read, who have commented on and thus contributed to her work in progress, and those who appreciate her writing. Above all, she would like to thank Peter Bews for giving interested students the opportunity to enhance their writing and speaking skills of English.



## CHRISTINE RITZ



I started my career as a creative writer at the age of eight - my works focussed on a little girl who, surprisingly, was not unlike myself - except for the fact that she could fly. My audience - fellow pupils at school - seemed to be fascinated; although, come to think of it, I wish I hadn't read my stories out to them...

As I became older, my stories turned into descriptions of elderly ladies (Clothilde and friends) who bragged about trips on pirate ships they had never actually taken.

After 7th grade, my promising career came to a premature stop as essay themes turned to more earnest matters (e.g. teamspirit in P.E. lessons). I didn't take up writing again until I joined Peter's class - weird to think that my main reason for going there was to have my English corrected!

## MATTHIAS REISSMANN

I'm twenty years old,  
My Zodiac sign is cancer  
I'd describe myself like this:  
I take events as they come at me.  
But I run off to encounter them beforehand



## PATRICIA GARCIA

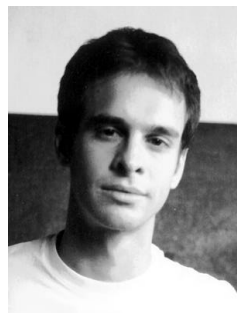
Zaragoza (February 1983)  
Barcelona (1986)  
and now Heidelberg (2002-2003)  
during my second year of Translation and Interpretation  
to know the city where many people seem to have lost their hearts.



## JENS GEORG RYMES

*la musique a Joe: c'est la rumba,  
le vieux rock au mambo,  
et Xavier Cugat et Yma Sumac*

(Vanessa Paradis)



## DANIELA SCHNEIDER

Don't write! This is my third contribution to a writing class booklet, and I still ain't famous! Yea, I know, I should be content with most elder folks recognizing me on the boulevards of Sandhausen... Okay, write, but don't move to or be born in Sandhausen!

Anyways, what with the CW booklets (for those who've been keeping track), the blue issue of 2000 is my favorite because it's blue. I find blue a healthy color. It's also the first CW issue I've seen with poetry in it. As for this issue, I'm still suspicious of things like coherent sense-making™ and plot development® and thus prefer poetry. - But Peter, I promise, you'll get a short story next semester! (It might be a crappy one though.)

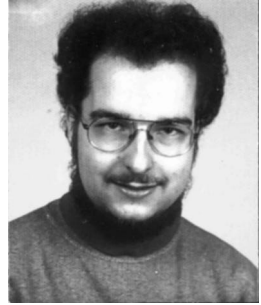
To my fellow authors : You rock! Or as they say in you know were : Yar all that inna buncha chips!

A final word : To my knowledge, Y'ALL is the coolest piece of vocab ever.



## HANS-PETER SCHÖNI

I was born in Heilbronn on September 14th 1979 and it took me 21 years to get away from that place. At the moment, I live in Mannheim and spend 2 hours a day in the OEG, cursing Heidelberg's housing market. I study English and History and am currently in my fifth semester. Most of my free time I try to spend gaming with my friends. I like almost all kinds of games: board games, (trading-)card games, computer games, tabletop games and especially role-playing games. In the rest of the time I design my own role-playing games (at the moment one home-made system and three campaign settings), read a good book (my favourites are Tolkien and Pratchett) or write a story for Creative Writing.



## VIOLA NORDSIECK

female, multi-coloured, moody  
14/12/1980 (Villingen, Black Forest) - Today (Heidelberg)  
English, Philosophy and (other) unidentified pastimes  
no other distinctive characteristics noted

## UTE GROSSKOPFF

*I'm broke but I'm happy  
I'm poor but I'm kind  
I'm high but I'm grounded  
I'm sane but I'm overwhelmed  
I'm lost but I'm hopeful  
I'm tired but I'm working  
I care but I'm restless  
I'm free but I'm focused  
I'm green but I'm wise  
I'm here but I'm really gone  
What it all comes down to  
Is that I haven't got it all figured out  
just yet*



(Alanis Morissette)



## OLIVER PLASCHKA

After 28 years of existence, lots of stories better not told, and a year in this wonderful class, it's still an interesting question why so many of us spend their time writing about people feeling... well, *uneasy* about being alive ("bad" is such a harsh word); and even more so, listening to others' stories picturing mostly the same mood.



So what is the motivation to go through all this again and again? Besides sherry, tobacco and Peter's office, I think it has to be one of the following:

- a) trying to make other people feel worse than yourself
- b) desperately convincing your friends there *has* to be somebody feeling worse than you all can ever imagine
- c) avoiding taking all this "life" thing too serious
- d) considering to start taking it *really* serious, or
- e) the joy of doing just anything different than wasting your time with one of the above.

Which still is done best with sherry, tobacco, and in Peter's office.

## VICTORIA CLAY

Victoria Clay

10.08.82; Leo

Course of study: English and Spanish

Hobbies: playing the saxophone, dancing, creating exotic dishes,  
writing stories



## CREATIVE WRITING

This is a voluntary, non-Schein course for all those who enjoy writing and are happy to have their work corrected by me (that's the language-learning bit) and discussed by their peers (that's the learning-to-write bit).

The course is pure pleasure on Thursday but pure hell as the deadline for handing in approaches, particularly the first piece. Participants are NOT expected to be alcoholics, despite the rumours that are circulating, nor is it some kind of secret sect - all are welcome from whatever semester, but it is true that after the course has finished most of us continue the discussions in the Essighaus in the Plöck.

So be prepared to give your opinion and to let the ink flow!



Creative Writing

**Do 18.15-19.45 AS 112**

Peter Bews

Look us up on the Seminar Homepage under Groups

**<http://www.listen.to/writeminds>**



Don't miss the presentation on

**Wednesday 7th May**

Romanischer Keller

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