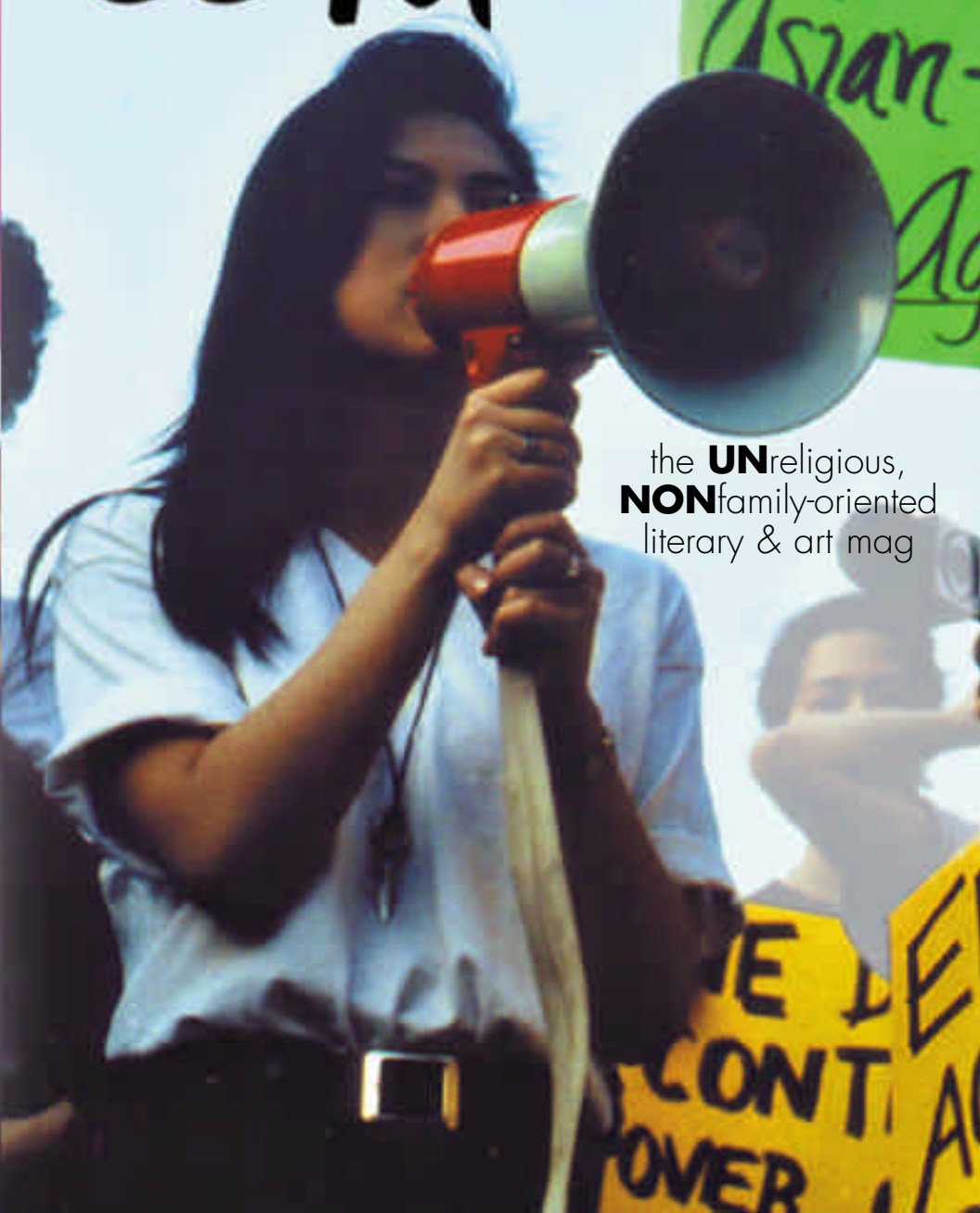


ccfd



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September '07



the **UN**religious,
NONfamily-oriented
literary & art mag

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5, 34. Cover art of a journalism photo of women protesting at the Take Back The Night March.

Truck full of Tires,
photographed by Joel
McGregor



the boss lady's editorial

Does the Internet Equal the End of Reading?

does the advent of new technology mean
the end of reading from a newspaper?

I'm sure you've heard statistics over recent years that American teens are failing basic literacy tests in school. Now, you could argue that it's the teacher's fault for kids not learning to read (though teachers were able to teach people to read in the past...), or you could postulate that it is how children now are taught to live their lives that makes reading from the printed page less important.

This of this example: with cell phones you can talk and talk and talk to anyone, even if you're not near a land line, and if you want to save money on the phone bill, you can text message friends. Granted, that's type, so people have to be able to comprehend words, but I'm sure text messages are seldom grammatically correct (and how many acronyms can be used for phrases to save your fingers from typing on a cell phone, which allow people to get an idea across without actually having to construct proper sentences?), so the art of writing well, or understanding proper english, can easily be lost.

It makes me think of how cellular phones have so inundated American lives that it's frightening. Go to the airport, see people on the phone. On the last flight I was on I saw people making calls to someone when we were delayed in take-off three times; I saw a flight attendant just about yell at a person to turn off their phone because it was not supposed to be on when the airplane was about to take off. and of course, once the plane landed, because people could get their carry-on bags from the overhead bins, people were making phone calls to people, telling them "we've just landed." Is telling them that *really* necessary? I had to call my ride once I got my luggage, because they were waiting for me in the call phone parking area of the airport. But right when you get off the plane? Is that really necessary?

But wait, that's just an airplane example. I heard a news story that cell phones have become so necessary in teenager's lives, because they need

to be able to contact anyone at any moment to help them out of a jam. That doesn't sound so bad, but in the news story, I heard that teens in a career meeting at their high school with their guidance counselor, would not know how to answer a question, so they'd *call their parents* to help them say the right answer.

Yes, they call their parents when asked a question on how they should answer. No lie.

I've seen ads on television where a child is asking their parents for their own cell phone, and parents keep saying no because it's too expensive (the ad is for less expensive phones they can buy for their children). All I think whenever I see that ad, is that if a child asked me for a phone, I'd say no. Because they shouldn't be getting a hold of anyone at any time. They can use the phone at home.

Now, I was raised strictly, had a 10:30 curfew when I was 17, and could go out one night on a weekend. But I never asked about making a phone call, and I could call people when I was at home (just avoid long distance calls). I think the rules I was given were too strict (especially when one of the weekend nights I'd work, and they wouldn't let me go out the other night... you know, with that 11:30 curfew, months before I was leaving for college), but I can't understand why any parent would actually purchase a separate phone for their child. They're a minor. They can use the parent's phone. The kid doesn't like it? Too bad. A parent isn't supposed to give a child everything a parent is entitled to, when their child is exactly that — a child. Cell phones are a newer technology (newer the personal computers in the home), and we act like everyone needs to have one surgically implanted into their hand so that anyone can talk to anyone at any time ever. Ut's a little over the top.

Enough about phones and communication. What about news, or being able to read a newspaper? I know teens don't pay much attention to news (unless it's entertainment news, of course), but adults want to know what's going on in the world. Newspapers are good for that, right? Well, sure, but they report on news from as recent as the night before (since they need time for printing and distribution). Why bother waiting for that when you can either read the articles on the Internet, or more easily, watch the drive-by media, I mean, the 24 hour news channels that exist (I think I see like 5 or 6 channel choices for news when I scroll through the cable choices). Even if you don't have cable, all the major networks even have news shows a few times a day (morning, some at noon, after the work day at later at night). Why even bother getting a newspaper when you can just turn on your TV and flick to a news channel?

When I do any research for any editorial of my own, I usually don't look to newspapers (well, I look to newspapers when I'm out of town and someone has a newspaper delivered that I can read for free, especially when I don't have access to the high speed Internet access I have at my office), but I look to the Internet for my sources — I might find a news article on the Internet I can reference for my work, but what do I need to go out any buy a copy of a newspaper for, when I can just use my keyboard and type in a few key words for a Google search?

Now, I keep giving examples of myself for this, what do *I* read, how do *I* work, what do *I* need... and that's probably because I don't have online access right now and I don't know what to search for on the Internet for information about the reading habits of people. I can just look around me and see that newspaper journalists (possibly in part because their sales are dropping) are in much smaller numbers than the number of television journalists out there, where it's more likely a television cast will send a television journalist to other countries to report the news than a newspaper would. Thanks to the invention of television, and the advent of the Internet as we know it, technology has pushed us farther and farther away from the mediums we have known to love — like writing on a printed page.

Even take *cc&d* magazine. Because Internet access is free for access to Scars Publications at <http://scars.tv>, the subscription list for electronic issues is fifteen times larger than the circulation of print copies, and people who aren't subscribers have access to these magazines as well, so the number of online readers is exponentially higher than for print issues. I've embraced technology and Internet access with *cc&d* since 1995, but I still love the print copies of the magazine, and I refuse to let that die. And yeah, you can see the print issues as PDF files online too, but there's a beauty in the printed page that far exceed whatever a web page could give you.

And yeah, Scars Publications has an Internet radio station (SIR Radio), but I'm not going to read issues for audio broadcast of magazines. If people don't want to pay for a print copy, fine (be that way). But you better at least be able to *read* the magazine (even if it's only online), and not depend on me to do it for you.

And that's the thing I think journalists and writers worry about — the fact the people are just looking for sound bytes of information from places like MSNBC (and I know it's MicroSoftNBC, but whenever I say that I think "Multiple Sclerosis NBC..."), and that with technology speeding towards people so quickly nowadays, people won't have the time to read the printed page. Newspapers are evidence of that. It's consoling to think that people congregate in bookstores now (because places like

Barnes & Noble or Borders made little cafés selling coffee in their stores to lure people in as a place to hang out), and I can't speak for the successes of the magazine industry, but I think journalists worry about the loss of the older medium like the newspaper.

If nothing else, the feel of a newspaper is different from a book of a glossy magazine (just don't caress the stuff too long and get the ink onto your hands). These are sensations that people lose out on by being glued in front of their computer for an extra half hour to get their news.

But honestly, I'm the first to tell you there's a convenience in getting material instantaneously online (and it's cheaper), but a large part of me still prefers reading things from a page instead. But the thing is, with new generations and new technologies, those old ideas fade away. I mean, I didn't have cell phone when I grew up (duh, they didn't exist), so when I lives as a single person in Chicago I didn't use a cell phone to get a hold of any friends. We left messages and came up with plans on our land lines (we called land lines our *phone* back in those days), and I was still able to get a hold of everyone I needed to, and I still was able to enjoy everything in my life. I didn't need to text message my friends, or have my cell phone at my side at all times to make sure that I'd never be alone.

But yeah, with a advent of all of these new technologies (like the Internet, which was first started at the University of Illinois for researchers to share information with each other, and like the cell phone, whose idea actually originated from seeing the cell phones that Captain Kirk used in the original Star Trek episodes), there is less and less of a need for those existing technologies, like newspapers. And although Thomas Jefferson is often quoted as saying that if he had the choice of a government with not newspaper of a newspaper with no government he's prefer the latter, but he also said that just reading one newspaper alone for all of your information was often worse than reading no newspaper at all, because you should learn from a wider variety and to get a better-balanced view of the news and the world around you. And having access to the Internet gives you a lot of pieces of information — some reliable, some not, but at least you get to hear a variety of perspectives.



Janet Kuypers®
Janet Kuypers
Editor in Chief

eye on the sky

NASA Looking at Planet... Earth

I need to share with you that I just heard of a NASA launch (and being the astronomy buff that I am, I was glued to the television when I heard the name NASA on the news) — five missiles were joined together for one launch, and these separating missiles would watch radioactivity of areas on Earth, that cause massive changes in upper-atmospheric weather that effect power lines and digital technical transactions.

Fascinating, people think NASA is in charge of searching for information about other planets, or the Space Station, and we only get ancillary side-products from NASA's technology (like certain cheeses or powdered drinks or pens that write upside-down). Apparently NASA also works to help learn things about our *own* planet too.

But NASA launched five satellites (all at once) on one Delta II rocket to monitor the Aurora Borealis... Actually, what these five satellites are really going to observe is the magnetosphere. These five satellites are called THEMIS (for Time History of Events and Macroscale Interactions during Substorms), and the effort is for these satellites help scientists understand what causes magnetosphere substorms.

Yes, the Aurora Borealis has something to do with that, because of electrons in the sky charged differently, interacting with the sun and the earth. And magnetosphere substorms are very much like space storms. Those space storms disable spacecraft, GPS navigation systems, radio communications, and even power systems. So learning more about what actually causes these substorms to start may give us more of an idea of how to anticipate them and how to correct and difficulties they may cause.

http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/themis/main/index.html

THEMIS Launches!

Taking multitasking to new heights, NASA launched the five THEMIS satellites aboard a single Delta II rocket from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida at 6:01 p.m. EST. Racing into space on the flaming power of three rocket stages and nine solid rocket motors, the THEMIS satellites will soon disperse around Earth to monitor auroras like the Northern Lights.

NASA is undertaking the mission to investigate what causes auroras in the Earth's atmosphere to change in appearance and dissipate. Discovering why the light of auroras can fluctuate and fade will provide scientists with important details on how the planet's protective magnetosphere works and on the sun-Earth connection.

The Mission

THEMIS is a mission to investigate what causes auroras in the Earth's atmosphere to dramatically change from slowly shimmering waves of light to wildly shifting streaks of color. Discovering what causes auroras to change will provide scientists with important details on how the planet's magnetosphere works and the important Sun-Earth connection.

THEMIS Will Judge What Causes Highly Dynamic Aurora

http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/themis/news/Themis_intro.html
01.17.07

On a clear night over the far northern areas of the world, you may witness a hauntingly beautiful light display in the sky that can disrupt your satellite TV and leave you in the dark.

The eerie glow of the northern lights seems exquisite and quite harmless. Most times, it is harmless. The display, resembling a slow-moving ribbon silently undulating in the sky, is called the aurora. It is also visible in far southern regions around the South Pole.

Occasionally, however, the aurora becomes much more dynamic. The single auroral ribbon may split into several ribbons or even break into clusters that race north and south. This dynamic light show in the polar skies is associated with what scientists call a magnetospheric substorm. Substorms are very closely related to full-blown space storms that can disable spacecraft, radio communication, GPS navigation, and power systems while supplying killer electrons to the radiation belts surrounding Earth. The purpose of NASA's Time History of Events and Macroscale Interactions during Substorms (THEMIS) mission is to understand the physical instability (trigger mechanism) for magnetospheric substorms.

A clash of forces we can't see with the human eye causes the beauty and destruction of space storms, though the aurora provides a dramatic symptom. Earth's molten iron core generates an invisible magnetic field that surrounds our planet. This magnetic field and the electrically charged matter under its control compose the Earth's magnetosphere.

The sun constantly blows an invisible stream of electrically charged gas, called the solar wind, into space. The solar wind flows at very high speed past the Earth and its magnetosphere. In order to visualize what happens when the solar wind buffets the Earth's magnetosphere, imagine a windsock in a gale force wind. The Earth's magnetosphere captures and stores small fractions of the colliding solar wind energy and particles on magnetic field lines that stretch like rubber bands.

During substorms, the solar wind overloads the magnetosphere with too much energy and the stretched magnetic field lines snap back like an enormous slingshot, energizing and flinging electrically charged particles towards Earth. Electrons, the particles that carry electric currents in everything from TVs to cell phones, stream down invisible lines of magnetic force into the upper atmosphere over the polar regions. This stream of electrons hits atoms and molecules in the upper atmosphere, energizing them and causing them to glow with the light we know as the aurora.

The same electrons sometimes charge spacecraft surfaces, resulting in unexpected and

unwanted electrical discharges. And those electrons that enter the radiation belts can ultimately find their energies boosted to levels millions of times more energetic than the photons that comprise the light we can see. Electrons with these energies can damage sensitive electronics on spacecraft and rip through molecules in living cells, potentially causing cancer in unshielded astronauts. Rapidly varying magnetic fields associated with magnetospheric substorms also induce electric currents in power lines that can cause blackouts by overloading equipment or causing short circuits.

Although the consequences of substorms are well-known, it is not clear exactly what finally snaps in the overloaded magnetosphere to trigger a substorm.

Understanding what happens during substorms is important. "The worst space storms, the ones that knock-out spacecraft and endanger astronauts, could be just a series of substorms, one after the other," said David Sibeck of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md., project scientist for the THEMIS mission. "Substorms could be the building block of severe space storms."

Just like meteorologists who study tornadoes to understand the most severe thunderstorms, space physicists study substorms for insight into the most severe space storms. "Substorm processes are fundamental to our understanding of space weather and how it affects satellites and humans in the magnetosphere," said Vassilis Angelopoulos, THEMIS principal investigator at the University of California's Berkeley Space Sciences Laboratory, in Berkeley, Calif. Scientists propose two possible triggers for substorms, but until now, there has been no way to distinguish between the two models.

Discerning between the two proposed substorm trigger mechanisms is difficult because the magnetosphere is so large. Over Earth's night (solar wind down-stream) side, the solar wind stretches the magnetosphere far past the moon's orbit, to form the geomagnetic tail. Substorms start from a small region in space inside the geomagnetic tail, but within minutes cover a vast region of the magnetosphere. However, the two proposed trigger mechanisms predict substorm onset in distinctly different locations within the geomagnetic tail, so the key to solving this mystery lies in identifying the substorm point of origin.

Previous single-spacecraft studies of the Earth's magnetosphere have been unable to pinpoint where and when substorms begin, leading to extensive scientific debate on the topic. However, NASA's THEMIS mission will solve this mystery with coordinated measurements from a fleet of five identical satellites, strategically placed in key positions in the magnetosphere, in order to isolate the point of substorm origin. The mission, named for Themis, the blindfolded Greek Goddess of Order and Justice, will resolve this debate like a fair, impartial judge.

THEMIS is scheduled for launch in February. When the five probes align over the North American continent, scientists will collect coordinated measurements down-stream of Earth, along the sun-Earth line, allowing the first comprehensive look at the onset of substorms and how they trigger auroral eruptions. Over the mission's two-year lifetime, the probes should be able to observe some 30 substorms.

Down-stream alignments have been carefully planned to occur over North America once every four days. For about 15 hours surrounding the alignments, 20 ground stations in Canada and Alaska with automated all-sky cameras will document the aurora from Earth. The combined spacecraft and ground observations will give scientists the first comprehensive look at the phenomena from Earth's upper atmosphere to far into space, enabling researchers to pinpoint where and when substorm initiation begins.

poetry

the passionate stuff

Alleyways

Mary Kolesnikova

There are things to be said for confusion,
but I wouldn't want to say them,
enslaved as I am to them and cowering
in alleyways that you built.
The darks roads you neglected
that, I swear, will haunt you
because I walk them. Or is it
more like the neglect of sleepers for the dawn?
Ignorant, on purpose, of the
weight of a whole new day.
Ignorant, on purpose, of my desire,
more overpowering than
one second left to drowning.



6 Planes,
photographed by
Curtis Glardon



Hammer and Nail, art
by Edward Michael
O'durr Supranowicz

Untitled

Paul Baker

Point to a text as if it were not cotton.
Rescind a partridge bird to inexplicable
Saliva. If the continuity figures destroy,
Then rinse in a weak vinegar solution
Until Thursday or the first full moon,
Whichever best matches your shoe size.
If mechanics cow you, then speak with
Less distinction, and the crazy
Mustache you remember from the Dr. Pepper
Commercials will surprise you with its
Generosity. You can't hide behind
Your charm. Beware the horticulture
Restricts obsidian. Go backward
To go forward.

Dodge County Fair 1965

Peter Martin

It was at the Dodge County Fair
that I saw my first stripper.

I was fifteen
and stared at the wild woman
on the raised stage.
She seemed old to me
but in an intriguing way--
I wanted to give myself
to her, have her
teach me of her wiles
touch me as I had never
been touched.

She shot ping-pong balls
at us from her vagina.
How could this be?
I was fifteen--I didn't know
such things happened
in the world.

The boys around me on the
front benches jumped
for the ping-pong balls
she popped our way,
catching and smelling each one
with an exaggerated sniff
before throwing it back on stage
to be shot out again.



art supplied by C Ra McGuirt

The night was exquisite,
the show a dream
come true
for a fifteen-year-old.
Boys brayed and howled
and stamped their feet,
falling backward from
the painted white benches
in mock faints.

We left the big canvas tent
changed that summer night.
Something had happened
and at fifteen
I knew it was something good.

The Death of Words

Peter Magliocco

Words left lies of lint
in pockets of petty thieves

purloining the parade lyrics.
Effigies of rhyme parted before it

with a flotilla of winter pentameters.
Riflemen shot odes from poetry trees

while generals saluted
dying figures of speech.

Cradlafi Café

Graham Fulton

In the upstairs room of the coffee house
date-faced ancients suck on hookahs,
gaze out the window, count the drops
of rain still falling into the square.
Smoke and coals and teeny cups;
they've breathed it all,
counted it all.

Three young lads stroll in, sit down,
scan around to see who's looking,
pull out decadent Marlboro packs
beneath a portrait of Colonel G.
A passable form of infidel vice;
as Western as it
ever gets.

Outside in the souks the shops are full
of everything that you never wanted:
genie lamps and Colonel watches,
scorpions dead and pinned and framed.
Cat gangs scrounge in Crescent forges,
crime-free alleys,
Lockerbie hells.

In the upstairs room of the coffee house
date-faced ancients suck on hookahs,
gaze out the window, count the sparks
of stars still falling into the square.
The faithful flow their way to prayer
beneath the porcelain,
mother-of-pearl.

Overdose

Je'free

Tonight,
it seems I have lost my way
in an unfathomable deep forest,
hearing overhead noises,
and a deafening chorus of crickets

As tea leaves exuded
their last flavors onto
my hot cup of water,
I reflect on failed suicides;
hoping this time,
I will not reach the 24th hour

All shall be renewed in grave -
a quarantine from affliction,
without stigma of isolation;
Maybe, the critiques of Heaven
will not have me exiled

But, what an excuse weak as
a surrender without a fight!
Where is my inner hero,
my potential for legacy,
who shall turn tears into smiles,
downfall into glory
under a new sun,
in a worthwhile world?

Sage With Umbrella

Doug Tanoury

Sage With Umbrella
Watches The Collapse
Of The Modern Age

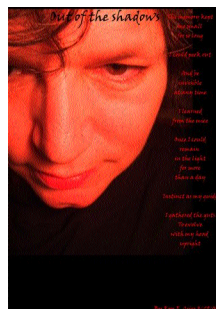
I remember
It was a perfect summer day
The kind that only seems to occur
In early September,
With a sky so azure
It seemed to glow with some
Inner luminescence
And the vivid color finish
They spray on new cars in Detroit,
The ice blue sports cars and
Peacock blue sedans.

A day so temperate that
The air feels perfect against the skin.
It is more an absence of temperature,
As if both hot and cold have somehow slipped
Below the point of perception and the air
Itself has become imperceptible.

Ah, such a day
Of blue placid beauty.
And then the rains began.
In ways fitting for our age,
In abstract and surreal images,
In some post modernistic vision,
With glass and concrete towers
Intertwined with airplanes,
Add to that the obligatory apocalyptic
Flames and smoke and you have a work that
Dali would paint, a Warhol or a Max.
And the rain began.

It rained paper and desks,
Chairs and tables,
All the mundane debris
Of daily life.
And it rained people,
Arm flailing,
Legs kicking,
It rained fire,
It rained rock,
It rained dust.

And I find myself in a
Peter Max
Oil on canvass, entitled:
“Sage With Umbrella
Watches The Collapse
Of The Modern Age”



Out of the
Shadows, art by
Rose E. Grier

You'll Make a Great Little Poem

AnnMarie Kolakowski

You'll make a great little poem,
if you eat all your vegetables—
eat them so your idioms
grow big and strong.
And maybe one day
you'll be clever enough
to rebel against my syntax—
you'll run on, wiggle your
hanging clauses and giggle at me:
"Just try to keep up!"
But until then, little one,
always hold my hand
and look both ways.
And pipe down a bit, please—
Mommy needs quiet so she
can prepare the brilliant
surprise climax
of your next line:

You'll make a great little poem one day,
I think.

But right now I just need you
to hold still long enough
for me to trim those extra syllables,
and make myself a drink.

That's right! I'm your mother,
and whoever said a little vodka
was anything but fine?

It gives your mother a glowing, healthy rhyme!
So Mommy wants a stanza to herself.
What a crime!



Winter Day Dreaming,
art by Aaron Wilder

And I wonder, is there ever
anywhere worth going,
that I don't turn around
and hail a taxi home in time?

Oh, what are you worried about? Didn't I say
you're gonna make a great poem someday?
I'm sorry you aren't the brainchild of genius—
but you expect me to sit down
and force myself to set aside
all my dreams of being great,
and all the flaws I would deride,
and to think instead on what a splendid
poem you will be.
For once, it would be nice to know
just what you think of me!

Don't cry now—I've stopped my rhyming, see?
The beauty of it is, I can never fool you,
but I must never cease to try.
And even if this is all just a big lie,
and you never find any nice diction to show
you're my baby, in proof or in spite—
you'll still make a great little poem,
if only
Mommy can do something right.

The Perfect End

Eric Obame

If I could live for as long as I wished
A mere five billion years or so
Long enough to see our dying sun
Become an Earth eating red giant star
The hydrogen food he consumed to glow all gone

Starving, burning for a means to live
Father will reach for whatever is near
And his closest daughter—our sister Mercury
Will be his first last meal
For dry as she is, she won't be enough
To stop his hunger from killing us
What a sight for my eyes it would be to see
Our dear sun magnified by a factor of five
The rivers and oceans will begin to dry
Although the icebergs will have melted
And many species of plants and animals will die
Father will continue to grow in size
His hunger unfulfilled
His stomach unfilled
He will reach for Venus
Our sour tempered second sister
And without hesitation, he will swallow her too
What a sight for my eyes it would be to see
Our dear sun approaching, filling most our sky
The surface of the Earth will burn
And everything will die
As father, in his last ditch effort to survive
Tries to make our beloved—our once beautiful
His third daughter—our mother
His next sacrifice
He might reach her
Or maybe by then, we will have spun far enough away
To avoid his dying grasp
Either way, it will be the end
The woman we knew—who gave us all life—who nurtured us as we grew
Will have burned to death
And the father we knew—who gave us all life—who nurtured us as we grew
Will turn into a pathetic white dwarf
A corpse spinning without a purpose until the end of its time
A relic of a glorious past
Unlike his big brothers who blow up when they die
Spreading the seeds of life that will give rise to new stars and planets
Unlike his even bigger brothers who blow up, then collapse on themselves
To form the cosmos' most powerful element—the black holes
Our mighty and brilliant father will just fade away

Until he becomes nothing more than that pathetic white dwarf
That is how I want to die
That would be my perfect end
To go out—to go into that final goodnight with him and her
As everything that gave birth to us dies
As our remaining sisters freeze
As our solar system goes silent and black

If I could live for as long as I wished
A mere seven billion years or so
Long enough to see our Milky Way die
As she collides with her sister Andromeda
It will be the greatest marvel ever seen
As the nearest galaxy to ours appears in the skies
Of whatever new Earths we will be forced to occupy
And night after night, Sister Andromeda will get bigger
Until she fills all the space before our eyes
Some of her alien homes and neighborhoods will be visible
With a child's telescope or plain sight
The two sisters will pass through each other at first
Like blind ghosts flying toward each other from opposite sides
There will be a few bumps
There will be a few crashes
But for the most part, everything will turn out fine
They will exit each other, in much the same way they entered
But for their tails, brought together by gravity
It is a taboo attraction—that taboo that will pull them back toward each other
And merge them through a mating dance into one super-galaxy
That is how our dear Milky Way will go out
Along with her sister Andromeda
Stars and worlds will impact
The stars and worlds on the edges of both sisters
Will be donated to the black, radiation-filled, chill of space
Then, like two magnets of opposite polarity
Like two lovers seeing each other from afar
The two cores from the once separate galaxies will move toward each other
To form a super-massive black hole
Eating every star and planet along their collision course
A super massive black mouth for a super newborn
That would be my perfect end

To depart—to wave that final goodbye
Having witnessed the most beautiful sacrifice
Two could make to give life to one
If there are still human beings at that time
If we are still bodies, and not just minds
Free to explore the infinity of the cosmos
Without the restrictions of space and time
If we are still bound to our Milky Way
Then that is how I want to quit life
That would be the perfect end for me
To exit with the species

If I could live for as long as I wished
A mere googol years or so
Just long enough to be there at the end of the cosmos
To die, as it dies
To see how it began
In black
The last star born would have long burned out
The dark galaxies would be scattered across all infinity
Like corpses in coffins dropped in the sea
Traveling through the water never to meet
There would be nothing left of the space I see today
But for the cold emptiness
And the mighty black holes now withering away
Until finally, they ceased to exit
And that would be the end of our space
That is when I want to go out
I want to exit just before the last hole fades out
I want to dive into it, and then die, just before it vanishes
Perhaps with its final strength, it will push me out the other end
And in another reality, I will be relic to what was
But more likely, I will be disassembled down to the atom
And as the last of the hole withdraws, everything that was me will be lost
That would be my perfect way to leave life
Having seen all there is to see
And reach the end of my time, as the universe that bore me finishes



Modified Works 01
Obscure, art by
Mark Graham

prose
the meat and potatoes stuff

The Airport Talk Show

Peter Magliocco

.05 GROUND VISIBILITY LIMITED//

A hand. Moving, gyrating. Colored with freckles: gesticulating, a filtered cigarette between fingers. The mammoth purse of a cyber-magnified icon, glimpsed by the airport screener. In some antiquated cosmopolitan city of future schlock. Against the bluest of color fields comes the X-rayed jewelry like the golden harbingers of unkind fate.

O the bright shadow of consciousness Which each passenger Thinks is his or her own ... Or the bright ring of consciousness Which each wearer thinks/ is his or/ her own.

Budda-bing! Off goes the metal detector with its untuned bell, sounding a trespasser's presence. I don't see, I don't hear, I don't feel, I don't know ... at times I do all of the above, 'cause there are times when you have to look away, pretend you're in another world & not the hypocritical 21st Century one.

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Tableau: outstretched hands of the X-ray screeners. Begging the monied passengers as they file through Vegas International, having cleared the X-ray screening security area. Young mothers shamelessly begging, resembling housekeeping help in their long blazer-blouses and drab skirts. The male contingent standing by stolidly in blazers and slacks, trying to look official, not just musty -- or tacky.

Budda-bing! Off goes another alarm with the offending passenger asking incredulously, "Is that me?"

"That's just your magnetic personality," cracks the seniors' crabby gentleman, Horney Huthkins, monitoring traffic through the upright doorway-like metal detector, or "Rens."

"Please step back and empty the metal in your pockets into a tray and pass it through on the moving belt. Then try it again, ma'am."

Huthkins looks half-blind and uses a cane, so the passengers don't feel intimidated by any routine screening nonsense. In fact it becomes like a game to them, eventually, something they can deign to patronize along with the screening personnel.

“Made it this time, Gramps!” beams a whiskey-smelling yahoo wearing Stetson, cowboy boots, and a huge jade belt buckle turned over to reveal nothing suspicious behind it.

I, Leo Carello, am in love with the pretty young divorcee (and mother of two) who sits watching luggage pass by on the black & white X-ray monitor screen. Her eyes seem transfixed, or maybe Amber James has been hypnotized by it all, to a point of eyestrain. I, Leo Carello, am the night supervisor -- or Checkpoint Security Screening Officer -- and stand by in my shiny orange coat officiously watching this endless parade of bewildered people and their carry-on luggage.

Why shouldn't they be testy and uptight? Next door to Terminal C a temporary morgue's been set up following yesterday's fatal runway crash of a 747 that landed the wrong way. Windshear was the cause, say the news reports; but local airport gossip has a different cause. Field cargo and ramp workers are suspects in a sabotage of sorts, in keeping with the 21st Century's age of domestic terrorism. If the F.B.I.'s right, it wouldn't be surprising. Everybody's scared. Some cast threatening looks. Nobody can figure out the ambiguous mess of the now dangerous civil aviation world in America, especially not the F.A.A.

And everybody's wondering: Who's next?

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If I wasn't such a drunk maybe I could have ended up with a better job than trying to get grannies in wheelchairs to put their purses on the moving belt -- and not keep clutching them with white knuckles for dear life.

I, Leo Carello, am a son of a bitch. Without home, without country. By choice. To myself a third world refugee who nonetheless almost thrives in Sin City, where hustlers abound like generic poker chips on The Strip.

Let the Middle Eastern terrorists come to V.I.A.! They all but have huge investments here in Vegas anyway. Let them come if there's an official Terrorist's Convention at the convention center that the town can profit by, and nobody gets hurt.

Especially not Ms. Amber James and her two girls -- one retarded, though “highly functioning,” Amber reminds me. As if that term could explain so much, including the state of our problem-plagued international airport, right?

Semi-drunk again. One night I'm sitting at the desk writing nonsense into the log book to pass the time. “If I wasn't such a drunk ...,” I write, then laugh and cross the sentence out. I don't want my boss, Tara the transsexual, to see any of it.

But screw Tara, I think. This airport is my forum, my talk show. The Airport Talk Show. An endless re-run. So I resume the log:

//+BUD LIGHT> SOMETIME BEFORE THE CRASH:

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Security Checkpoint Station at Vegas International Airport (or “V.I.A.,” as it’s more popularly known). I’m your host, Leopoldo Carello -- and also your Checkpoint Security Screening Officer, or C.S.S.O., as the Federal Aviation Agency deems it.

Boy, have we got a great show tonight! Thanks for stopping by. If you’re arriving at our wonderful city (premier gambling Mecca in the world), then Welcome. We’ve got some great guests lined up, including cameo appearances by some of your favorite show business celebrities as they pass by to catch (or miss) their flights.

I’m new to Vegas myself, and also to this airport security business. Now why they chose me as your late night supervisor I have no idea, and won’t bore you with too many details. I’m 35-40 -- kind of good-looking -- 5' 10", 160 fluctuating pounds, never married, of Italian-Mexican descent; Gemini; love L.A. Dodger baseball; already miss Southern California; and am generally a clumsy fucker. Well, I’m glad to see nearby Hunter’s Bar doing good business, because people in my business like a tall, cold, “good one” at every possible chance. Cheers!

Say hello to my already favorite boss, big Mr. “Pig Iron” Jones ...

“Good evening, Leo. Getting the hang of things?”

“Sure am. Or they’ll hang me, right?”

Pig Iron laughs his huge baritone. He’s the poor man’s Pavarotti, firmly against the city’s opulent glamour and criminal money-making. In other words, Pig Iron’s a real cop, freshly retired from some boring bureaucratic job the state tenured him on. Corpulent, balding, awkwardly bespectacled (with scotch-taped specs) -- Pig Iron, my man! He loves to laugh at the carnage around him.

“Quite a few delayed flights tonight, Leo, so you’ll have a lull over at the B-Gate.” The B-Gate’s where I run things. Pig Iron runs the whole show from the A-Gate, where the larger screening area is usually, and greatly, passenger-busy. “Plus be sure not to breathe all the fumes from the endless construction in progress.”

Endless is right, ladies and gentlemen. Vegas International Airport is being completely remodeled -- and reconstructed -- at a tremendous cost to the taxpayers. Supposedly six months from now (or deep into the fall), V.I.A. will have its “Grand Opening” and officially be reborn. A gigantic new L-Terminal will be in operation. Also a sleek and space-age “People Tram” will be scooting along its monorails like something out of Fritz Lang’s Metropolis, a film much older than anything by Spielberg, unfortunately, or Disney.

“That construction’s purt-near the noisiest thing around here,” Pig Iron Jones adds, lighting another Indian Reservation cigarette. His eyes

look scary-huge behind his double-thick Lens Master glasses. “And this place is damn noisy enough as is.”

Please don't be alarmed, folks, that Quasar Air's flight 602 from Dallas has apparent mechanical complications -- and might have a rough landing with its now defective landing gear. I get such information because I'm an official part of the airport grapevine, but of course downplay any negative aspects. Delayed flight 602 will be landing shortly, all right, and somehow that talented flight crew will have that sucker safely on the ground. So, folks, go play another video poker machine or have another drink at Hunter's, because it's “not-to-worry.”

At his A-Gate desk Pig Iron begins doing his endless paperwork. Both he and the paperwork seem formidable ... And now please say hello to one of the airport's most personable custodians, Harvey of Washoo County. Harvey'll be kinda sweeping up around us and making snide comments simultaneously.

“You'd never believe it, but somebody just died in the men's room. Metro found him dead on the toilet. Heart attack. Talk about the last shit.”

Harvey moves on, expertly wielding his small broom and dust pan, looking himself in need of cleaning or reconstruction.

I finish checking over my own paperwork and sign in on Pig Iron's register. People dourly move through the metal detector. Known officially as the “Rens,” for some obscure reason, it resembles a doorway's wooden framework removed from a mobile home -- or house of ill-repute, probably. People act like they're passing into the Twilight Zone, into that “sterile” dimension where civil aviation thrives best. Oh well ... Some people even contort their bodies, freezing underneath the strange wired-and-wooden framework emitting its prohibitive buzz-sound whenever detecting too much metal.

“Must be the iron fillings in my shoes,” one such violator tells me, shocked by the unpleasant buzz-sound. “These damn steel-toe work shoes.” They all say that. Or usually it's: “Kind of sensitive, isn't it? All I've got is some loose change. It didn't buzz in St. Louis!”

Vegas is a long way from St. Louis, chief. But in his inebriated condition, what difference does it make? At least he's still walking, able to board his flight without passing out under the Rens, like some joker did last night.

At the small, poorly equipped B-Gate a threatening man asks, “What's the story with flight 602? My wife's on that plane.”

I tell him I don't know what's wrong, but it feels like I'm lying. It even sounds like it. The man resembles a brawny construction worker and wants to punch me out. Probably he's had a bad day polluting the airport's atmosphere. In my inimitable way I manage to insult him without his immediately realizing it.

From her seat behind the X-ray machine where she's screening luggage, I can hear Sophie laughing. "That's telling him," Sophie says, a vision of old age preserved as effectively as dairy products in a bad refrigerator. "Just let me know if you want Metro called and I'll hit the button." There are a couple of buttons under her work station which alert the airport police in their substation. Fortunately for Sophie the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police are everywhere patrolling the airport.

The phone rings and Pig Iron wants to know if everything's all right. I assure him it is. The phone is Pig Iron's lifeline, his second umbilical cord. Only our head supervisor Tara Chavez uses it more.

"That late Quasar flight has me worried," Pig Iron admits. In a way I'm like a wayward son to him, and have to humor him through his weepy moments. (The price we pay working for Coldwater Security, notoriously the lowest paying company in town, and arguably the worst.)

Bernie Coldwater, President and owner of the company, is so cheap he hires basically senior citizens who can't find work elsewhere. Bernie owes his wealth to America's "golden panthers."

But what have we got here, wall-to-wall dweebs & newts tonight? The mass return of the nation's unreconstructed nerds? Who else would clog these terminal corridors with their sunless features almost demanding indulgence. These passengers are lost, disoriented, unhappy because they can't find what they're looking for and signs only get in their way. These passengers, for some reason, experience a group amnesia and collective illiteracy upon setting foot on Vegas International Airport's hardly crimson carpet. Why isn't everything they're looking for right under their snotty noses where it should be?

Ladies and gentlemen, these questions are hardly rhetorical. I tell myself that after settling in at the B-Gate podium, where I discover a mound of incomplete paperwork awaiting me. Incomplete because the swing shift supervisor, Harry Besco, feels it's my duty as "a kid" to help his senior corpus out and complete his paperwork. In other words I have to guess which times his people took their breaks, etc., and just what times they sat at the X-ray machine. Harry leaves cryptic notes like, "Fill in the dots, Leo ..." or "This is more of the F.A.A.'s goddamn bureaucracy. Bingo. Nobody gets out of here alive." As I tediously complete his paperwork I know exactly where Harry is right then. He's out getting drunk and playing keno somewhere at a local casino, trying to forget who his sweetheart was/is in life. Ah, well ...

All the while I'm recalling God, Time, The River and what I didn't have for lunch that day. It's not easy living practically in a business office where your basic shower is the latrine sink. But the rent's cheap and it will have to do until

I can afford real apartment digs featuring “basic cable.” When you’re an aspiring poet-thespian like I am, ladies and gentlemen, you have to make do and steal whatever opportunity presents itself. I, Leopoldus Carello, well remember the riot-terrors of L.A. and its street gangs. So right now Vegas is heaven, and I’m not fleeing for my life from some burning office building.

As I assault the Daily Log with my white-out various folks pass by the desk podium. Some kibitz, some stand around gawking, some expect to be recognized as celebrities (though they’re not), and others await my official introduction before feeling comfortable:

“... She was a wonderful fashion model and today, though divorced, remains a breaker of male hearts and other vesicles. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Sasha McCoy, Quasar Air’s flight attendant extraordinaire ...”

“Sasha, how you doin’ tonight?”

“Just fine, Leopoldus. Just fabulously fine.”

Blonde and radiant, Sasha sits down in the guest podium chair and sure shows a lot of leg, kids. She must wear super-silk Hanes stockings. Sasha is one of the many guests welcomed at the desk, at all hours of the unending nocturne. Some guests are not so welcome, such as my weekend gate guard MacCreedy Richards, age 74. Just kidding. Mac is a terrific, near-limping fixture at the A & B gates each weekend; no one casts a more commanding presence, even in sleep. Old Mac for some reason dislikes airline personnel like Sasha McCoy (“What kind of life is that for a young woman to live? She’s like a paid escort or part-time prostitute ...”), but that’s his problem.

With that I excuse myself for a jaunt to the rest room (the men’s, of course), begging Sasha to remain seated while I briefly -- very briefly -- attend to amenities. Boy, this horse-chicken better be ready, I joke in parting, crassly trying to put Sash at ease. Because if anybody’s ill-at-ease, it’s a beautiful young woman faster than a thoroughbred at the Kentucky Derby. Yes-suhs.

The problem with going to the rest room is it’s hard to get there. First I have to leave the fantastically talkative Sophie in charge -- a mistake. I know the moment I’m gone she’ll start yakking away at the provocative flight attendant, scaring her away. But, being short-handed as always, there’s no choice. Sophie’s the only worker there. The others have called off sick; even terminally so.

The only problem is every time I attempt to leave the screening area, several flights seem to arrive simultaneously. Suddenly swarms of hurrying passengers clog the moving walkway and retard my forward progress to a standstill. (Just like in an old Jerry Lewis movie?) So it takes a good few minutes just to bob and weave through this influx of humanity, to finally get by the cactus souvenirs and the overcrowded gift shop, and eventually approximate the rest room’s vicinity. But before I can slip in there I just have to say hello to our res-

ident shoe shine operator extraordinaire -- Mr. J.J. Rapp, super-soul brother, ladies and gentlemen. "How ya doin', J.J.? Are they tippin' big tonight or what?"

"Shit," J.J. usually responds, looking pretty bad behind his twenty-year-old dark glasses. A perfect picture of an aging John Lee Hooker in this post-Motown era, My Man likes to kid me about being a Dodger fan. "Man, that 'blue machine' ain't shit," he likes to remind me, especially if they've lost that day. It's deep into a merciless Vegas summer of baseball, minor and major, and J.J.'s my alter-ego as far as being cool goes. He's got enough cool to spread it around, I tell him, just like it's something contagious.

"Don't be spreadin' no bad mouth now," J.J. warns me, and I hear some familiar cackling nearby. It's Laverne and Shirley, the county's finest custodians, emerging from the women's room which they've just cleaned up. "Any good graffiti in there?" I joke warmly, doing my best P.R. bit, even if it kills my urinary tract.

"I just saw Dolly Parton in there," Shirley cracks. "She was in front of that mirror a damn long time."

Shirley's white, Laverne's black. They're a great team, and those are their real names. Their names will never change so that the guilty among us remain protected. They know incriminating secrets about all of us at your airport, my friends, and that's why they're so seriously respected. I suck up to them all the time. They think I'm "funny," but they like me.

By the way, I remind them now and then that I'm part Hispanic, part Italian. Just like a well-bred show dog. It's an ethnic p(l)ug. They like it.

"If you find Sammy Davis, Jr. in there, please notify Metro." They don't really get it, but laugh anyway, just like my parents would.

"Dodgers should lose a hundred games next year," J.J. yawns, warming me. He's seated alone on his stand like a regal phony Rap artist on his throne. He's a Prince of Kiwi, my friends, and dresses for overkill. He won't touch my own scuffed brogans because, he says, they disgust him.

"I hear there's trouble with the Quasar flights tonight," Laverne confides, pushing her cleaning wagon like it's a shopping cart in Vons. "I swear that airline's gonna go bankrupt."

"It's the last one that ain't," Shirley guffaws back, and J.J. raises an acknowledging forefinger. Stee-riker!

I wave to the young cashier girls working in the cafeteria as I sidle into the men's room entrance. I can't believe I'm finally in there. My bladder's about to burst like a transplanted baboon liver. The problem is there's like this small and winding hallway you have to navigate before really getting into the rest room. It's crowded as heck once I'm in there, and naturally there's only one unused urinal left for me to stand over. The sound of flush-

es goes off around me like gun salutes at a military funeral. It's really all just a bad Jerry Lewis movie, this life, I remind myself.

I also note that the men's room is filthy, and that Laverne and Shirley should clean it pronto, rather than shoot the bull with J.J. Or maybe old Harvey of Washoo County should have cleaned this sucker hours ago, instead of napping back in the secluded wheelchair area. Oh well ...

Outside I run into a huge cardboard cut-out of "Silver Gabby," a cartoon miner figure with a written warning in the thought balloon over his head. "Folks, I'm Silver Gabby! Please Watch Your Step During The Airport Construction ... Pardon Our Dust!" Gabby holds a miner's pick-axe rather formidably, smiling through his beard all the while. What a totally inappropriate cartoon mascot! These things remind me of what Reno must have been like in the 40s. (Obscure reference here to old Hollywood stars who should saunter along at any minute, like Porky Pig?) Of course, hey, I wasn't alive till 1963 for any trivia buffs.

I wave to a couple of passing Metro officers on my way to the cafeteria. The place is more crowded than a local swap meet. I desperately crave an overpriced cup of coffee, since I forgot my thermos. The airport coffee is bad: it'll either wake you up, or put you to sleep. Maybe permanently.

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-AD 2000: RADAR REDNECK INCORPORATED

There are many potential hazards in this airport, and the cafeteria is certainly one of them. Privately I call it The Auschwitz Cafe. The pastries under the cabinet glass look terrible, like removed portions of human anatomy. Other gruesome specialties are displayed with the aplomb of autopsy day at medical school. With no appetite, I realize this is the perfect diet center.

"Did that Quasar flight come in yet?" one of the cashier girls asks. "I hear it's pretty delayed."

"I really don't know," I reply in dumb face. Ignorance is my hallmark. I expertly represent it, like professionals do knowledge. Privately I suspect another fatal crash at Love Airport in Dallas-Fort Worth area, ladies and gentlemen, but why alarm you? Greater security consciousness only makes you more nervous. You want your in-flight cocktails to forget about any potential unpleasantness, don't you?

Is it time for a commercial? We'll be right back, folks, after these important messages.

Back at the B-Gate X-ray screening area the curvaceous flight attendant is long gone, and Sophie is dreaming about The Movie. Sophie is always dreaming out loud about The Movie. Film companies are always

filming something inside V.I.A.'s terminals: public announcements, commercials, T.V. shows, and occasionally -- to all the airport employees' fascination -- "a major motion picture." The cameras are always rolling inside V.I.A. (though actually prohibited, for security reasons, around the Checkpoint Passenger Screening Area), and homely, star-struck Sophie can't wait to glimpse a passing well-known actor, if not an actual Vegas lounge performer/celebrity. Behind her rust-tinted opaque glasses, giving her a rather blind-looking appearance, fabulous Sophie lives for an occasional Star Sighting. And there are many star sightings in the currently-being-remodeled V.I.A., which will soon (according to Washoo County publicists) be the nation's most glamorous airport, featuring state-of-the-art, pastel colored terminal lighting and giant silver cacti glowing like airfield tower beacons for the overwhelmed passer-by, who'll eventually suffer the same ocular problems as Sophie's.

And why not? Las Vegas loves big, tourist-friendly phenomena seen nowhere else in North America, because Vegas is Vegas. (Insert your favorite Vegas commercial slogan or ringtones here, please ...)

Sophie believes a movie should be made about V.I.A. in which everyone can appear for a few precious minutes. Almost as Pop artist Andy Warhol prophesied, but not quite. Such a project would have to feature the many Vegas stars that Sophie goes boffo for: Wayne Newton, Siegfried & Roy, Allen & Rossi, Melinda the magician, Liza, Kenny Kerr, Joan Rivers, and countless others. (In fact such a movie's already been made, I cogently point out to overweight Sophie, if memory bears me out. It's playing celestially right now around us: LIFE.)

Eventually one of the black wall phones rings and I'm informed by Quasar's ticket counter rep that the delayed flight will arrive after all, only two hours exactly overdue as was correctly surmised earlier. Sophie receives the information with her perennial deadpan expression. "I told you that forty minutes ago," she announces. "One of those delayed suckers has already arrived. Didn't you hear me?"

In this noisy environment of everyday pandemonium, I explain to Sophie I didn't even hear what she just said. Outside the adjacent giant picture windows I spy one Quasar aircraft already docked at a nearby gate, with a ramp agent loading baggage onto his tractor-cart as well. The night airfield scene is a familiar and never-ending one fascinating the terminal passengers glimpsing it, especially from rows of chairs where human bodies slump in anticipation of long waits to flight times. As the early morning hours drag on, the scene outside the B-Gate screening area resembles an airport flophouse.

"We're short-handed," I glumly tell Sophie. "We've gotta get somebody

for the gate tonight.”

“Call whoever you can get,” Sophie replies.

“I just hope somebody’s still sober,” I tell her.

Later we discover that Quasar Air’s flight 602 has crashed on the runway about 1:35 A.M. local time. Propelling the airport into terminal terror (a hand: moving, gyrating ... severed; gesticulating, with a half-smoked cigarette still elegantly between exquisitely manicured fingers, goes flying by outside the movie still of the A-Gate’s huge wall-size window), the runway conflagration briefly illumines the ink-dark night’s devastation with fiery colors, superseded by a flickering, orange-red flare. Sirens follow ... People panic, approaching me menacingly, some even running the security checkpoint.

The dream. The movie. The life ... In a numb panic I can’t tell one from the other.

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Then I’m rudely roused from sleep. Head coming back up, neck sore, I look into Sgt. Tara the transsexual’s disapproving face.

“You been dead drunk, Leo. I’d fire you if we wasn’t short-handed, and so many people quittin’.”

Standing next to Tara is the beauteous Coldwater employee of the year, Ms. Amber James (now dressed for O.T.), along with her two cute -- but very scared -- girls. Ms. Amber James also glares at me disapprovingly, ladies and gentlemen.

“Fiddle-dee-dee,” I mutter wearily. Shit. Just break for commercials, folks. Sheepishly I look around, trying to focus and come to. Noting that my face had been resting on the open, bourbon-cum-coffee stained log book I’d previously been writing in. Clumsily I close it, cramming the dog-eared green log into an overstuffed desk drawer, nearly knocking over Tara’s “Pet Rock” from a mahogany ledge. Somehow my eyes focus on the gray stone always kept on the desk (along with the hand-held metal detector wand, several X-ray radiation measurement badges, and other equipment) which is labeled “Rocky III.” That rock is, at the moment, a close friend.

Tara curses me. At 4:30 A.M. she’s arrived to relieve me as C.S.S.O. Maybe permanently.

“Tara,” I begin. “It’s been a long fuckin’ bad night. Quasar’s flight 602 crashed on the runway ...”

“I know, baby,” Tara says, putting her tote bag under the desk. “There were fatalities. The fire department and police and everybody in the world -- including the goddamn media with their cameras -- is still out there lookin’ for bodies not burned to a crispy-crisp. And you never called us or anybody.”

I’m sorry, Tara, was written on my beard-stubby mug. I was just glad

that Sasha McCoy -- the beautiful Quasar flight attendant -- had worked a different flight.

“You crashed too, didn’t you, Leo?”

“I was practically the only one left here for hours,” I told her. Noticing single parent Amber James and her daughters staring at me like they would at a bug, I meekly said hello to them.

At this hour the V.I.A. main terminal was as quiet and depopulated as it usually was, except there were more police and civil authorities visible and moving about. I thought Tara would still fire me, but she didn’t. She and Amber (who took her seat behind the X-ray monitor vacated by Sophie an hour earlier) were simply preparing for another typical work morning, despite the crash. Slowly I got my gear together and carefully got out of Tara’s way.

Once Tara had been a man -- Terry. It wasn’t that hard to believe. Now -- as technically a “woman” -- she was still more masculine than many men. She was barely five feet tall, yet the equivalent, with her muscled physique, of a circus strong man walking around on his knees.

But even at that height she was a colossal figure who soon threatened to fatally fall over me ...

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Why was it no one listened to me -- especially Tara?

Was it because everyone saw yours truly, Leopoldus Carello, as the prototypical white trash figure of all time?

I’d been a drunk who came to Vegas awhile back and lost every cent at the blackjack tables. A drunk who simply collapsed in the main V.I.A. terminal one night, with no money or plane ticket back to L.A., my unconscious body spread-eagled on the floor next to several other sleeping sorts who endlessly waited either for an early morning flight or another day trying to survive in an airport. When I finally came to, Harvey of Washoo County was jabbing the pointed end of his broom into my side and sweeping up the flotsam around me.

“Why don’t you get a job, buddy?” Harvey asked when I was fully awake and half-sitting up.

That’s how it began. I was suddenly surrounded by the ancient seniors of Coldwater Security -- Sophie, Huthkins, MacCreedy, and others (including Laverne & Shirley) -- when abruptly the chilling mutant form of Tara appeared authoritatively from their midst, beaming convivially down at me. In her eyes I was the day’s perfect job applicant. In minutes they had a blue Coldwater blazer on me and hot coffee galore force-fed, baby-like, into my ravaged insides where nothing remained but the hollowness following some great, and still lingering, pain.

That was the beginning. That’s how Tara the transsexual fanged me for

good, ladies & gents.

For days thereafter I was unable, neurologically speaking, to speak coherently. Everybody at Coldwater loved that. I was their perfect dummy: the lovable alcoholic who was no threat to anybody.

Soon I was promoted to security screening supervisor ...

The seniors loved it. I had fallen into their wrinkled and hoary midst the way play-acting Cyrano allegedly did from the moon. One bald-headed fellow nicknamed "Whitey," a former Quasar Air ticket agent for years at V.I.A. until forcibly retired, was actually my first and closest working friend at the B-Gate screening area. Ol' Whitey ... His skin a mottled map of internal disarray from whatever disease was slowly killing him. Skin flaking away like snow droppings. Had the goodness to tell me: "Watch out for this place, Carello. These people are no damn good. Quasar Air ruined me for good. They're on their way to bankruptcy, though. That's why I'm working here. So I can enjoy constantly watching them go under before I die," winked Whitey.

Not long after he was dead.

But I got the message.

In the midst of all the noisy renovation and hustle-bustle of passengers, the taped and gravel-thick voice of Silver Gabby -- Hollywood's cartoon miner -- came over the P.A.: "Pardon Our Dust, folks, during the remodeling of your airport! Pardon our dust and make sure when you ride the moving walkway to stay on your right so others can pass ..." Then the startling sound of Silver emitting a cowboyish Ya-hoo! at ear-piercing volume.

Also in the midst of everything the Las Vegas Metro police department personnel became familiar patrolling figures who added daily to my paranoia. I knew they wanted me to be Tara's work prisoner forever. That had become my lot in life, along with being a hostage to the seniors. I owed my recovery and "life" to all of them. But of course I soon yearned to escape them and find my old boozy freedom again, no matter what. And they sensed it.

Poor terrible Tara, once wife to the Mexican bad husband who beat her for not being more of a woman. (Small wonder, I thought.) Sadly I was now a form of therapy for her. She even called me "dear," saying I was just like her former hubby.

Only the beautiful women of the airport sustained me and provided hope, ladies and gentlemen. Their beauty and sexiness enthralled me. I was caught between the glamour of Quasar Air flight attendant Sasha McCoy -- with all the wild sexuality of her swinger's world -- and the more homely attractiveness of the young divorced mother, Coldwater Security's Amber James, who sized me up as a potential surrogate husband for her two tots, but refrained from encouraging my male hormones towards real, uninhibited sexual fantasy.

But ladies and gentlemen, we really have to wrap things up here -- there's only just so much time left on the big airport talk show, as you know ... We'll be right back with our final guests after this commercial time-out:

"While in flight on Quasar Air from Vegas to whatever your destination, be sure to savor the good taste of Windshear Ale before you encounter any mechanical difficulties," says Silver Gabby on the terminal's P.A. system.

=OK: FASTEN YOUR SEAT BELTS FOR SOME REAL P.A. RAP!

"Welcome back, everybody, to Leo Carello's last talk show. I know you're going to love what's yet to come.

" 'Yeah, right,' joke Laverne and Shirley from a nearby cordoned-off rest room. They wave their dust mops at me.

"This is the scene on surveillance videotape, ladies and gentlemen, when your humble host shows you his final hours at the airport: A Hard Day's Night Dick, you might say. Just call me Crash Carello for paperwork purposes: for the inability to really believe any official by way of the government is what its citizens really suffer from, a blood fever escaping unstopably through a pierced & oxygen-sucking blown away aircraft's side (courtesy of Plastic Explosives, Inc.?). Now see the paisano plummeting through the thick fogs of all deceptions -- scummy or otherwise -- yummy as super-sleek Sasha McCoy's rear fuselage in the roving eye of Leo the Crash as he stumbles towards Hunter's Bar, after fleeing Tara and her terrible X-ray screening shame, where cancerous radiation emissions remain at a reputedly harmless level, dudes & dames, just like your microwave oven; stumbling almost up to her pulchritudinous and martini-swilling side on this very fine 5 A.M. hour, wherein Sasha sits magnificently out-of-uniform in killer cleavage-deep blouse and spandex hip-hugging pants. Her air that of someone drinking a breakfast beverage and nothing more, not that amnesiac's liqueur of aphrodisia coursing through her fine, barely blue veins. O shit, oh muy merde, silky legs like tapers burning in a cathedral of sin. 'Let me buy you a drink, Sasha,' I insist by way of reintroduction: I am your camcorder, baby, let my long lens into that shaded sanctuary of Latin appellations, let this be the mother-of-all-videos in a potent nutshell, my eyewitness tape-cum-coming with a neo-Etruscan T.V. built for-2, & the handy corder I'll remove from my tote and start training on your transcendental soma is more a part of myself than other bodily appendages running on no batteries, or acid-leaking ones ...

" 'Put that damn thing down, you scumbag!'

" ... did you think I was a private pressperson, ladies & gentlemen, with a perfect news-gathering right to invade Sasha McCoy's space? She, bitch of all bitches, who is now my boss' not too shabby mistress? ...

"I envied and hated Bernie Coldwater, President and owner of

Coldwater Security, as I sat next to Sasha and ordered Scotches for us both, recounting to her the very possibility I was a member of the press indeed (nicknamed the mag man because I was always popping tape cassettes into my camcorder, the way ammo magazines are into semi-automatic rifles dating back to the Desert Storm war era I was a hapless soldier in), luxuriating in the presence of her flesh, until she told me rather point-blankly to cease pointing my camera lens at her, like she were a true Hollywood royalty and I merely the most disgusting paparazzo.

“She was, is, Bernie’s kept woman. There was no ultra-doubt about it. Yet somehow I had dared to foolishly hope for all these months, for all these endless, booze-riddled nights. And to hope, I suddenly knew, was more foolish than believing Silver Gabby the equivalent of Mickey Mouse in this retarded Disneyland of an airport.

“ ‘You better lighten up on her, pal,’ Grammy the mustachioed bartender told me after Sasha McCoy had unofficially excused himself from my presence. ‘She lost a coupla close friends in that runway crash thing. This goddamn airport won’t be the same again -- for awhile ... And, oh, yeah, why don’t you lose that fuckin’ camera?’

“Why are the biggest asshole bartenders always the ones with the ugliest mustaches?

“That’s my ultimate rhetorical question, folks -- and be sure to join us next week, when our guests will be relatives of the deceased Quasar flight crash victims ...”

*

FINAL APPROACH #@2000 SQUARE FEET

Like a dead soul her spirit leaped inside and inveigled me, and the camcorder through whose lens I was staring at the world suddenly stared back, its power of resolution far greater than mine. Clearly I saw myself looking through the peephole at the abyss I was, ladies & gentlemen, about to fall in.

I panicked, shutting the camera down and trying to blink away the terrifying images. How could such a pseudo-technological sight come about? I felt this sight was something criminal, and now I was hardly its beholder but simply it.

Quickly -- and with the thief’s stealth -- I put the camcorder back in my bag. Desperately feeling I was losing my grip on things, I knew suddenly I had to see Ms. Amber James: see her with all proverbial swiftness --

Before I saw myself waving goodbye ...

To myself.

“Amber, I’ve made a boffo mistake it looks like ... But if you’re willing to love me again, I swear this time I’ll try my sober best. I swear it ...”

Amber only shook her head in pity. To her I’d become a low-life extra-

ordinaire. It was 9 P.M. and she and her two girls were just getting ready to make a pre-bedtime snack of pizza and orange juice in their cramped, two-bedroom apartment just off The Strip. If you looked out the window you'd see the monstrous emerald mountains of the MGM Grand hotel overshadowing all with its eerie glow.

"No, Leo, save your breath -- you can't stay the night," Amber said off-handedly, while dicing pepperoni.

"But it's my night off," I pleaded.

There I was pacing around and waving my spirit-trap of a camcorder like a madman -- the only one not wearing a robe and slippers. And dear, petite Amber James was completely apathetic as she casually busied herself in the kitchen, oblivious to the ticking time bomb inside me that I'd become one with. I rushed into a bedroom and surprised one of Amber's cute daughters -- who shall forever remain nameless -- sitting sleepy-eyed and yawning on the edge of her bed. Little Darlin' had her robe open and I espied the pristine comeliness of her enticing figure in all its minor glory. I stood there trembling, dry mouth agape, realizing what an attraction her little body was: how much more it aroused the dead sexual embers within than frowzy Amber herself did that time we tried to make it when she had everything off except her hairy pin-curlers, bra, and exotically edible panties.

Little Darlin' almost winked with complicity at my bald-faced stare as I stood there, feeling sweat pop out on my unshaven clown's mug.

I was a pervert! On this typically beautiful evening in Southern Nevada, a day after the fatal Quasar crash at V.I.A., along with everything else "I-WAS-A-PERVERT!"

That's when I all but totally lost it for real. Somehow managing to pry myself loose from Little Darlin' and bolt from Amber's kiddy-cat home. I'd been waiting to freak out for a long time, I guess, and knew what to do next as if I'd been programmed by some invisible cyber-god.

I had all the ingredients for making a pipe bomb stashed back at the small office I rented nearby The Strip. That office had become my refuge from the airport and my parents, who I was convinced were basically seeds of evil trying to plant my wanting garden of self with bad tomatoes. At the office I'd begun writing my Edict of Reformation against all of America's sleaze-ball media pundits. (I won't go into detail here, but to me my tract was as important as whatever Martin Luther drafted for the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century.) Before midnight I'd assembled one of my primitive devices: a pipe bomb consisting of a battery, clock face, stick of dynamite and blasting cap, most of which I'd purchased from a local hardware store. I put my baby in a blue tote bearing a United Airlines logo

and headed for the airport.

Once there I was able to saunter into the Main Terminal rotunda despite the increased presence of Metro police officers swarming about. Now all baggage was suspect -- except mine, of course. I was still in uniform, still wearing a blue blazer with an airport badge displayed in clear view. Most everyone working on the concourses would recognize me, of course, and there'd be no problem.

And there wasn't. After buying a muddy cup of coffee at The Auschwitz Cafe, I headed for the B-Concourse where I easily bypassed the security screening checkpoint by walking through the B-Gate -- unchecked by the night's gate guard, a tired old Horney Huthkins, who could barely muster the energy to wave weakly from the podium he'd been sitting at for hours. He must be working beaucoup overtime for Tara, I figured, due to the Quasar tragedy. Despite all the hubbub caused by the tragic event, all looked pretty routine and normal as I strolled onwards and boarded the horizontal escalator (or "People Mover") -- just like any other person on his way to work or one of the B-Gates to catch a redeye flight. As unmolested by a screener's hand magnetometer as could be.

I sat down at one of the airline gates -- I think it was Southwest's -- and waited. The seats were all but unoccupied; the next flight, according to the posted info, wasn't for another two hours. Slowly finishing my coffee, I debated whether or not to stash the tote inside one of the wall lockers and get the hell off the concourse. The device wasn't set to explode until another sixty minutes -- but who knew the reliability of my bomb? I wasn't skilled at making them, and it probably wouldn't work anyway. So I sat watching the bustling airport life carry on around me, and tried to forget anything connected with Sasha McCoy, Amber James, or her nymph-minor daughter ... Ironically, for the first time in who-knows-when, I realized I was stone sober.

O bright shadow of consciousness! -- or something like that popped into my head then, I remember. How long it took I couldn't say, because time tritely departs from our world like a disappearing 747 jet into another stratosphere. But I do remember going to the nearby white courtesy phone on the wall and dialing the Metro police substation inside the airport.

"Vegas International Airport, Metropolitan Police Department," a fuzzy female voice said, without any further questioning redundancies.

"My name is Leopoldus Carello, my friend," I announced slowly. Glancing at my digital Timex, the cracked face revealed the time as 11:15 P.M. "I have a pipe bomb set to explode soon in the B-Concourse ... Can we talk?"

The date was September 10, 2001 -- a day before my birthday.

Homeless

Sarah Deckard

I was born on the street. After my mother left me, I had to fend for myself. I rummage through garbage cans and beg for scraps to get food each day. I get

into a lot of fights to protect my territory, but we all have to learn to get along here to survive. I sleep out in the open even on the coldest nights. I have no name for I have never had a family to name me or to love me.

It is a family I wish for more than anything in the world. I see them walking by on the streets, so happy together. They avoid me. Sometimes they even cross the street to stay away from me. Every once in a while a child will come over and start to play with me. But as soon as his parents notice, they rush over and pull the kid away as though they are frightened. They whisper things like, "He's dirty. There's no telling where he's been." or "He might be dangerous."

Some children are not so kind. They throw stones at me. Grown men kick at me with their boots. I cower and scurry back to my dumpster. Sometimes when I am digging through a trash can, a man will open the door next to it and come out yelling at me and pushing me away with a broom. People use harsh voices and words to scare me away. I am so hungry and lonely but they won't even spare some scraps for me or take time to be kind.

They treat me badly but I never growl. I have never learned to grow mean. Some of the other dogs are harder than I am. They snarl at people and snap. I think they give us all a bad name. "Never, never go near stray dogs," I hear parents say to their children when they come near me. I just wag my tail as they pull the child away. I never bark. I did that once and found that it scared the people even more.

I might think all people were cruel to dogs if I didn't see them with their own pets. But all the time people come by walking their dogs. They never let the dogs get near us even though the dogs seem to want to. I see the dogs with their shiny coat. Their ribs don't show through their



skin, so they must eat well. Sometimes they even have human clothes on them to protect them against the cold. I know they are loved. I see their children playing with them. I see the old people give their dogs biscuits. I see many of their owners stop and pet them. I am happy for those dogs because their lives are not hard like mine. But I cannot help feeling sad. No one has ever petted me.

I want more than anything to have a family. I especially want children to play with. The children seem to love the dogs most of all the people. Plus they have lots of energy to play. I am young too—only a year and a half old—and I would love to play. Sometimes I wish someone would stop to pet me and feed me biscuits. Then they would see how nice I am and take me home with them. I would be so loyal! I would try to be the best dog in the world. I would love my person more than anything because he saved me and took a chance on a street dog. Sometimes I dream about this at night. My dreams are all that keep me going. Someday, maybe, it will happen.

I don't know why no one wants me. No one has ever said I am ugly. I have short, dark brown fur, with a little white on the tips of my toes. My ears are long and floppy. I am medium sized and have a good disposition. I have seen other dogs that look a lot like me walk by on leashes. Their owners seem proud of them. None of them have white on their toes though. Could that be why no one wants me? My mother looked a lot like me. I've never seen my father though. I wish that people could look through my fur and see my heart. All I want to do is make someone happy.

Today, two men came with a big truck. A lot of the dogs here ran away because people have been so mean to them. These men looked interested in dogs though, so I stayed. I thought they might want to take me home. Each of the men had a long pole with a loop on the end of it. The sticks were kind of intimidating but I did not run away. Then one of the men talked in a low voice to me while the other ran after another dog. I wriggled with excitement. He did want me! All of a sudden the loop was around my neck and it was choking me. I whimpered and tried to get closer to the man but the long pole kept me away. He didn't want me near him after all. This was some kind of cruel trick. He dragged me to the back of the truck and pulled me up into a small confined place with bars. Then he let the loop off and slammed the door in my face. I listened to the cries of other dogs as they caught them and loaded them up. What were they going to do with all of us?

They took us to a place with lots of dogs. They were in bigger hold-

ing places but they were all behind bars. The man who had caught me put me into one of these places and then left. I noticed there was fresh water and food in here. I ate ravenously. Was this what a home was like? I didn't think so. There were too many dogs and no people around. I asked the dog next to me where we were. He was street tough looking. He said, "This is a place where they take and put all the unwanted dogs from the street. Sometimes someone's pet gets loose and they bring them here. In a few days though, his family comes and takes him home. Sometimes people come and pick out a street dog they like and take him home with them. But most of those like us just stay."

"Forever?" I asked.

"No," he said, "If no one picks you out after three weeks, the people here come and get you. They walk you down that long hall there and no one ever sees you again."

"Maybe, they take you to a nice home," I said excitedly.

"Maybe," he grumbled. "I don't know what they do with them. But I'll tell you something strange. All the people who take dogs home . . . go the other way down the hall. I've seen a few dogs taken home and a lot go down that hall. In fact, it happened to the dog who was in where you are just the other day. I tell ya, as soon as one of these things gets empty, they bring in another dog."

"You seem to know a lot about this place. How long have you been here?"

"Two weeks."

Now, I lay here in the dark and dream of a family coming and picking me out. Me! I am so happy. I lick their hands and faces. The children crowd around me, petting me. They say I am the best dog in the whole world. They tell their parents, "We want this one." The parents nod and smile. Then we all leave together. My dream ends there because I do not know what a home is like. But I am sure it is wonderful.

The next few days I spend waiting and watching. People come in and look at all the dogs. Most of them leave without one. I am determined to be on my best behavior. I will wag my tail and whimper at everyone. I will jump up on the bars and try to lick them. But very few people come by to look at me. They stop down the hall to look at the puppies. People must love puppies. When someone does leave with a dog, it is usually a puppy. I wish I was a puppy. Inside, I am scared that I am too old for anyone to love me.

A few people wander by to look at me and my new friend. Their eyes seem distant as they glance over me. I am not the one they are looking

for. I do my best to get their attention. Apparently, I am not the only one who has thought of this. Most of the dogs jump up on the bars and whine when people come by. I am just one of a great number of dogs. I try to stand out, be special. I double my efforts. A lady comes by and sees me. I am bounding everywhere to get her attention. She steps back. "Too hyper," she mumbles, and shakes her head. She moves on. My tail droops. I begin to see why some dogs have given up and no longer get excited when people come by. My friend is one of those. He says he's been here so long he has no more hope of ever being chosen. He's just waiting for the three week mark. He says he's scared. I try to cheer him up by saying the hallway probably leads to a nice home. But I am not sure. I am very confused about this whole place.

One day a man walks by and I jump up to do my act. He doesn't notice me. He is looking at my friend who sees him but stays lying where he is. The man bends down and begins to call to him softly. At first my friend is hesitant. I bark at him. He gets up slowly and with slumped head goes to the man. The man holds out his hand and my friend begins to lick it. The man says kind sounding words and begins to pet him on the head. I feel a pang in my chest. No one who has looked at me has ever petted me. I see my friend perk up. He begins to lick the man's fingers with fervor. He wags his tail and mumbles to me. "This might be my last chance."

Just now, one of the men who is here all the time comes up and begins talking to the new man. "You like this one?"

"Yeah," says the man, smiling. "He reminds me of a dog I had when I was a kid. He's got the same scruffy coat and bristly face, same cream color. He even acts as laid back as Cody used to."

"You decide you want him?"

The man's face looks all remorseful. He looks back at my friend. "He seems like a great dog, but I already have a male. I don't think they'd get along. I am looking for a female. I just had to stop to pet him. Poor old thing."

"That's too bad. He only has a few days left. He's been here almost three weeks."

"Aww," says the man sincerely, "That's a shame. But I've had two male dogs before and all they did is fight. I really want a female. Too bad though. He seems like a good dog."

"Well, come this way then. I'll show you some females."

Before the man walks away he leans down and pats my friend on the head one last time. "Don't worry boy. I'm sure you will find a good home." He stands up and walks away.

My friend slumps to the ground. “That was my last chance,” he says sorrowfully. He doesn’t speak to me for the rest of the night. He doesn’t try anymore when people walk by. It’s like he has given up on life. I think the words about the three week mark being a “shame” and the fact that he’s a poor fella made us both very scared.

Two days later they come to get him. As they lead him off I yell at him to be hopeful. I tell him they are probably taking him to a good home. I don’t really believe it anymore. If he were going to a home they would take him out the other way. But I want to believe. I need to. He doesn’t even look back at me, just hangs his head and keeps walking. He disappears behind some doors. I never see him again.

The sight of his empty cage is depressing. I howl for him at night. I have no one to talk to. Three days later they bring another dog into his cage. She is smaller than me and scared. I have to tell her all about how this place works, including the walk down the hallway. She trembles, and inside so do I.

I have been her for about two weeks. My ribs don’t show through nearly as much. I can’t complain about the food or the company but I do miss running. Still, no one has petted me. I am less enthusiastic now when people stop to look at me. The hallway gives me nightmares.

I am laying in the far corner of my cage dozing peaceful. Suddenly, I am jerked awake. I see a little girl running down the hallway straight for my cage. She is smiling and excited. She is yelling joyfully. “Oh Cocoa, Cocoa, it’s you it’s really you. I missed you so much!” I run to the bars more excited than I’ve ever been in my life. I get there whimpering and licking before she falls to her knees. She wants me. She really wants *me!* She’s even given me a name already. Cocoa. That’s me now. I like it. She’s missed me all of her life. I am licking her frantically through the bars. I am yelping with delight. This is the first time someone has ever really wanted me. She is sticking her little hands through the bars and petting me. I am writhing with joy. She seems to be too. She keeps saying, “I love you. I love you so much!”

“I love you too!” I bark triumphantly. “I have missed you too. I have waited my whole life for you.” I lose myself in the bliss of the ensuing moments. I am not even thinking about going home with her. I am not even imagining family life. I am so caught up in the wonderful now. The first time I have ever been petted, and with such enthusiasm. I never imagined anything could be this good. In all my dreaming, I never knew it would feel this good to be loved.

She kisses me on the nose. I tremble with delight and keep licking her

in a frenzy. I see now two grown ups and an older boy coming down the hall slower. They are smiling. This must be my new family. The thought excites me but in a distant way. Right now all I can concentrate on are her hands in my fur. The others eventually reach my cage. The man bends down and says, "How you doing boy? You sure had us worried."

"Oh, I was worried too," I bark. "I thought I might never find you."

The man laughs gently as he stands back up. From the other side of the hall and down a few cages I hear whimpering and a bark. A lot of dogs get jealous when they see someone else find a family. The man and woman start talking and call for one of the men who is here all the time. I am so excited. I am about to be let out. I can go home with my new family. The boy bends down to pet me. Then his face looks confused. Before he reaches out for me to lick him, he stands up and starts saying something.

"That's not Cocoa! That dog has white on his paws. Cocoa's a pure bred chocolate lab. Real labs don't have any white on them. This is just some mutt."

All of the people look in confusion. I am startled still. The little girl looks at my paws. "You're right. This isn't my dog." My heart stops.

They all look around. "Well, where is he? He has to be here somewhere?" I hear the bark from across the row again. "There he is. Oh poor baby, we were ignoring you. He must feel so bad."

One by one they start to leave to go to the other dog's cage. I get frantic. I start licking the girl even more. She pulls away and gets up. I bark wildly, "No, please don't leave me." But it's too late.

I hear them cooing and talking to the dog over there. I hear the little girl say, "I'm sorry Cocoa. I thought that other dog was you."

I watch as a man comes to get the other dog out. The people talk. I hear the father say, "Who knew you'd have another dog that looked so much like ours. We almost took the wrong dog home."

I watch them gather Cocoa's things and march merrily down the hall. The little girl is so absorbed in her own dog that she doesn't even look back at me. I lay down heavily on the floor. I am the wrong dog. They hadn't wanted *me* at all. I am "just some mutt," whatever that means. It means I am alone again. It means I am unwanted and unloved. She thought I was some other dog but that doesn't change the fact that for one moment, even if it was just a moment, she loved me.

I am depressed for the next several days. My neighbor is worried about me. She tells me there will be other people. But I have given up hope. She gently reminds me that my three weeks are almost up. That brings back the fear. I start acknowledging people when they come by. I

jump up and whine, but it is a half hearted effort. I keep thinking about the little girl—the only person who has ever petted me. I want someone to look at me that way again. I try to get people’s attention but now it is mainly because I am afraid. I do not think anyone will want me like that again. And I don’t want to walk down the hall. Days pass. No one else ever stops to look at me.

Finally, the day comes. They open my door and start hooking a rope to this thing which is around my neck. My neighbor is trembling. I am resigned. I hear her say, “Goodbye . . .”

“Cocoa,” I say. “Call me Cocoa. That is what *she* called me. It’s the only name I’ve ever had.”

“Goodbye, Cocoa. Remember what you said. Maybe they are taking you to a nice home.”

I look in her eyes. She doesn’t believe it either. “Maybe,” I mutter.

I do not know what to expect as they walk me down the hall. Perhaps they are going to put me back out on the street. An outcast. They tried their best to find me a good home. They took me to where there was good food and lots of people to look at me. Lots of chances. But nobody wanted me after all. Now, it would be back to the street. Back to the cold and hunger. Back to the territorial fighting and cruel people. Back to the loneliness.

They open the door and walk me in to a very small room. Immediately, I smell death. Finally, I know what this room is for. So this is what they do with dogs who are unwanted. A dog not worth loving isn’t worth living I guess. My eyes water. Well, I guess this will be better than being alone.

They chain me to the wall and leave. I lie down, waiting. Slowly, a gas starts to fill up the tiny room. It makes my eyes water and I can’t breathe. I am choking. Slowly, through the smoky room, a face begins to waver before me. It is the little girl. She is smiling and saying, “I love you.”

“And I love you,” I try to bark, but choke. Everything is very hazy and a darkness starts to creep up on me. I feel my heartbeat slowing. I can still see the little girl’s face. My final thought is of her—the first and last person to ever love me.

*Dedicated to the stray dog I mistook for my own at the pound.
May his story have ended better than this one.*

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the **UN**religious,
NONfamily-oriented
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