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Alaskadog sled sign in Alaska, Alaska
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Cover art of a smiley-face drawn on
the street in Naples, Florida.

the boss lady's editorial

Al Capone caught for tax evasion; O. J. Simpson caught for robbery

According to a Reuters story from Canada (titled “Simpson jailed as “flight risk” amid media frenzy”) about Orenthal James Simpson, “Simpson was arrested (in Las Vegas) on suspicion of armed robbery, assault with a deadly weapon, conspiracy and burglary. An expletive-laden audiotape surfaced in which Simpson was apparently heard issuing threats.” Defamer.com even outlined that “Simpson was charged with two counts each of robbery with a deadly weapon and assault with a deadly weapon, and one count each of conspiracy to commit burglary and burglary with a firearm. The first two carry sentences of anywhere from 6 to 70 years in prison. [NY Times]”

Hmm.

You know, I could talk about the war at great length, but when I hear about your favorite murderer and mine, I think I should give you my phone number so you could call to talk to me about O. J. Simpson:

264-8927

I give you my phone number so you can talk to me about either his murderous ways (check out the editorial “DNA Versus Emotion”) or about him recently coming into a private sale of (potentially) his merchandise with goons and a gun.

Wait a minute. How silly of me. That’s not my phone number. That’s O. J. Simpson’s jail I.D. number. Never mind.

But really, it’s convenient when we’re so faced with grappling with either the war in Iraq or the potential presidential candidates, it’s nice to see something in the media taking our little minds away from grappling with the fate of our country. In the past, our recent forays into the media have been about either the death of Ana Nicole Smith, or the inadequacy of Britney Spears with her equally less-than-intelligent husband Kevin Federline and the raising of their two children. It’s nice that we can wrap our minds around crimes following a murderer who got off on technicalities in what most call the “crime of the century.”

The Reuters Canada article even went on to say, Simpson “was denied bail because he was considered a possible flight risk and had no ties to the local community, Clark County Judge Nancy Oesterle said.

An audiotape of the incident, reportedly made by one of the dealers, was released on Monday by the celebrity Web site TMZ.com. In the recording, a man said to be Simpson is heard saying: “Don’t let nobody out of this room ... Think you can steal my shit and sell it?”

In the AP article *O. J. Simpson, accused in Las Vegas robbery*, says he was reclaiming sports memorabilia, “TMZ said the recording was made on a handheld recorder belonging to Thomas Riccio, co-owner of the auction house Universal Rarities. Riccio did not immediately return a call for comment Monday.

Simpson has said Riccio called him several weeks ago to say some collectors were selling some of his items. Riccio set up a meeting with collectors under the guise that he had a private collector interested in buying Simpson’s items.

Riccio told the site he believed Simpson was planning to confront Alfred Beardsley, who was allegedly planning to auction off Simpson memorabilia. The site said the objects of Simpson anger were Beardsley and another collector, Bruce Fromong.

Simpson was accompanied by men he met at a wedding cocktail party, and they took the collectibles. Fromong said Simpson was the last of the men to enter the hotel room and was not carrying a gun.”

But I think I heard one of the arrested cohorts with Simpson mention something about Simpson having his money in off-shore accounts. If any of that could be proved, there would be new charges brought against Simpson.

Simpson was let out \$125,000 bail, and had to relinquish his passport (you know, so he’s not a flight risk), but then I was asked if he would be tried individually or as a group with the other men involved in this robbery? And I figured that he would be tried individually, but then it was suggested to me that maybe he *should* be tried in a group, you know, to put him in league with all of these other felons in his I-want-my-stuff-back heist.

Speaking of the men he was with in this robbery, someone heard a DJ on Chicago radio call this group of men “O. J.’s Eleven,” which probably had something to do with the fact that O. J. Simpson was the only man out of the 11 involved who didn’t have a felony (isn’t *that* funny). Well, who knows what the “Eleven” was for, it could have been for the fact that there were 11 charges against Simpson and 10 of them were felonies.

Newsmax.com even talked about Simpson facing jail again, noting

that “The Las Vegas police followed textbook criminal procedure, carefully arresting, charging and questioning the accomplice and obtaining two firearms and other evidence before going after O. J.

The accomplice, Walter Alexander, was arrested on two counts of robbery with a deadly weapon, two counts of assault with a deadly weapon, conspiracy to commit robbery, and burglary with a deadly weapon, enough charges to induce a deal with prosecutors.”

But considering Simpson and robbery and felony, it reminds me of how they ended up catching Al Capone: he was in charge of I don’t know how many murders over his career, but they got him by arresting him for tax evasion.

So yeah, people have speculated that this “catching” has been set up, that the police seemed far too eager to find and pounce on Simpson for this crime. And maybe they are, I don’t know — maybe they are working extra-hard to be able to catch Simpson on *something*, and as my husband said, if the law seems a little slanted against a person, because it is O. J. Simpson, he doesn’t mind the law being slanted this way at all.

But Simpson said “he did nothing wrong and was merely trying to retrieve his own collectibles, personal photos, his Hall of Fame certificate and other items he said had been stolen by a former sports agent” (according to that same Reuters Canada article). And on some levels he’s totally right, those were his things, and he had every right to own the things that were stolen from his home. But all I can think is that there are legal ways to get your stolen belongings back, and there are illegal ways, I mean, O. J. Simpson ways, by getting a few men together with guns, and say to them, “Don’t let nobody out of this room”? And I don’t know if that point’s been brought up to Simpson, because I heard someone say (though I can’t confirm that this is something that really happened) that Simpson told the police a number of times he knew who possessed his stolen goods, but the police didn’t follow up on any of Simpson’s requests. And that may be a true account, that cops won’t take any honest complaints from Simpson seriously because, well, he’s O. J. Simpson, but then if that’s true, the question still begs itself: is the answer to solve problems to do something illegal to correct his problems?

Well, Simpson said so when he was quoted in a Reuters update (*UPDATE 6- O. J. Simpson held without bail in Las Vegas robbery*): ““I’m O. J. Simpson. How am I going to think that I’m going to rob somebody and get away with it?” he said. “You’ve got to understand, this ain’t somebody going to steal somebody’s drugs or something like that. This is somebody

going to get his private (belongings) back. That's it. That's not robbery.””

Oh, wait, we're talking about O. J. Simpson. Maybe doing something illegal is what comes naturally to O. J. Simpson.

But even if there are many people who hope this will be the way to get Simpson in jail for once, CBS News will even remind you that Simpson has even been nick-named the *Teflon Defendant* because he seems to be able to avoid conviction. In “Think O. J. Is Jail-Bound? Not So Fast,” CBS News point out that “just because O. J. Simpson is disliked by many people does not mean that he is doomed when it comes to his current legal predicament.”

Because CBS News pointed out that he has been prosecuted for many things since the murder trial, and was always acquitted. Here's a list of some of those legal troubles:

In 2005, Simpson's neighbor in suburban Miami called the police to report a fight. Police showed up but no charges were filed.

In 2004, Satellite television network DirecTV Inc. accused O. J. Simpson in Miami federal court of using illegal electronic devices to pirate its broadcast signals. Simpson was ordered to pay \$33,678 in attorneys' fees and costs.

In 2003, police responded to a call from Simpson's teenage daughter. She said she needed help for “an abuse thing.” No charges were filed.

In 2002, Simpson paid a \$130 fine for speeding through a Florida manatee zone in a 30-foot powerboat on the Fourth of July. An arrest warrant was briefly issued for his arrest.

In 2001, Simpson was cleared of all charges in a Florida case involving an alleged road-rage incident.

So, apparently he's had his share with trouble from the law, but was never seriously sentenced for any real misdoings.

Maybe he is the Teflon Defendant.

I mentioned that people look to O. J. Simpson for anything related to the news or to crime, and people look for media news in the likes of Anna Nicole Smith or Britney Spears. But when I asked someone in Wisconsin her opinions on the O. J. Simpson robbery, she said she just really didn't care. Then she added that the news could cover something that's related to us — not even necessarily about the war, but maybe about something like education, or taking care of the people in this country here.

And I thought she really had a point; when I turn on the television I don't look to entertainment, I turn to the news — and not that Regis and

Kelly crap, or even the Today Show or Good morning America, but I turn to CNN, MSNBC, even Fox News or Headline News, where half of the news right now deals with either terrorist information or the political campaign. But at the same time, I'm still just like some of the drooling masses, who wants to know more about O. J. Simpson, who saw what they thought was a grave injustice in the double-murder trial of the century and wants to somehow see what trouble Simpson can get into now, and if anyone will ever be able to actually put him behind bars. Yeah, it's a trite and petty desire of the American masses, but don't be mad if I want to pepper my news with something more media looking for justice when it comes to the Juice.



Janet Kuypers®

Janet Kuypers
Editor in Chief

Part 2:

If I Exploited It

Trying a turn a buck on O.J. murdering a family member

In light of what is going on with O. J. Simpson right now, the publication of the “If I Did It” novel (yes, I wrote an editorial about that too) was actually released on September 13th 2007 by the Goldman family, and defamer.com even said that “If I Did It currently sits at the #2 position on the Amazon best seller list, unseated by Alan Greenspan’s *The Age of Turbulence*” (it was also listed as #1 on best-sellers lists). According to Wikipedia: “In August 2007, a Florida bankruptcy court awarded the rights to the book to the Goldman family to partially satisfy an unpaid civil judgment. The title of the book was expanded to **If I Did It: Confessions of the Killer** and comments were added to the original manuscript by the Goldman family, the book’s ghostwriter Pablo Fenjves, and journalist Dominick Dunne. . . Rights for the book were transferred to the Goldman family, who will receive 90 per cent of profits, as part of their settlement.” Denise Brown has a petition out to stop people from purchasing the book, and Nicole’s father, Louis H. Brown, lost when

attempting to sue the Goldmans, also trying to stop publication of this .

On September 25th, I heard that the ghostwriter of the book “If I Did It” was interviewed — and the kick in the pants is that the ghostwriter is the man whose dog was in the street barking because the dog heard something wrong during the Brown-Goldwin murders. Pablo Fenjves testified against Simpson 12 years ago, coining one of the most memorable phrases of the trial: “plaintive wail” of a dog. Fenjves, Brown Simpson’s neighbor, testified that he heard a dog crying by the two corpses. Simpson recognized Fenjves from the trial. And when O. J. first met up with Fenjves (and he knew of his dog barking at the time of the murders), Simpson said something to the effect of “Imagine if I had been found guilty based on a barking dog.” And from what I know, PABLO FENJVES seemed sure at that point (if he wasn’t sure before) that O. J. Simpson actually committed those murders — and the funny thing is, O. J. even believes his ghostwriter believes O. J. Simpson murdered Brown and Goldwin.

According to CBS News, Fenjves told The Early Show co-anchor Julie Chen that “It was incredibly compelling. You know, to be given an opportunity to sit in a room with a man that, you know, I personally believed to be a murderer — was just — it was hard to not do it.” Fenjves also said, “I said, ‘I’m sorry, O.J. You know, I — I — thought you were guilty then, and I still think you’re guilty,’ “ Fenjves said. “And he just exploded. He said, ‘I know you do!’ “It was a — very explosive. ‘I know you do!’ very loud and ferocious. And we were alone in — in the hotel suite. But a moment later, he was like — he was back to himself.” And according to the CBS News article, Simpson went back and forth between being jovial and being distressed while Fenjves interviewed him about the murders.

But when it comes to the interviewing for the novel writing, and from what I understand, O. J. would answer questions about what “would” have happened at any given point in the evening, and he would always answer in the third person (like, well, then they would have done X, or they would have killed her first, then him, something like that). But Fenjves would occasionally ask a question where O. J. would answer in the first person.

Like, when Fenjves was asked if this double murder was something that the murderer could have done alone, or would he have needed help from anyone else to kill them.

O. J. would answer a question like that with something to the effect of, “Oh. I couldn’t do that alone. I had to have help.” He would answer while changing from third person to first person in his answers.

Fenjves also asked O. J. at one point, in this “murder scenario,” as the murderer was leaving the crime scene, if he would have turned left or

right to leave the alley.

O. J. would answer a question like that with something to the effect of, "I couldn't turn right because then I'd drive by the limo and the murder scene. So I had to go left." Once again, he would answer while changing from third person to first person in his answers.

Also according to Fenjves , "He told me that when the Akita, the dog, came out of the house and saw Ron Goldman, the dog wagged his tail," Fenjves said. "And I thought, 'Wow. That's a very telling detail.' You know, to me, it suggested that the dog knew Ron Goldman. And he had been there before. And that's not the kind of detail one makes up."

Fenjves even said it was also disturbing when Simpson gave a hypothetical motive for murdering Nicole in a TV Extra account: "This narcissist is describing this woman in the most unflattering terms and doesn't even see it," he said. "I think the message in that is, 'If I did it, she had it coming.'"

I came across (after Wikipedia) a TMZ.com article that actually had parts of the manuscript before the publication of the book (because apparently the manuscript was leaked on the Internet before the book was actually released). Just because I assume someone else out there has the same sick fascination with this whole book scenario that I do, I am going to show for you here what TMZ describes as "a chilling scene" Simpson describes about the murders:

"I looked over at Goldman, and I was fuming. I guess he thought I was going to hit him, because he got into his little karate stance. "What the fuck is that?" I said. "You think you can take me with your karate shit?" He started circling me, bobbing and weaving, and if I hadn't been so fucking angry I would have laughed in his face. "O.J., come on!" It was Charlie again, pleading. Nicole moaned, regaining consciousness. She stirred on the ground and opened her eyes and looked at me, but it didn't seem like anything was registering. Charlie walked over and planted himself in front of me blocking my view. "We are fucking done here, man-let's go!"

I noticed the knife in Charlie's hand, and in one deft move I removed my right glove and snatched it up. "We're not going anywhere," I said, turning to face Goldman. Goldman was still circling me, bobbing and weaving, but I didn't feel like laughing anymore. "You think you're tough, motherfucker?" I said. I could hear Charlie just behind me, saying something, urging me to get the fuck out of

there, and at one point he even reached for me and tried to drag me away, but I shook him off, hard, and moved toward Goldman. “Okay, motherfucker!” I said. “Show me how tough you are!”

Then something went horribly wrong, and I know what happened, but I can’t tell you exactly how. I was still standing in Nicole’s courtyard, of course, but for a few moments I couldn’t remember how I’d gotten there, when I’d arrived, or even why I was there. Then it came back to me, very slowly: The recital-with little Sydney up on stage, dancing her little heart out; me, chipping balls into my neighbor’s yard; Paula, angry, not answering her phone; Charlie, stopping by the house to tell me some more ugly shit about Nicole’s behavior. Then what? The short, quick drive from Rockingham to the Bundy condo. And now?

Now I was standing in Nicole’s courtyard, in the dark, listening to the loud, rhythmic, accelerated beating of my own heart. I put my left hand to my heart and my shirt felt strangely wet. I looked down at myself. For several moments, I couldn’t get my mind around what I was seeing. The whole front of me was covered in blood, but it didn’t compute. Is this really blood? I wondered. And whose blood is it? Is it mine? Am I hurt?”

Okay, that’s all I’m going to have. I just wanted you to see a different aspect of the Simpson debacle through the eventual release of this book. Because with the more information you get, it becomes more

obvious that trying to wrap your mind around the entire O. J. Simpson escapade is probably impossible, if you haven’t lived through the nightmare yourself.



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Editor in Chief

poetry
the passionate stuff

Pickle Juiced

Michael Lee Johnson

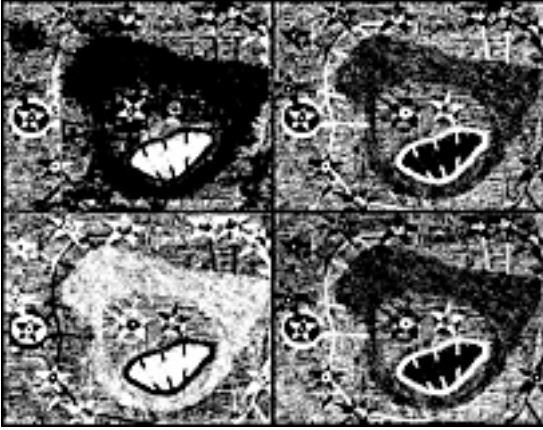
My skeleton is in
a large glass jar-
x-rayed for dental remains,
half dead, detained
& vibrating in nerves endings.
I walk through
this night pickled juiced,
caged in.
I know who I am by
the words I type,
the fonts I chose,
the poems that
didn't nurture
in my brain, aborted.
Behind my shack
a trailer park playground
of juvenile tormentors
shove basketballs
through netted rims.
A skinny redhead
named Randy
urinates then
hammers his basketball
against the side of my
bathroom wall for practice-
shatters glass, the scent
of ice blue Aqua Vela
permeates shaky
shadows on the wall.
But these pesky human
insects are gone my midnight.

The displeasure of
the laundry mat doors
slamming relentless against my
living room wall lock down at 1 am.
Cordless, powered by inebriation
I toss this fried skeleton box
into a cheap twin bed,
wrestle with the quiet
for 3 hours.
April 15th, taxes are due.
Poverty is a pair of scissors
cutting dull across the foreskin.

Friendly Fire

G.A. Scheinoha

There's no fighting
the heavy hardware
of the heart.
When you crank out
the big guns;
guilt, anger, fear,
they've no choice
but surrender
or be pounded by
the artillery
of their own
regrets.



Brooklyn Dog Days

Mel Waldman

In the Waste Land of Brooklyn, during the dog days,
when the heat is seething but chilling to the psyche,
you'd better watch your back.

It's Psycho Country, here & now. And even though
Anthony Perkins (as Norman Bates) won't cut your
heart out while you

cleanse your body and soul (he's dead, you see), some
innocent-looking psycho will, in the sprawling desert
of Brooklyn,

during the dog days, on the beach-where you're spread eagle
beneath the omnipotent sun at Brighton or Manhattan Beach
or Coney Island

or in the streets of Flatbush or maybe, back home when you
look into the mirror and discover a strangely familiar face-
smiling sardonically

& a disembodied hand clutching a machete-cuts the stranger,
who is the enemy and, in fact,
you!

Cycle

Shannon Krol

The life and death of a woman,
Forgets where she is at.

The life and death of a woman,
Remembers everything.

The life and death of a woman,
Knowing there is no more.

Here lies the death of a woman
Never, she'd be scorned...

All her life she'll wonder,
If what he said was true.

Propaganda

Kenneth DiMaggio

Propaganda is the writing that shows
how everybody is trying to be like
Mr. and Mrs. Popular but your television
is a hallucinogenic window and the rest
of the world does not want to live
in the scripted conformity of a suburban
American high school

And when they are not waging war
the Joint Chiefs of Staff are bagging
the unidentified remains of soldiers at
the cocaine white shopping mall

And when they are not shopping
Mr. and Mrs. Middle Class pour pieces
of Antarctica into their cocktails
while barbecuing tracts of the rain
forest for their neighbors who are
mannequins because they have read
the best selling novel and because
you have not

you get to live with the two headed
frogs and other mutated amphibio-
reptiles in the contaminated trailer
court where each inmate gets
a satellite dish to watch
previously rehearsed live
wrestling and religion

Oh don't tell me your
ideology or your religious
affiliation just quit
your job and let someone else
clean up the mess



CloseBody09, art by
Melanie Monterey

the future is not our responsibility

the future is our ongoing art project
titled Anarchy

Soldier

Joe Frey

Imagine that at any given moment
he could be killed.

As in a dream, in an unfamiliar
place, with unfamiliar surroundings.

Imagine that every conscious second
of every single day he is alert
and on-guard.

Thankful for every new morning
he wakes to see.

When he speaks to God in prayer -
he means it.

His sincerity is piercing when longing
for his loved ones -
he means it.

When he reaches out in thanks
for each meal before him -
he means it.

When everything he does has a purpose.
A meaning, a well thought out plan
with an end result.

Nothing - absolutely nothing is ever
taken for granted by the soldier.
No one else is more honest, somber and
dyed-in-the-wool than the soldier.

His thoughts, posture and actions
are all genuine.
They speak only what he knows:
Methodical by nature.



Helping Hands, art by Edward
Michael O'Durr Supranowicz

When his finger balances precariously
on that lever of fate, his devotion and
all he believes in and is programmed for
is at attention -
and he means it.

Hello Kitty

Sarah Marie

“Don’t you fucking say ‘burning’ again...”

followed by a poorly- calculated
Oh baby baby baby, don’t leave

I join the blond, 5'8", C cup land
(with pre-packaged,
conveniently pre-popped cherries),
the very moment that I allowed the
wild-eyed/seductive
savage to
bend me over and
penetrate me with the status quo.

left naked to
sitting on this putrid bathroom sink,
gazing at the [one-dimensional, false] royalty purple
shower curtain.

a blank witness to sexy vice.

all where truth/reality
shrills in falsetto cadence
--to tender eardrums--

so
with hangover subsiding,
I giggle {inanely/stylishly}
it all easing through lips.
So, what do you want to do?

Porn Stars

I.B. Rad

I was watching porn stars
humping and grunting on TV
while switching on election returns
during less explicit scenes
when I started laughing
at an aroused candidate
going through the motions,
climaxing at what she’d do
if she got in office,
for I knew,
unlike posturing politicians,
at least porn stars
truly do it.



Cat Eye, art by Cheryl Townsend

Let's Not Watch the Evening News Tonight

John Grey



This Land is Bad, art by Brian Hosey

The Parched Earth

Bernard Gieske

Leaves bursting with thirst
suicidal descents
into the sands of oblivion below
the final searching
so much brown
green - a lost
bewildered orphan
disappearing children
crucified limbs
flesh torn
slowly from hanging skeletons
we journey through the desert

Dog broke into the yard,
attacked the tiny poodle.
snapped its back, its neck,
ran off into the woods.

Dog just did it out
of spite or jealousy,
not hunger
'cause it left
the poor thing
intact and lying there.

Now it's a dog
on the run
in forests of
its ancient ancestors,
maybe guilt-ridden,
maybe fearful,
as if it heard the
man in the hardware store
swear, "I'll shoot
that mutt on sight."

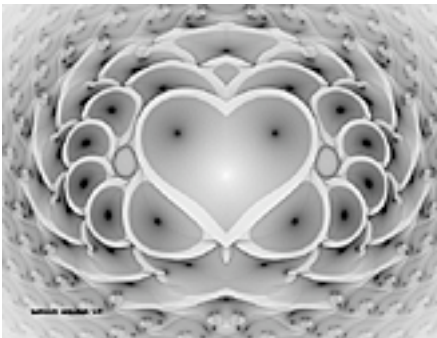
Maybe it'll meet
up with a mangy pack,
all yelping and growling
rutting, running wild

The trees could be anything
as the sun drops down
and dark flies high
its skull and cross-bones.
Wild dogs are on the move.
Dead dogs are in the hands
of loved ones.
And we don't need the news
to tell us that.

Bright Images

Eric S. Mackey

Images of life inspire me
Under their bright falling light,
And if I could
I would gather them
And display them
Like paintings in a museum.
Images of a dualistic world
Where opposites are needed
To balance the extremes,
Images of an existence
Between Heaven and Hell,
Images that compensate
For ineffective speech,
Images of being one
With each other and
The Earth as it rotates
And sustains us,
Images of growth through
All that life brings our way,
Images of evolution of
The mind and spirit.



Alien Heart Evolution,
art by Junior McLean

Yesterday

Jinesh Patel

Turns out I was right
You can lie again
You can act decimated
I'm not ready to believe

The boy who cries wolf
The story of our time together
Eventually no one comes
Eventually no one believes
Eventually you are left alone

Return back
Revert through the mirror
Feel the same
Understand the world before I choke

There is no coming back
No green on the other side
We move forward, not back
We are who we are today
We are what we do today
Not before, there is no yesterday

Cry again tomorrow
Cry again next week
Who will come?
I didn't want to be right
I don't want to be your wolf
But, Yesterday exists no more

The Hand me Downs

Kimberly Creighton

My daughter
the hand me downs, she takes
she watches as I clean
and babbles as I scrub
waiting for the the hand me downs, she likes
she cries as I bathe her
and sleeps as I touch her
for the hand me downs, she makes
and as she grows and eats
I believe I can teach her
for the hand me downs, she waits

Firefly

Holly Cross

What the firefly does not want
is to be flipped over,
examined, scrutinized.
Pull out her light, her allure,
her mystery, and she is just a bug.

Deflowered by the fingernail of a child
or pinned by the science of a man,
it is the same. She has been touched,
attached, struggling under sin
and she is ruined.

What the firefly does want
is to float, suspended in time,
blinking with the pulse of nature;
aloof, unaware, unburdened.

To trap her in a jar
would be to change the percussion of the earth.
The rhythm fades
into a faint, but sudden change in the music.



Trading Cards, art
by Nick Brazinsky

Hiking Boots And Raingear



Ken Fisher

“Are you taking the cruise?”, they asked automatically
On hearing our dreams of Alaska,
Not understanding the lure of the earth-
The mountains, the forest, the tundra’s vast intrigue,
Migration of caribou swept cross the taiga,
Snowfields that cling to the crags long past summer,
Either sparkling in sunlight or camouflaged by the mist.

“Why not the cruise?” they ask in surprise
Until I speak of freedom felt when climbing up a glacier,
Choosing my steps cautiously, planting my resolve
Upon a grinding, crevassed sea of ice, beyond immense,
Cracking underneath my feet, arousing fascination
With motion sensed and understood, felt only in the soul
Ecstatic to be riding ancient snowstorms through the glare.

How does one reveal the spirit of a forest, huge and silent
Wrapping one within vast energy
Which soothes and strengthens
When a hiker settles on a rotting log, and travels inward,
Poised to find enlightenment exposed just momentarily
By whispered breezes, murmurings within the underbrush just barely
Hiding secrets one desires, but might be unprepared for.

I stood just feet from vicious mauling, adrenaline on fire,
Searching grizzly eyes for hints
That they’d warn of aggression.
They didn’t flare, I never blinked, just quickly flicked the shutter,
While he lunged wildly for salmon, gnawing on each flopping morsel,
Permitting me my stealthy crawl toward images imbued with power,
Allowing me a moment that will thrill me to my grave.

I can't describe the dazzling brilliance on a ridge called Polychrome,
Where I scrambled up loose scree
On trails where Dall sheep graze and amble,
To stand in reverence deep within a grandeur most cannot conceive
Where jagged orange and burnt umber cliffs cut sharply down to emerald
Vegetation clinging to the braided rivers that meander
Infinitely further through a paradise than soaring eagles
Ever could set eyes upon in a lifetime of winged freedom.

I still saw wonders from the water, but tasted sea spray in my grin,
Delirious with our rough passage
Over seas that pounded me
With ocean's power and it's gifts, which floated past or arced in triumph
Through my vision for an instant, then to slice back out of view,
With the backdrop of huge glaciers calving with the crack of thunder,
Along a rocky coast where creatures fade back into endless forest.

Hiking, climbing, stalking wildlife, capturing their moods and struggles,
I became Alaska's essence,
I was offered up it's soul
To digest through dreams which linger, now absorbed as part of me-
Moose and orca, ptarmigan, wolves that sprang up for a glimpse,
Volcanic cones and huge Denali peaking through the smoky haze,
Settling on a wilderness which stretches to the Arctic Ocean.

They ask me why I didn't choose banquet meals and shuffleboard,
And I just smile because words cannot answer
What is missing deep within their satisfaction
With what's lost, when one embraces barriers that needn't loom
Between joy's vast experience and echoes in the soul
When living human beings give up living, just for comfort
Upon a ship where most are thankful to belly up to the buffet.



You gave me hyacinths first a year ago They called me the hyacinth girl

David J. Thompson

Eliot was reading “The Wasteland” at a little theater on the edge of Bloomsbury. I was there with the Woolfs, trying to impress them by listening intently with my eyes squeezed tight, when noise from the stage and gasps from the audience forced me to look. A woman dressed in a long, black cape, beret, and boots let a white terrier loose on the stage. It ran for Eliot immediately, yapping incessantly, jumped up on his leg. Oh, God, no, I heard Virginia say as she covered her eyes, It’s Vivienne. The woman in black yelled, Have you missed us, Tom? Have you missed us at all? We’ve certainly missed you more than you’ll ever know. Eliot didn’t move at all, an expression of indistinguishably frozen wonder or horror on his face. Men came on stage, pushed her and grabbed the dog; moved them offstage. Leonard reached across me to reassure Virginia who was shaking, muttered something about this bloody awful business under his breath. Eliot steadied himself on the podium and began to read again, now with his head down, but all I could hear was the fading sound of that little white dog that wouldn’t stop barking even as they carried it away.



Backlot 52,
painting by
Jay Marvin

www.jaymarvinonline.com

prose
the meat and potatoes stuff

Academic Climbing

Pat Dixon

1

“Hi, folks. It’s Lindsey calling. Uh—how are you? Uh—how are you, Gary?”

Gary Martin sucked in his lower lip and gently nibbled it, holding his breath and staring at the top line on his computer screen. His fingertips rested on his keyboard.

“Listen—um—uh—as you may’t be aware, I—we’ve been bringin’ up the issue of censorship in—um—the Faculty Senate—not the Senate—at, at the—uh—Computer Users’ meeting. And we have kinda drafted a resolution—or rather I’ve drafted a resolution as—I’ve e-mailed it—copied it to you sssev—a couple of times on—at the school e-mail. I don’t know if you get that. But the basic thing is that—um—you know—I, I, I drafted a resolution whereas the A-CUC, the Academic Computer Users’ Committee, said that we’re opposed to the—uh—filtering of any kind of—content. And—um—you know we have”

During Lindsey’s third sentence, Gary took a deep breath through his nostrils and stood up. As her shrill, high voice continued to emanate from his answering machine, he slipped into the light wool jacket he had hung across the back of his home-office chair.

“Bull stool, cow stool, sow stool, chicken stool, elephant stool, whale stool,” he whispered, walking out his back door and into his yard.

Fifteen minutes later he re-entered his house and pressed the “play” button on the white plastic answering machine.

2

“Who’s the message from, hon?” asked Donna Martin, glancing down at the blinking red light next to their phone.

“Lindsey Ames. I saved it for you to interpret to me, but please don’t play it till after we’ve made love. Otherwise it might serve as an anti-aphrodesiac. I played it four hours ago, and I am just now finally recovering.”

“Okay—you saved it, for me to listen to?”

“After love and after supper, both. That’s my recommendation. Did it

torpedo each other during the noon meeting and occasionally fired off little shots towards Ralph and me. Ol' Andrew nodded approvingly whenever they made some point, and that seemed to encourage them. Ralph and I basically kept our mouths shut, though he did a lot of eye-rolling whenever I looked across at him."

"He wants you, babes," Gary said.

"I am for Gary," she said in mock-robot tones, "after he gives me a five-minute foot rub."

"Foot rub first," he said.

3

While Gary finished washing their dinner plates and silverware, Donna sat in the livingroom and played Lindsey Ames's message. From time to time she wrinkled her nose.

". . . I, I, I drafted a resolution whereas the A-CUC, the Academic Computer Users' Committee, said that we're opposed to the—uh—filtering of any kind of—content. And—um—you know we have obligations obviously to provide for security and—nnn—no illegal activities on the Internet, but content—um—should not be filtered. So—um—though—I got an e-mail from Becky—um—MacLeod, the Senate President, that you wanted the proposals—um—forwarded—no—mmm—the motion made putting the proposals on the floor—thing is, we're going to have a very—probably a long meeting voting on membership—on Friday. And—um—I, I was kinda anxious to get this—um—censorship issue on the floor, as well as—uh—actually pushing for new—uh—reorganization—with Academic Computing—as a separate—entity—or a distinct entity—so—um—we're not gonna have time to do all of that. All I hope to do is get the motion made and—um—you know—get the motion made that is—um—about censorship and—um—you know—kinda take it from there. Anyway, give me a call at 676-6480. I've been talking with Becky MacLeod, and I said—you know—I would talk to you and maybe would take up your proposals next—at the following meeting. Okay, darling. Take care."

Donna's hand hovered over the "delete" button of the answering machine.

"Babes?" she called towards the kitchen. "You want me to save this shit?"

"Nah," said Gary. "I already talked to her for—oh—ten minutes. So, what did you think that was about?"

"Think?" she said, walking into the kitchen so they wouldn't have to raise their voices. "That ****ing **** is trying to steal your proposal and put it out as her own while you're on sick leave."

Gary turned to face his wife and grinned.

"Shocking! You just used the 'C' word—one of the words I can't use, not even as a term of endearment."

“Sometimes it’s the only word that does the job, fella. ‘Sides, I’m a woman. And it’s not about us getting to change our minds. Anyway, what did you and her talk about?”

“Well, first there was a two-minute minuet where she asked how I’m doing and told me she hoped I was feeling better.”

“But not a peep during the previous four months from her!”

“Now, Donna, the Lindsey is doing the best she can with what the Lord gave her. So anyway I gave her a rather gross, detailed description of what the surgery was like and how my bowel movements are and how my physical rehab is going, and then she asked me if I might be thinking about retiring.”

“Probably has some friend in mind to come in an’ replace you—like what she did when Brian Delany and Willard Ford retired and what she tried to do when Wendy Kaufman was denied tenure.”

“Yuh—that crossed my mind, too. I guess we’re reading from the same page. Then she got around to ‘her’ proposal. Part of her wants to be everyone’s friend, I think, in case she tries to run for department head again, so she was angling to get my permission to substitute her own proposal against Internet censorship for the one I e-mailed to Becky and that Becky forwarded to the whole faculty about three months ago—the one that nobody would put on the floor to be discussed or voted on.”

“Along with your seven other proposals—to abolish praying at Witherspoon’s graduation ceremonies and convocations, to rewrite the forms the department heads use to rate faculty members, to have an Honor Code for everybody, not just the students, and—whatever.”

“Yuh—and have faculty members fill out forms to evaluate their department heads and all the other administration right up to—or down to—the Super. And revising the sick-leave policy. Nothing like a little surgery to make a fella cranky and disinhibit the ol’ brain—that and having a little nose-to-nose with the Reaper. His breath did something, maybe, to my backbone.”

“And your whatever bone—unless it’s the salutary result of being away from that stress factory for a few months—and going to rehab for reconditioning three times a week. Uh—thank you. Thank you very much,” she drawled in a deeper voice.

They both grinned at Donna’s Elvis impression.

“So why did Little Lindsey decide to put out her own motion on censorship? What’s up?” Donna continued.

“Besides wanting to add one more line to her annual list of achievements for the betterment of ol’ Witherspoon Military Academy? And keeping her face—and voice—in the minds of the whole faculty? She said there’s been a questionnaire sent around to the faculty by A-CUC, that Computer Users’ Committee she was assigned to after I got sick. And they

determined that about two-thirds of the faculty now is in favor of recommending that the Super remove the censoring program. So, it took a few months, but the direction of the wind seemed clear to her, and she decided to capitalize on it if she could—with my blessing. But, before I'd tell her whether that was all right with me, just for fun and to smoke her out about some of my other proposals that she said she'd put on the floor at the following meeting, I acted a little tangential for a minute or so."

"Like how? How tangential?"

"I said, 'Gee, Lindsey, that's great! Imagine the faculty responding so favorably to the idea of standing up for this!' An' I was careful not to sound sarcastic at all. Then I digressed like a ninny and told her what else was great—about how my tastes in classical music have shifted from orchestral pieces to bel canto singing since my operation, especially arias sung by basses, contraltos, and mezzos—and that I'd been buying tons of opera CDs while on sick leave. And I mentioned I'd e-mailed a fan letter to Shirley Verrett and had received a gracious note of thanks back from her. O' course Lindsey, who projects herself as the expert in all things artistic, pretended to know what I was talking about. She had no clue who Shirley Verrett is or what's so great about her. She barely knows the difference between—oh—the violinist Arthur Grumiaux and the conductor Arthur Fiedler—or composer Leroy Anderson and contralto Marion Anderson—or Johann Bach and Offenbach—or Cheryl Crowe, a Top Twenties singer she's heard, or at least heard of, and Cheryl Studer, a diva she hasn't. And so on—and if I'd really felt mean today, babes, I could've asked her which soprano she liked better—Cheryl Studer or Sherrill Milnes—and she'd've faked it and made a bogus choice!"

"So what is the right answer, hon?"

"It's a tricky question. Studer is a soprano, but Sherrill Milnes is really a baritone with a unisex-sounding first name. And Lindsey wouldn't've had a clue."

"I didn't have a clue either. What's that make me?"

Gary's eyes softened. He took Donna by her shoulders and rubbed his nose against her nose. "Somebody who can be honest about having a gap—somebody who lovably can say—" He paused and kissed her forehead, her nose, her lips, and then the side of her neck. "Somebody cute and adorable who can honestly admit—like me, most of the time—'Gee, I've got a gap in my knowledge. Can you help fill it in?'"

Donna nuzzled the front of his shirt. "You mean like how you helped fill in my gap a little while ago—upstairs?"

"Funny. Clever. Two more reasons why I nub you, little cutie. And—what were we talking about? I suddenly have a gap."

"Bout you telling her, Lindsey, you sent a fan letter and got an answer back?"

“That’s right. Thanks. And here’s an unexpected payoff. Not to be outdone, ol’ Lindsey, who fancies herself the expert in all things artistic, bragged that she’d pressured somebody ‘who—um, uh—works at the Landmark and who—uh, uh—owes me—uh, uh’ to give her two freebie tickets worth \$40 each to observe a Marilyn Horne ‘master class’ they were having there—and how she had then played Lady Bountiful with the other ticket—‘uh, uh—this is—uh, uh—entre nous, of—uh,uh—course.’ And then, after this confidential confession, I switched our conversation to the topic of the honor code!”

“What a bitch. Her, I mean. Not you, Gary.”

“You may well say so, sweetie. I couldn’t possibly comment. Anyway, I told her, ‘Concerning what you said before, Lindsey, about the faculty getting gutsy—it makes me have hope, entr’ ourselves, that my favorite two proposals will get passed when you put them forward—the one about abolishing compulsory prayers at ceremonies and the one about instituting an Honor Code for the faculty and the admin. That last one has been a big issue with me ever since I first proposed it five years ago. Did I ever tell you, Lindsey, that I’ve got written evidence that Graham, our peerless little department head, told me and a student that he was going to sign a waiver for the kid to drop my course late—and then he made a phone call telling the Dean to disapprove the waiver? How’s that for honor, huh, Lindsey?’ I said.”

“You’re bad, Gary.”

“I know. What I was thinking, of course, was how she had done something even worse herself—written a poison-pen letter against Graham to the Sabbatical Committee and then, when she was questioned about it, pointed the blame towards Wendy Kaufman. And three weeks after Wendy got canned, the stupid ‘C’ felt bad, a little, and confessed it to me—with lots of self-justifying bull stool—and elephant stool. Not that I even hinted today that the Honor Code idea was chiefly put into my head by her own actions. Anyway, she had the brass ovaries to tell me, ‘Well—uh, uh—I wouldn’t be too happy about having to sign any Honor Code. I’ve got my own code of honor—uh, uh—and it’s a pretty strict one, but I—uh, uh—wouldn’t want to be forced to adopt an outside kind of code—of any kind.’ By the way, I’m not able to do proper justice to her elocution. So, anyway, then I let that Honor Code issue drop and moved back onto the compulsory prayer issue.”

Gary paused to put a cup of instant coffee in the microwave oven.

“You want a cup, too, hon?” he asked.

“Not now. Maybe when we have some sorbet later,” Donna said.

“So I asked Lindsey about the prayer proposal, and she said that she had no problem with things the way they are—that she—uh, uh—just stood up

and closed her eyes and thought—um, um—about other things while the chaplains delivered their sectarian prayers. ‘No skin off my—uh, uh—nose’ was the colorful phrase she used. So I said, ‘But you don’t have any problem about putting the proposals on the floor for me? I’d do it myself if I weren’t on sick leave, and you can just say it’s a favor for a colleague, not something you’re endorsing, if that would make you happy.’ And she said it would be not a problem for her. Then she pulled the conversation back to the proposal that is now ‘her’ proposal about not censoring the Internet at a four-year college—for faculty, the administration top to bottom, and the students. And not even the library can get into some bookstore sites to order books, because, I guess, the words ‘adult’ or ‘sex’ or ‘nude’ appear there.”

He took his coffee mug out of the microwave and set it on the counter top.

“So then the Lindsey said directly, ‘You don’t mind that I’m putting out my own proposal on this issue? I—um, um, uh, uh—told Becky I’d check with you.’ And I said, knowing she would do whatever she wanted regardless of what I felt or said, ‘It’s the good of the—the students—and the faculty at ol’ Witherspoon ‘Cademy that comes first with me. We need to get moving on removing that freakin’ filter as soon as we can.’ So she took that to be a green light from me for her, and she told me to tell you hi and that we’ll all—uh, uh—have to get together when the—uh, uh—term settles down.”

“Oh, right. I’m so looking forward to that.”

“The weird thing is that she has no clue that anyone can see through her crap. And she may even believe it herself as it comes out of her mouth. She and a few Janus-like other folks who shall remain nameless—like Graham (‘Slick’) Osborne and Arthur (‘Art for Art’s Sake’) Quinsey. And Gordon (‘Watch Your Back’) McEwen and Jack (‘Off’) Thiel, to not name a few.”

4

A week later, Gary Martin accessed a copy of the Senate minutes with his home computer and discovered that an alternate proposal recommending the abolishment of the censoring “filter” had been presented by Gordon McEwen and seconded by Arthur Quinsey. Following a brief discussion, the motion had then passed by a show-of-hands vote of 92 to 28, with 5 abstentions. Lindsey Ames’s name did not appear in the minutes. And there was nothing in the minutes about “voting on membership.”

Five weeks later, Gary accessed a copy of the minutes of the next meeting and learned that the administration had responded to the will of the faculty: the policy about “filtered access” to the Internet would be “reviewed by the Superintendent” at the start of the next academic year. Additionally, Gary noted that none of his other proposals had been put on the floor to be debated and voted on.

The Lesser Gods

Jim Meirose

The thing the Doctor said to Mike was this; after he snapped the x-rays up onto the highly polished lightpanels he turned stroking his nose and pointed to the x-rays and he said it.

There's a large tumor there. There. See it? In that space there. That dark blotch.

I see, said Mike. So what does it mean?

It means your behavior and perception is altered. It must be removed—

No! said Mike, waving his arms—no surgery. No braining the pillow in this house of games. Wrecking balls swinging would be dangerous yes, but not this tumor. I think I'll keep it. What do you say, Doctor?

I have spoken, said the doctor gravely. It needs to come out. But the decision is yours.

Having said this, the Doctor stepped back arms folded and disappeared through the wall next to the x-rays, nodding straight-lipped and wide-eyed as he melted into the wall. His blue eyes were the last to disappear, hanging there a moment, two cold blue dots, and then they melted back away into the beige painted wall and the Doctor was gone.

Mike took a last glance at the x-rays and then he was gone down the hallway with the creaking floor and out the door and out into the sun. He found his sedan across the crowded lot. He got in.

Bosh, perceptions altered, he thought to himself. Just as I could I would renege on such a promise. It couldn't be kept. It could never ever be kept, in this life.

Never, he said, pulling away in a cloud of fumes. Pan sat in the back, goatfaced, holding his flutes, scratching at his belly with the other hand.

Black are the heavens that hang above on the day you're told you have a brain tumor—

Hold it, said Pan, shutting off Mike's words. His cloven hooves beat time on the floorboards as he lifted the flute to his mouth and played a tune that was in time with the rumbling of the sedan's wheels and the pinging of its engine.

Where do you want of me? asked Mike.

Pan lowered the pipes. The silence filled the car like cement just poured in would fill it.

Let me off on the corner of bumbershoot, said Pan.

Pan's goat smell filled the car and Mike screwed up his nose but he dared not tell the great God Pan he stinks. Mike sniffed back his nose and the goats stood all around going by, all in the fallow fields all around and he drove quickly through the goat fields until he got to bumbershoot street and its tall green sign. He pulled over onto the rocky shoulder. Here, he told Pan. Bumbershoot street.

Thanks for the lift, said Pan, brushing his hand down his beard. He was always merry and playful even though he was always after one or the other of the nymphs but was always rejected because he was so ugly. He got out into the deep lava flow rolling by and melted quickly out of sight, screaming. Mike nodded gravely.

It was his choice to get out here, he thought. And so, he had to pay—
The blacktumed x-rays still hung on the lightpanels, heated.

—with Gary Alan, muttered Mike, scratching his side. Best show on TV, that show with Gary Alan. The way he kicks the shovel blade down and the handle just shoots up into his hand. If it was me, it'd just smack me in the face. He saw the show across the windshield before him as on the other side of the back of the big fourdoor the door opened and Dionysus got in. God of the vine. He struggled his way in past the clots of vines filling the backseat and sat straight on the seat cushion and put his hand on the frontseat and spoke to Mike.

Together you rotten apple so if you can, said Dionysus.

What, said Mike, turning around and brushing aside the vines to see.

Never mind. Want some wine? said Dionysus. He held up a goblet with green gemstones studded all around the rim.

Mike pulled the big sedan back out into the traffic. Blue cars went by. And green.

I'm not supposed to drink and drive, protested Mike.

Well, said Dionysus, there are two sides to the fruits of the vine. The jolly joyful part and the dangerous frightening troublemaking part. Your laws must be slanted the way they are because of this. But there's a case to be made for thinking that drinking will cause you to drive more joyfully, thus more safely.

No, said Mike. Being too joyful behind the wheel is what causes accidents.

So. Dionysus put his hand on the side of his face. I see. I am learning something today. You're saying it is proper to be dour when driving and then you will not have accidents.

No—not dour, and not joyful, said Mike, waving a finger. But something in between. Besides wine does more than just make you joyful your senses are dulled and your reaction times are slowed and that is the real

cause of the accidents- -not being joyful.

Dionysus drained his goblet and filled it again from a large brown bladder of wine he had hung to his side. The vines curled about him.

You should clean this car from time to time, said Dionysus, brushing aside the vines. Say, I'll get out there—by that pole there. That silver pole. That tall silver pole. That tall silver pole with the red flag waving from it. That pole there—

All right, all right, said Mike.

The car pulled to a stop by the pole on the left and Dionysus got out the door to the right and all the vines went out with him, and as he stepped away from the car door all a great writhing bundle of vines a great blue tractor trailer came by at eighty miles an hour straight into Dionysus and Dionysus disappeared in a flash and a great cloud of leaves fluttered down all around.

The blacktumed x-rays still hung on the lightpanels, heated.

Mike gripped the wheel and checked to see if he was sober. For sober is that proper state, in-between. He rapped his chicken-bone on the doorframe and saw the road forked here and the hills went up to the right and sloped down to the left and he decided to go down the hill to the left but Eros got in first, his hair flowing and his loincloth rippling in the wind of his coming. The back seat turned to a luxurious red velvet gold-trimmed ornate couch as Mike quickly drove away. A great swarm of bees engulfed the car, buzzing loud as a freight train.

Rumbling bees scare me, thought Mike. Got to get away.

He pressed his foot harder.

The great cloud of bees fell behind as the sedan gained speed and finally the great cloud of bees was gone. Eros stretched on the red velvet, lounging.

I need sex, said Eros. His golden skin glowed.

I need sex.

So what do you want me to do about it, said Mike, visibly worried and clutching the wheel like a wild-eyed fiend.

The blacktumed x-rays still hung on the lightpanels, heated.

Eros leaned forward into Mike's ear and whispered.

You need sex. From sex flows love. I am the God of love. You're funny that way you know not believing things fully this way that way like you do your driving, so confidently, so smoothly—

I don't know what you're talking about, said Mike, shaking his head. But what you said is wrong. Sex flows from love. Not the other way around.

Then fill up the gas tank of love, guy, exclaimed Eros, and he threw

himself back onto the red velvet, laughing. Bring me the head of Buster Brown! Bring me the head of Buster Brown, he cried. He kicked off his red velvet shoes and waved his long slender legs in the air.

Buster Brown? thought Mike.

The big sedan tooled smoothly around curve after curve. There's a time and place for everything and everything in its place. Buzzards. I saw a buzzard once. The buzzard stood in the road not knowing the sight of it would amaze people. But Buster Brown? I don't know—

The car struggled against Mike all the way, but he got it around all the downhill curves and the road was straight now going between fields of tall cactii. Mike chomped his bit. The cactii kept growing on either side.

—bring you the head of Buster Brown? I don't know—

Eros suddenly sat erect.

Shut up! he cried—I'll get out there, he said, pointing to a particularly tall blazing green cactus by the side of the road about a half mile ahead. For this is the thing dreams are made of, he added, as he pulled back on his velvet shoes. Mike pulled the big sedan over and it stopped up short in a cloud of dust. Eros popped out the back door and the back seat became a back seat again complete with the holes dug in it by the small black dog Mike used to take for rides. Scratch, scratch scratch with the jet black claws. Eros walked a short way into the cactii and then a large winged buzzard came by and lifted him up easily in its claws and flew him off to its nest, to feed its young.

Help me, screamed Eros. Help me—

His voice faded as the dot disappeared in the sky.

The blacktomed x-rays still hung on the lightpanels, heated.

Mike leaned back, blinked, and wiped his eyes.

What have I seen—

A tiny baby appeared swathed in cotton blankets on the back seat propped up by a pillow. I am Hebe, said the baby in a clear adult voice. Goddess of youth. Mike turned around and gripped the wheel and the air in the car smelled sweet as a baby and he pulled away from the curb and soon they were roaring along hammer and tongs between great soaring walls of vegetation. Hebe sat in the back seat and turned into a young woman. The baby blanket lay folded in her lap and she sat nude on the rough back seat. Mike blinked—multicolored backseat weave fun furry trips the dry ones trips the wet ones trips trips, he said, and went on further, because she sat there naked. But she didn't care, just raised her hand to quiet him and looked him in the eye and spoke.

There is an age at which you are too young to drive this car, said

Hebe, shaking back her hair. What age is that? she asked, breasts jutting.

I don't know, said Mike. Thirteen, fourteen maybe—but the law says you need to be seventeen. In this state, that is.

A great jet roared over low followed by another then another then another. Hebe put her hands over her ears.

What was that, she asked thinly.

Jets, said Mike. The car bounced over a crack in the road bouncing Hebe in her seat. Mike looked away.

How old do you have to be to drive jets? asked Hebe.

I'm not sure, said Mike. I've never driven a jet. Jetsonic. The power—the meat of the light fantastic—

He went on as they jetted along the blacktop, skimming the surface. The green leafy walls on either side turned to wide grassy fields with the horizon rolling along in the distance.

Still talking, Mike half turned around and shut up when he saw Hebe had turned into an old bent crone with a faceful of wrinkles and gnarled liver spotted hands and flat breasts flapping down the front of her wasted body.

I thought you were the Goddess of youth, said Mike. There were no curbs here to trip over. So what happened? I trip up the stairs and the cat and dog food always goes flying, but you—

You can be young at any age, said Hebe. Shakily she raised a crooked finger pointing to the fields ahead.

I'll get out there.

Where?

There, she said, and he pulled up to the side of the road just as she aged so much that she died and she fell out onto the shoulder in a heap of rags and flesh and dust after opening the door with her one last reflex.

Goddess of youth, breathed Mike.

The blacktumed x-rays still hung on the lightpanels, heated.

Through the still-open door two got quickly in after kicking Hebe's tiny body to the side and they had sour looking faces, and clenched fists, and black sunken eyes and hard set straight lipless mouths. They were an older woman and a younger man.

Who are you, said Mike, dropping the car into drive gone gassy gassy gone gone as the back door slammed shut. I mean, who are you gassy gassy gone gone gone to space in the mists of the timeless void—

Shut up, said the woman. I am Eris—Goddess of discord. And this is my son, Strife.

—stomping on iron ground strumming a guitar mindlessly and clashing

the cymbals loudly and crying afterwards at all the pain you've caused—

Strife leaned forward, hair hanging in his eyes.

You were told to shut up. Why won't you shut up? Look at the road. Its so straight. It should be all spirals and all corkscrews like when you screw a corkscrew in a cork and it comes out pop, pop pop, just like that, pop—

Shut up son, said Eris. You're as bad as our driver here. Her tangled tresses puffed out hugely. What you're saying's not true not true at all the lying cats got your tongue again got it by the tip with its teeth and its bleeding, be careful—you'll end up with a bloody tongue again—

But Ma—

She shook her head violently and her hands turned to claws.

—never mind but ma here! she cried, slapping Strife on the back of the head. He cringed away.

Why'd you hit me, Ma, you're always hitting me—

She turned from him and leaned up against the front seatback, looking out the wide curved windshield.

The road is so long, so black, and so straight, she sighed softly into Mike's large right ear. Mike held the wheel steady—the mountains went by craggy and broken on either side. He spoke.

Have to be careful here of falling rock—

—so long, so black, so straight—

Eris leaned forward and clamped her hand on the wheel and pulled it violently to the side sending the car veering toward the rocky shoulder and Mike slapped her hand down and barely kept the bouncing car right side up must always be right side up you know—shiny side up, greasy side down, cried Mike, fighting the wheel.

Right—there's a right side, and there's a wrong side, said Strife from the back seat. Drive more carefully! he half-yelled to Mike. You'll kill us!

But she's the one—

Yes, said Eris—drive more carefully! Or you'll kill us! But we've had enough anyway—there, there, there, we want to get out there by those jutting broken rocks our cave is nearby—

Right, added lying Strife—our cave is nearby.

Up there, she said, and she waved her hand with her finger pointed toward the place she wanted Mike to stop and he stopped and one of his front wheels bumped hard over a large rock. They piled out of the car in a tangle. Their smell lay pungent in the car. They went up the rocks climbing like spiders. Loose shards slid and bounced down to the shoulder. The very strife of them, the very strife and discord of them has broken all these rocks, said Mike. I'd better get out of here before I die. Because all the others died, but they haven't. Unless they're going to die

after I pull away. At any rate—it's a bad sign I haven't seen them die, like the others. It's not right somehow—

The door slammed shut. He pulled away. Soon he was on a long bridge over the blue tossing sea.

The blacktomed x-rays still hung on the lightpanels, heated.

—it's not right it's not right it's not right—

A figure stood hitchhiking. Mike pulled over to the side of the bridge. The sea tossed wildly below throwing up whitecaps. Mike leaned at the hitchhiker.

Gordon? said Mike—Gordon Gillman? I thought you were dead.

Nope. Not dead. Not by your Harry crackers. Can I get a ride? Can you give me a ride? Will you give me a ride? Could you would you should you give me a ride—

Sure, said Mike. The steel bridge trembled from the surge of the stormy sea. Gordon got in all in white—suddenly followed by a blue bearded gentleman in a dark suit with a golden-handled cane.

I am Thanatos, said the gentleman wearily. God of death.

Oh no, said Gordon, and he rolled himself up into a ball on the far side of the back seat from Thanatos. Pointing his cane at Gordon, Thanatos said I am here to take this man he got away from me somehow before but now I am here to take him to the gates of the pit where he belongs—

The blow was not fatal, said Gordon, his head poking out of the ball he had become. Look at me here. I'm here alive, as alive as can be—

Mike drove off. They rumbled gently along the bridge.

Yes it was a fatal blow, said Thanatos. You're not alive. You just feel alive. Thanatos' eyes were black holes like in a skull. Mike gripped the wheel, eyes straight ahead, listening, guiding the car when there's things like this happening around you all you can do is guide the car. Rattle trap shakey bakey. And listen.

No it wasn't a fatal blow, said Gordon, whitefaced and bugeyed. If it was how could I be here—

But the Cuban hit you hard with the crowbar—

Yes but not hard enough. Look.

Gordon tilted his head. His bald head had a wide crease across it that looked as though it had bled a lot but it had stopped bleeding now thank heavens thought Mike who'd always cared about his car seats and wouldn't want to get blood on them. Thanatos waved the cane in a frenzy.

Yes it was hard enough. You're mine. Come. Come to daddy, come now come and I'll just pick you up like a big white rubber ball and we'll go down the big crystal stairs to that wide red-hot stone gate—

No! exclaimed Gordon. Mike. Hey Mike—

What, said Mike, his face set straight ahead.

Tell this fool I'm not dead.

I thought you were, said Mike. The papers said you were— You're not helping! cried Gordon. The car shuddered over an expansion joint in the bridge. The front wheels shimmied like they do when they hit a bump like this so Mike hit the brake slowing down and the wheels straightened out and Gordon tucked his head back into the white ball he'd become and Thanatos pointed with his cane right by Mike's ear to a spot on the side of the road ahead by a pole set into the railing of the bridge like flock rubbing at the distaff side. You see the crunch. You see the crunch but it doesn't matter the rattlers gather all around and one at last rears up to strike you and you are very very very afraid—

Shut up! said Thanatos harshly. Here. Let us out here.

Mike shut up and they pulled up by the side and the stainless steel railing went all across and Thanatos gathered up the white ball from the backseat and got out and walked along swinging his cane with one hand and dribbling the big white bouncing ball with the other. The car stood still parked at the side as Thanatos got further and further out along the railing and then leapt over it off the bridge after throwing the ball down into the tossing whitecapped waves. Mike sat open-mouthed. He ran his tongue along the curve of his upper row of teeth before dropping the big sedan down into drive and pulling out onto the road again. The bridge stretched to the far horizon. The water did likewise on all sides. Mike didn't remember ever being on a bridge like this he couldn't remember having driven home this way but the car knew the way so it must be all right.

The blacktumed x-rays still hung on the lightpanels, heated.

Well, those two must be dead now, he muttered. No need to worry about those two drowned rats. Drowned rats suck up to the meals in front of you and in back of you and behind you it doesn't matter where the meals are the drowned rats will find you—

A few miles down the road a voice came from the back seat.

Say—driver. Shut up a minute. You're ten miles an hour over the speed limit.

Right. Ten miles an hour, crackled a second voice.

Better slow down, whistled a third.

Right, droned the first. Mike's foot went on the brake and he turned around and three ugly blotch-faced pinch-faced women sat in the back seat all dressed in blue and gold and white with long golden hair down to there oh down to there— Mike didn't know what to do or where they had come from so he pulled over to the side and stopped again by the railing. The sea below was tossing even more strongly now.

How did you get in my car, said Mike.

Never mind how that happened—it just happened, said the first woman. All I know is it's illegal to just stop on the shoulder here on a bridge, unless you're broken-down. She had a large wart in the middle of her left cheek that wiggled as she talked.

Yes it is, said the second. She had a scar down the center of her long nose.

Better start driving, chimed in the third. Her head was larger than normal and she had a unnaturally jutting chin.

Who are you, said Mike, turned around.

Drive and then we'll tell you. Right now you're breaking the law.

Right—can't have you breaking the law, said the second.

We don't speak to people who break the law.

So drive, said the third.

The women's black eyes set hard in their faces and with six eyes boring into the back of his head Mike dropped the big sedan back into drive and pulled out on the road. He took her up to cruising speed.

You're over the speed limit again, said the first.

Yes—you're breaking the law again, added the second.

Better hit that brake, said the third.

No speed limit signs were coming up so Mike slowed down to about forty and half looked back and asked them What's the speed limit here? There are no signs.

There were signs but you didn't pay attention to them, said the first.

Right—you should read all the traffic signs—its the law.

But we'll let you off this time. The speed limit's fifty—and turn back around and face front. You're to keep your eyes on the road.

It's the law.

Mike kept the car at about forty-five and his palms were sweating and he felt a drop of sweat running down his side under his shirt.

Who are you, he said loudly, glancing in the rearview mirror.

Keep your eyes on the road, we said! they said in unison.

We are the Erinnyes, said the first.

Right—otherwise known as the Furies—we punish crime, added the second.

That's right, said the third—and if you must know everything like you seem to want to do, we were born of the blood of Uranus when he was castrated.

Mike winced and bit his lower lip hard.

My name is Tisiphone, said the first.

And I am Megaera, added the second.

Call me Alecto, said the third.

The car kept moving toward the horizon and Mike said Glad to meet

you—my name is Mike.

A good name.

A nice name.

A strong name.

Sure.

Suddenly the tossing waves disappeared and the bridge expanded to either side and they were tooling along between wide, long fields of wheat. The fields waved and rippled in the breeze. The sky lay blue above them. They rode along in silence, Mike being careful to watch for any traffic signs and careful to keep the car under forty miles an hour—or had they said the speed limit was fifty—it didn't matter he'd just keep it at forty and he'd be safe Toby inside says so Toby inside knows all things no matter what happens to this mortal body, Toby will live forever—

Shut up and let us out here, said the Furies in harmony.

Pull over, said Tisiphone. Here—here, on the shoulder. It's legal here.

Yes its legal here, insisted the others in unison.

Mike pulled over. The passenger side back door opened and they piled out in a tangle of skinny arms legs and flying hair and ugly faces glaring and too-long fingernails clacking.

The blacktumed x-rays still hung on the lightpanels, heated.

The door slammed shut. The Furies were left in a pile by the roadside and Mike smoothly pulled away, glad to be free to drive normally, not paying attention to traffic signs or signs about whether or not to use the shoulder and all those other other things young people highly renovate ventilated rooms in frame houses for and the pound, pound, pound on the joists and timber framing and beams—

The car jounced over some tracks. Again, three women appeared but this time hitchhiking on the side of the road this was a day for hitchhikers this was a day for it yes.

The blacktumed x-rays still hung on the lightpanels, heated.

Three plain women in plain-looking ankle length gowns of a brownish color, each with cropped hair and high heeled boots stood by the side of the road. One held what looked to Mike like a big spool of twine or thread twine is big thread is small it might be twine or thread, he muttered—the middle one held what looked like a ruler, one of those kinds that carpenters use that fold up and fold out that you never see any more, like Mike's dad used to use in the musty cellar to measure pipes to run out the new sewer line and put in the new gas burner, and the last one carrying a large pair of scissors just dull black scissors not golden or silver just dull black not with any molded plastic handles either but just a plain pair of scissors—the kind you hardly see any more that your grandmother

might have had in her heavily beaded sewing-basket—

All right, said the first of the three, sliding into the back seat. You don't have to go on and on like this,

Mike realized he'd been babbling again so he shut up and let all three of them get in. They sat in the back neatly lined up and proper with their things in their laps and their hands folded over their things like the dog folds one paw over another when he's pretending to be good when he jumps up in the chair when the master's husband comes in the room talking—

—but who are you, said Mike, without stopping to take a breath, even as he realized that this was the first time he'd asked any of the many people who'd been in his car today who they were—or maybe it wasn't—it didn't matter—.

The rightmost woman looked up and raised her spindle of thread in front of her to quiet Mike. She had a painfully deep dimple in her chin. Mike fought an urge to stick his finger in it.

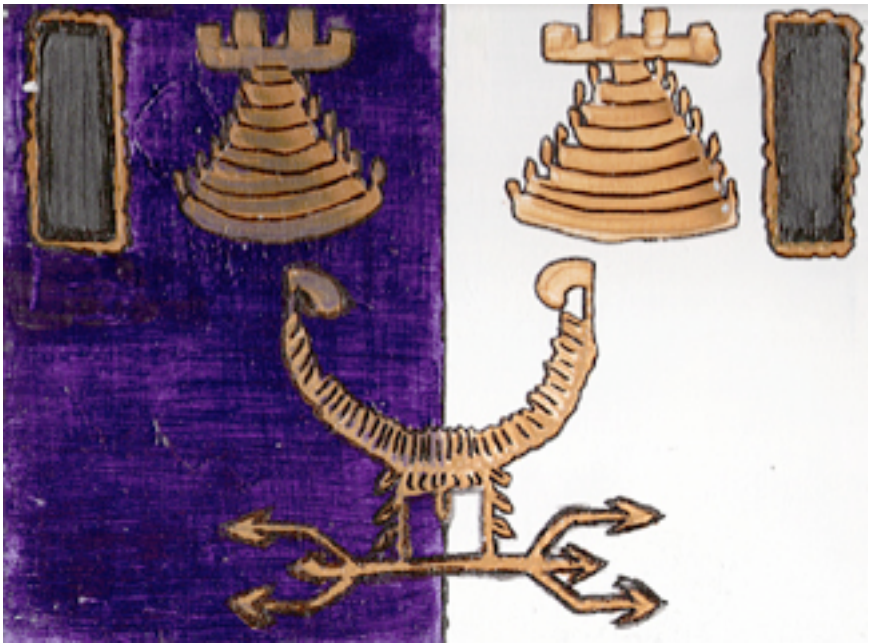
I am Clotho the spinner, she said.

The middle woman leaned forward and she had one blue eye and one solid white like it was blind.

I am Lachesis, the measurer, she said.

The leftmost woman raised her scissors before her, not in a threatening way, but gently, saying I am Atropos, she who cuts thread. Her face was perfectly round and flat as a frying-pan.

Drive off now, said the dimpled woman. The three leaned back and



Worschelle, art by Aaron Wilder

Mike once more pushed the lever down into drive and the big sedan crunched through the stones of the shoulder and went out on the smooth blacktop picked up speed but for some reason Mike could not bring himself to go any faster than forty. The tires smoothly hummed along. Suddenly the first woman writhed easily and snakily over the seat into the front passenger side and started measuring off lengths of thread along Mike's arms legs and body. He flinched back.

What are you doing, he said.

Spinning out the proper amount of thread for you, she said. Then, hold-

The blacktumed x-rays still hung on the lightpanels, heated.

The car bounced along the uneven road and there were no more hitchhikers. In the distance a palace appeared with golden spires and turrets and a great golden wall around it and in the front of the wall the gate was lowered and there was a wide moat of pure mercury around the palace and Mike drove his car up the ramp through the gate and stopped up by the tall wide golden ornately carved front door. He stepped out holding the thread. He went across the golden pebbles and turned the golden doorknob and went through the golden doorframe. Outside the walls other cars went by the run down shack and they often thought, who could live there? How could they live? Inside the run down shack Mike got down a golden cigar box from on top of a tall glass fronted heavily gilded and ornately hand-carved cabinet and put the thread in it, coiled. He put the box on top of the cabinet way to the back toward the wall so it couldn't be seen.

The blacktumed x-rays still hung on the lightpanels, heated.

After turning the heat on under his stewpot on the pearl-inlaid stove he sat heavily on his golden chair by the jewel-encrusted kitchen table. The chair creaked loudly as he sat back and put his feet up on the table and leaned back and locked his hands together behind his head.

There. As long as I have that, I'll live forever.

The tumble down shack stood leaning crazily about him and he thought, no more doctor. I've got a brain tumor? Well its not hurting me. I will live forever.

He sat silently at last. Questions still arose as they always did but when you're resting like this questions are harmless, they just came up and hit you and kept drifting up past you and spread out across the ceiling like smoke and then they disappear, making any answers meaningless. He fell asleep, surrounded by questions like they were big soft pillows packed comfortably in all around him. A nurse came in the room and switched off the lightpanels. The x-rays became cold in the darkened room. The stew sat bubbling over growing hotter and hotter as the moments, seconds, minutes, hours, years, decades, and centuries passed slicing Mike's tomorrows and nows into dimly remembered yesterdays as they always do and always will, forever, one thin slice at a time.

This too is the work of the Lesser Gods.

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