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Editorial

Issue # 04 marks something close to a year of Used Gravitrons. A year of booze, monsters, basketball, Sacramento, noise, shopping malls, mice, phone booths, Shelly Duvall, Timothy Cutlass, birds, horses and nail polish. More in the pages that follow.

Thanks to the people with it from the beginning.

Wes Morishita

James Welch

Mike Wiley

Keith Zimmerman

And thanks to all you contributors, you're the voice we've been looking for.

- Shea Newton

Detective

- Casey Wooden

These are the thoughts you have in alleys behind tenement buildings. This is what passes through your mind when you aim a camera into a bedroom window. A neighbor could yell at any moment and the jig would be up. You know it was never supposed to be like this, that right now you are making mothers cry, that this is worse than taking candy from a baby, than pursesnatching an old lady. You feel tiny, lower than dirt, yet the camera in your hand is mightier than a wrecking ball. You want someone to come down the fire escape with a bat. Hopefully a large person in a wifebeater with meat dangling from his arms like blessings from the Lord. He pounds you and yells in a language you do not understand. An old woman in a cotton dress, maybe his wife, shouts from above and shakes a spatula. Dogs howl. The couple in bed races to the window dripping with sweat and comes outside to kick you as they call the police. And the cops slam you against their car and take pictures of you and the wounds of your transgression ripening across your flesh.

This is living vicariously. They never check you for the roll of film you swallowed. They never see you hold the photographs from the police report and match the marks on your skin.

The 9 to 5'ers, the judge, they have nothing on you. They never see you pull the condom from the toilet, nor you pressing the pictures of their sex against your bruises like a shaman's salve.

But the butcher on the fire escape never appears, and neither does his wife, or the dog, nor do the lovers in the crosshairs of your lens ever notice. They are occupied. Like territories. A border skirmish over where dick ends and pussy begins. Maybe they're on the same team. He never makes a sound, but she gasps at the top of her cycle like a steam engine, their hips locked together and flying in concert. Right now you can believe the stories are true. True love, and all that. Their eyes are closed, and you get the feeling they aren't moving so much as breathing together. Maybe it never happens at all. Because when their eyes pop open, the dance changes. Out of sync, they each speed up. He buries his head in her tits and wails. The grooves in their bodies strip, and the machine begins to squeal. They bear down. Avoid each other's eyes. She starts to howl. He flips her over and stands behind her, pushing her head into the sheets. She grips the edge of the bed and looks back at him in disgust. You know she wants to ram herself backwards and break him. He grabs her ass and stares up at the ceiling like he's talking to the Lord. What an asshole. Click. She's clearly out of the picture. She closes her eyes and stops, let's him take over. His thrusts shorten, quicken, all the muscles in his back bunching, lifting the orgasm from his knees. Click. Her head snaps around and she jerks

away from him. Her hands are out, and he is no match for her in this moment. Click. She throws him onto his back and leaps on top of him, holding his neck like a rope as she cowboys up. She closes her eyes and holds him down.

They dig into each other for orgasms. The first one to it wins.

Click. She stares at her lover's face as he ejaculates with his eyes closed. It appears she's looking for something. He huffs and puffs, and we watch to see if a real person is in there. You take pictures of the expression on his face. You know they are dead pictures. Anonymous landscapes. Evidence of murders generations past. All the dead ancestors, stirring up blacks in the prints. The grain. Every print a little more death floating around from person to person, from husband to wife, from lawyer to judge, ruining a little more life. You know you are a bringer of misery, and you wait to be punished for it. This is what keeps you drinking. Your telephone a horn for bad news and money. This is the grease for the long slide to the grave. This is butter on shit toast.

Tough As Nails
- Neila Mezynski

Rubber doll thick wrists baby; given up arms, broken glass. Yearn. Red sticky confusion.
Stringy hair, head sparkles, wrapped present. She won't leave.



Hobo Jinn

- Dan Davis

"Of course," I told him, "there are a few things I can't do. Even magic has its rules."

He wasn't listening to me. He had the jar in his hands, turning it over. At least he'd put the lid back on; the idea of his greasy fingers sliding over my things sent a chill down my metaphysical spine.

"I can only do personal wishes." I cleared my throat and repeated myself; he inclined his head to show that he was listening. "No world peace. Can't get anybody other than yourself elected to office. Can't go back in time and kill Hitler. Can't stop the extinction of the dodo. And I can't make you God, because even I don't know if He exists. I can give you powers can only imagine, but your imagination is limited, and thus, so am I. I can kill whomever you wish in the present time, but can't guarantee you'll get off scot-free. I..." I paused. "Hell. One of these days I'll write the rules down."

He glanced up at me. He tapped the jar with a finger that still featured a healthy amount of debris. "You were inside this thing?"

"Yes, Kevin. I live in there."

"But it was in the dumpster."

"So were you."

He pulled his rags tighter to fight the chill, and lifted the jar to the sunlight that snuck its way into the alley. The glass was translucent, whitish. He said, "Looks tight in there."

"It looks bigger on the inside. I use light colors. Do you have a wish, Kevin?"

He set the jar on the concrete in front of him. At my back, the city moved. It'd been a long time since I'd heard the voices of people, the sounds of civilization. Everything was so mechanized.

"How about a girl?" I said. "That's always a popular one. Guy wants a girl, I can make her want him. The consequences are all your own, of course, but..." I let my thoughts die. His smell was rank and manufactured, a product of his modern surroundings. No woman would voluntarily get within fifty feet of him; even with all of my conjuring, it would be tricky.

"A shower would be nice," I suggested. "Get you smelling clean and fresh. Then bring on the women!"

He said nothing, just frowned behind his beard. I said, "Or the men. I don't judge."

Nothing. He pushed the jar away from him with one finger, then pulled it back. He looked like a child with a new, complicated toy, but I could tell he wasn't playing. His brow was wrinkled in concentration, his eyes focused sharply on my home. I stepped forward, knelt in front of him. My suit had seen better days; it'd been so long since glamour mattered. I made an attempt to smooth the material at any rate, though my hands, grimy, left marks. I sighed and shook my head. "Oh, what we have come to," I said. "Kevin, I implore you, wish for us a penthouse."

"I wish," he said.

I waited. A minute went by before I realized he wasn't going to finish the thought.

"Hell." I stood and walked to the mouth of the alley. I watched the pedestrians. People never change. They never look into alleys. No one does. People pretend alleys, and their inhabitants, don't exist. No one wants to see what is there. I would say that it is some deep-rooted fear that people have of winding up in such places themselves, but really, it is merely disgust. I was filthy. Kevin was filthy. My jar was filthy. I wondered who had thrown it out. And why. It was a perfectly good jar.

"Come on," I said, and turned around. "Kevin. The world is at your fingertips. I'm even willing to bend the rules a little, for you. I mean, what are rules for, if not to be broken? Am I correct? Is that not a part of today's vernacular? I mean, think of it: do you have a lost loved one you want to see again? A wife? A child? They can be here. It wouldn't be them, not in the sense you knew them, and it'll only be temporary – but still, it rarely fails to make someone happy for at least a short while. Or how about a job? I can get you the best damn job your mind can create. Architect. Zookeeper. Presidential advisor. I can get you a three-course meal. Steaks, salads, strawberry cheesecake. Those little French things with the cream on top. I can get you a house, your own mansion, with a mounted bear in one corner and a heated indoor swimming pool. I can make you friends with all the latest celebrities. Drugs. Money. Women. Fame. All you have to do is name it, Kevin, and it's yours."

He grinned at me and tapped the jar. "You were in here," he said. "And the jar was in the dumpster, and I found you."

"Once," I assured him, "my jar was housed in a palace. I was the friend of princes and queens. Through them, I ruled kingdoms."

"I wish," he said, "that you would go away."

It was the first time his eyes had met mine. I held them. It is not easy for men to look at me so; I have seen the fire in my reflection, the flames that dance within my pupils. But he did not look away. I said, "You have three wishes. If you wish this, you cannot wish your other two."

He nodded and took the lid off the jar.

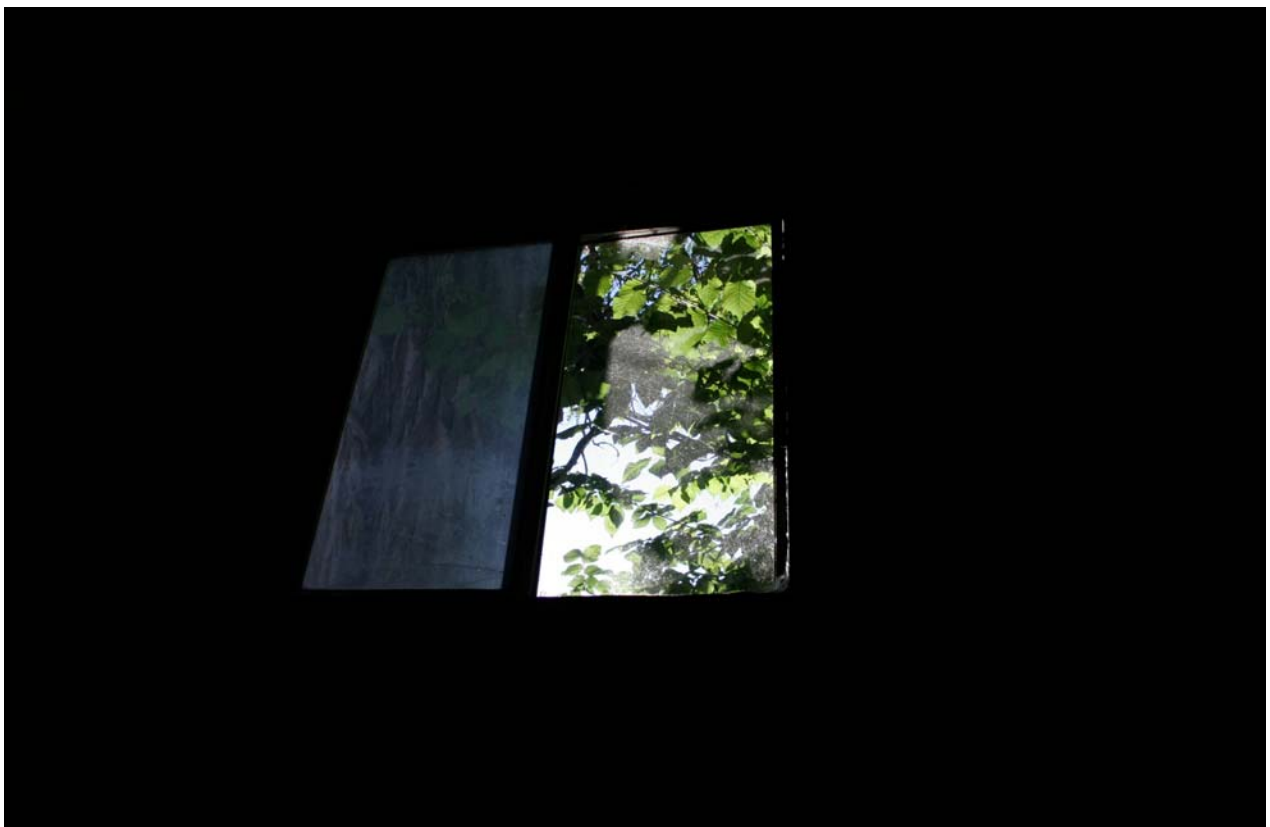
"All right," I told him. I picked some dirt out from under my fingernail. "Put the jar back in the dumpster, then. As was meant to be." I started to snap my fingers, then held back. "Just a thought, though. Ambition, Kevin. You might have wished for a little ambition."

"Ambition," he said, nodding. "After you go away."

I shook my head and went back into the bottle. He screwed the lid on, and my ears popped at the pressure change. I waited until I was sure I was back in the dumpster, then put my head in my hands and began singing songs from the old days, songs of princesses and horses and full moons and magical breezes that carried you endlessly across the desert nights.

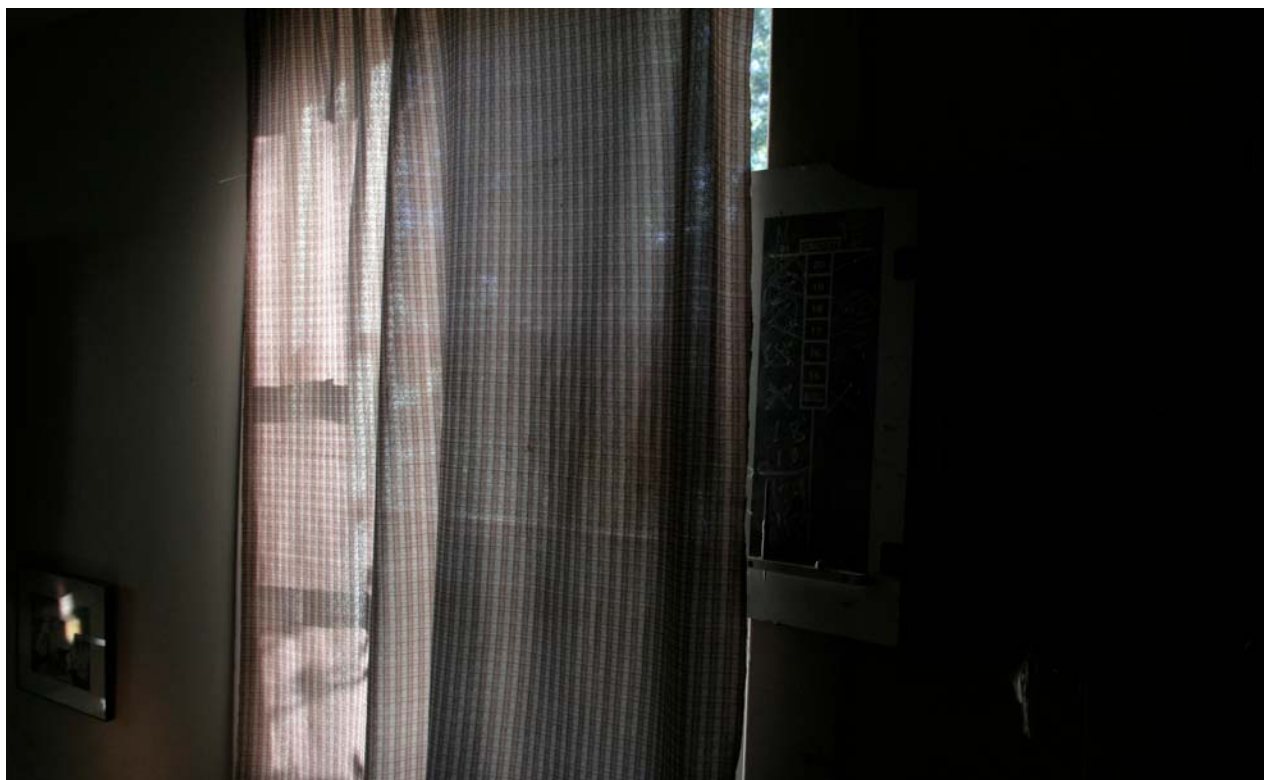
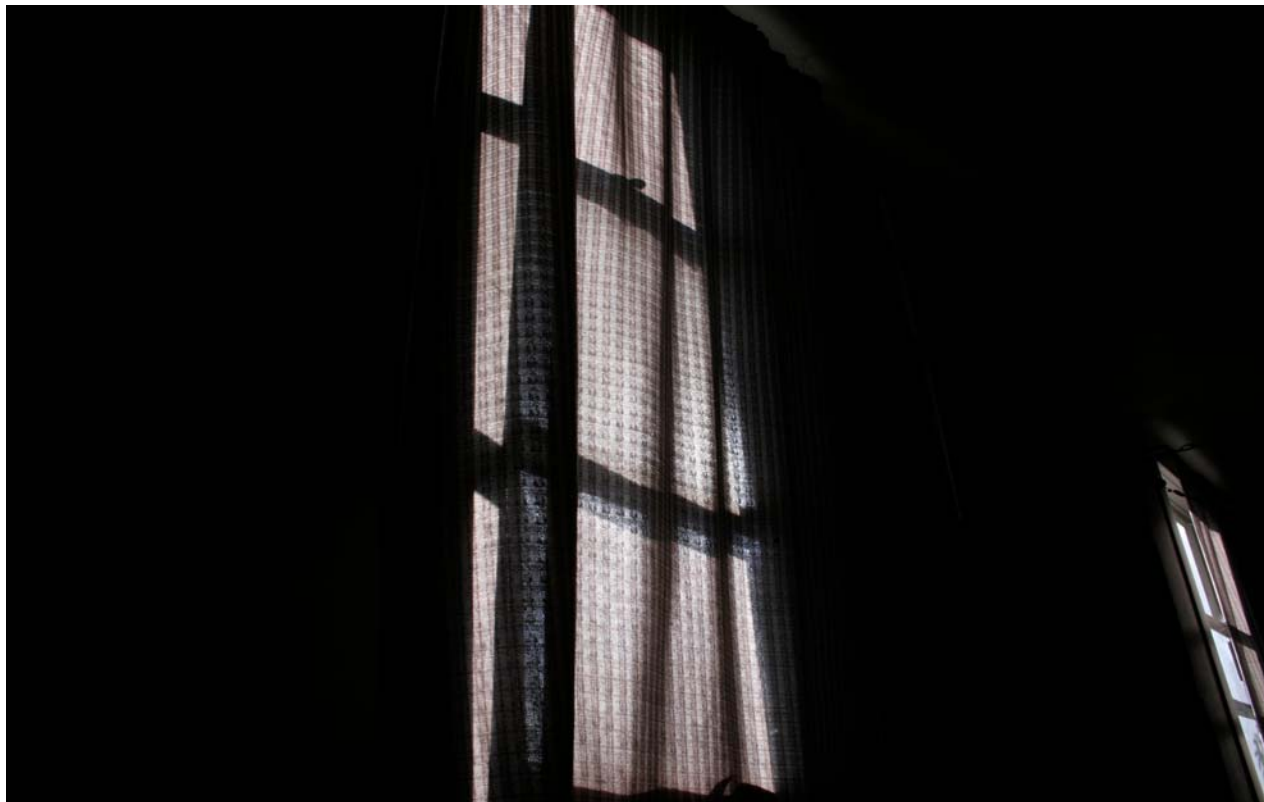
These are all photos taken at my friend's house. I don't remember why I took these, if, in fact, I had a conscious reason in the first place. In retrospect, they seem important.

- Dan Rooke









White Skies

- Keith Zimmerman

Rain sang hard on the flat black ragtop of Gina's Jeep Cherokee. Beads like perspiration formed and splattered on the zippered nylon lining, stretching out like quicksilver in the wind on I-55, south from Worth to Chicago. Jimmy watched through the plastic window, the little brokedown houses and desolated automobiles blemished the yellow-grey plains; plains like these were all you had in this part of Illinois, eleven months out of twelve. At least there was rain. Let it rain all it wants, Jimmy thought. Weather was better than white skies, and white skies were all they'd had since he'd been with Gina - a sure sign of God's apathy, he knew.

Eighty miles an hour down a highway in the rain and she was tail-gaiting the car in front of them like it was a funeral procession blocking her from emergency medical procedures. So typical, Jimmy thought. Like the time she'd kicked him in the head: be aggressive, do what you feel, see what happens. That was her philosophy as far as he could tell. He didn't suppose the Mad Dog he'd just bought at the gas station was helping, either.

Gina had put his copy of *New Morning* into the tape deck, and he guessed she'd try to keep it when she dropped him off. No matter, she could have it. A little something for her trouble. 'Went to See the Gypsy' played softly but tension and bitterness had truly soundtracked the day, were almost its anthems. He watched her as she drove, aware of her presence, sure she was aware of his. He chuckled.

"What?" she said.

"Nothing. It's just...I don't really know you. At all, it feels like. I don't know how I got here. I don't know how *we* got here."

"And?"

"I guess I'm just glad to be going home."

She looked at him then.

"Yeah, no shit." She said it like she was talking to a small child who would have to be tolerated. "You're lucky we had that party. Otherwise you couldn't afford to go home."

"If that's what you call luck. Jesus."

Jimmy barely registered two quick red flashes of taillight at the farthest periphery of his vision. He turned from Gina to the windshield, his mouth agape, grabbed the steering wheel and jerked it hard to the right as she jammed the brakes. The Cherokee slid a full forty feet on four wheels, the tires slurring and screaming in the rain. The car in front of them drove on.

Jimmy and Gina sat in silence staring at each other, the car at a full stop on the interstate. Gina's left eye was couched in a yellow and green bruise.

Bus stations for Jimmy were like hospitals, jails, churches or sewers - they were places

to avoid, places where only unpleasant circumstances led someone, places where bad things happened. The Chicago Greyhound terminal had floors finished with a vinyl black and white checkerboard pattern made to resemble actual tiles, walls painted a graying yellow piss color, all the paint chipping or carved up by voyagers past, and countertops laminated with a thin gold and silver Formica. It was totally mobbed out and loud, children screaming and laughing, parents apparently beyond care. Jimmy stood in line, already a few minutes late, knowing he would be stuck there for at least twenty more minutes. Wonderful, he thought, perfectly goddamned delightful. Well, I can't blame her for not trying. She must really want me gone.

When his turn at the purchasing counter finally came Jimmy bought a ticket for the next departing bus to Denver, which left in twelve hours. A kid, about seventeen or eighteen, approached Jimmy and said "Hi." The kid had on jeans, a clean white t-shirt and a baseball cap; just a regular, clean-cut Midwesterner to Jim. But a good-looking kid with a nice, friendly smile.

"I saw you at the ticket counter. The same thing happened to me," the kid said.

"You have twelve hours, too?"

"Uh-huh, just about."

"You headed to Denver, too?"

"Nope, huh-uh. Other direction."

"Jesus, what a drag. So what are you doing today?"

"Don't know. You wanna do something?"

"Yes. Let's go get some whiskey."

Walking to the liquor store, he learned the kid's name was Bud, that he was twenty-two years old, Jimmy's own age, that he was from Jacksonville but had been living in Tempe for the last summer or so, and was headed home. Funny, Jimmy said, he was headed home too, so they had that in common. He bought a fifth of Beam and had the man at the counter put it in a paper bag. Bud bought a couple of sodas, said he didn't drink much. Fine, Jimmy said, now we've got chaser.

They found a lowered loading dock at the base of a declining driveway in an alley behind the 7-11s, lottery vendors, liquor stores and warehouses. They cracked their bottles and drank in the slackening rain.

"Jesus. I should have been on that last bus. Twelve hours! I'm supposed to be halfway home by then! It's nice hanging with you and everything, but I can't wait to get back to Denver," Jimmy said.

"What are you doing here, anyway? Visiting?"

"I don't know. I just moved here with this girl - she's from here, or from Worth, which is where we were living. I hadn't known her for long when we moved out here. Just a few days, really."

"For real?"

"For fucking real. And I don't know, it was about as crazy as it sounds. I just couldn't...well, I figured out pretty quick I didn't really like her, but I guess I didn't go home

because I didn't want to admit I was wrong or something. I figured I'd stay out here, get a job, figure shit out. But I never did. And I've been to jail twice now in about six months. So that's a sign. I'm going back."

Jimmy pulled from the bottle and handed it to Bud.

"What about you? Why're you here?"

"I don't know," Bud said.

"Just kinda bumming around?"

"Uh-huh. I guess I'm taking it slow. Not quite as excited as you."

"Your parents aren't worried? Do they know where you are?"

Bud looked away, seeming as if he didn't want to talk about it, so Jimmy let it go.

Two men walked down the alley, stopped talking when they noticed Jimmy and Bud drinking at the dock, and turned in and approached them. Jimmy, startled, eased up a bit when he noticed their shabby clothing and ragged faces; the men were obviously homeless.

"Whatchya drinkin' there, boys?" The man was of average height and build, his hair dirty yellow and slicked back, his ruddy face unshaven and oily. His bushy eyebrows downturned in a v so severe it was almost comical. Three teeth were missing from his mouth that Jimmy could see. He talked slowly, almost thickly, with a sort of mild belligerence.

"Oh, just got a little whiskey," Jimmy said.

"Then I must be a soldier of fortune. Mind if we get some, too?" the man said.

"Well - " Jimmy glanced at Bud, who shook his head slightly, then at the man, then at the man's friend. The man's friend was tall, about six feet five inches, with long black hair worn in a ponytail, a flannel shirt and jeans. Jimmy thought he looked Native American. He looked back to the first man. "I don't see why not."

"The name's Lenny Lacy, but people call me Stonebreaker," the man said. "My friend here, don't worry about him. His name's The Stone, he don't talk much."

Jimmy handed Stonebreaker the bottle. Stonebreaker took a long pull, waited a beat and took another. "Ah, the pause that refreshes," he said handing the bottle to The Stone. "Mm-hmm. Nothing like some good whiskey. I'll have another."

The Stone passed the bottle back to Stonebreaker, who helped himself. Jimmy cleared his throat and scratched his nose. He lit a smoke, felt himself tensing up again.

"I'm Jimmy and this is my friend Bud."

"Well thank you very much Jimmy and Bud. You mind if I get one of those, too?" He pointed at the cigarette. "What are you boys doing out here in the rain, besides drinking good whiskey? You good looking, so you must have woman trouble." He grinned as he passed the bottle to Jimmy.

"Oh, I don't know. I'm leaving my woman. We're both waiting for the Greyhound bus."

"You know what I always say about a woman?" Stonebreaker grabbed the bottle from Jimmy and swigged. "Always chew gum with your mouth closed, because if a woman knows you have money she'll sure as shit take it. Fucking whores." He laughed loudly, slapping his leg. "I hate 'em. Don't mind belting a whore, neither."

"Jimmy, can I talk to you for a minute?" Bud said it barely above a whisper.

"Sure."

They walked up the ramp to the alley.

"Listen, are you sure you wanna hang out with these guys?" Bud said.

Jimmy looked down at the two of them. Stonebreaker was drinking lustily from their bottle.

"Yeah, I don't know. Fucking Stonehenge or whatever is a ball buster. Crazy fucker. You wanna ditch 'em?"

"Uh-huh. Dude, once you give these guys something they figure they can get over on you." Bud was visibly frightened now. "They just ask for more. Or take it."

"Yeah, ok. They're drinking all the whiskey anyway."

"Let's take the El and score some shit. We've got all day."

Jimmy walked down to the men.

"Well, I think we're out of here. It was nice to meet you guys."

"Already, huh?" Stonebreaker said with mock surprise.

"Yeah, I think so. We're waiting for our buses and all. But you guys take care."

Jimmy reached out to take the bottle, but Stonebreaker stepped back.

"Whoa! Whatchya think you're doing there, boy? You tryin' to take my whiskey?"

"My whiskey," Jimmy said.

He stepped towards Stonebreaker and saw The Stone's fist right as it struck his head, knocking him to the cement. Yellow and white explosions erupted and pinwheeled behind his eyes, then it was black for an undeterminable amount of time. He heard laughter vague and far away, realized he was on his knees. Jimmy saw only blood through his right eye. His left eye was liquid with tears, like looking out a window covered with rain. He staunched his eyes with his t-shirt and stared at the ground, trying to memorize all the little pebbles and cigarette butts, the grade of the concrete. Jesus, he thought. Jimmy stood up slowly without speaking or looking at the two men, kept his eyes covered, and walked away.

The Alley Elevated shook and rattled on stilted tracks, crested and lowered through tunnels and cutaway sections, in and out of light from Chicago proper down to the South Side. The city flattened out, the buildings becoming shorter and smaller farther out, until shacks, small housing projects, an occasional smokestack, and two- and three-story storefronts dominated the landscape. Bud said this was the place to score and Jimmy wondered how he knew. I guess the kid's been around, he thought. After all, you don't see his face all beat to shit. He stared at his reflection in the graffitied windows, the cut above his eye throbbing hotly, a shiner already beginning to form. His shirt was colored with blood.

They departed the train into flagging rain and a neighborhood that consisted mainly of loafing men, skittering, almost floating trash, and sharp barks from unseen, invisible dogs. They passed a very tall, very black young man shaped like a broomstick on the corner, and Bud said "Hey, man, you holding?" The man shook his head no, Bud shrugged. They walked

on. "Hey!" the man stage whispered. Bud walked back to him palming a twenty, shook his hand, and the man extracted three small baggies from under his tongue. He handed them to Bud.

"Jesus, Bud, I thought we were going to get some weed or something," Jimmy said as they waked away. "What is that? Crack?"

Bud was laughing.

"Yes, Jimmy, it's crack. *Weed*, Jimmy? Gimme a break."

"Jesus, I don't know." Jimmy was chuckling too. "I don't really know you."

"Man, look at you - I'm really sorry those guys fucked you up.

"Not your fault. And anyway, now I fit right in with the neighborhood."

They both laughed, feeling good and excited to get high.

Bud was moving naturally, and seemed to know exactly where to go. He led Jimmy to a boarded up red barn located between a little bodega and a purple two-story with a sign that simply said "VIDEO." They walked through scrub brush and thistles between buildings, around to the back. Tires, bricks and trash were heaped in piles among the tall weeds, and a makeshift gate, just a few scraps nailed together, had been made to block the back door. Bud moved the gate to one side and walked in. What am I getting myself into, Jimmy wondered. Mom always said if you have a bad feeling about something, don't do it. Said it's a sign from God. I had a bad feeling about Gina, so maybe she's right. Then again, I didn't think those bums would jack my whiskey, so maybe it's bullshit.

Pipes made from soda cans and hamburger wrappers lay between haphazard heaps of rubble inside the barn, the debris from lives wasted. Women of indeterminate ages looked like so much dirty laundry on the dirt floor. Thrown away, Jimmy kept thinking. It all reminded him of a foreign country, third, fourth, or fifth world, where a bomb had gone off, where plague still lingered. There was an odor of piss and sweet, burning rubber. Jimmy and Bud stood by a boarded up window.

"Jesus, what a scene," Jimmy said.

"Yeah, it's pretty rough to look at."

Bud took a small glass cylinder from inside a sock and placed a small bit of crack in it. He fired it up.

"Take it slowly at first, then suck hard."

"That's what she said. I've smoked it before, but not for a long time."

Jimmy did as he said, but accidentally took some into his stomach. He puked a little on his shirt.

"Guess I'm gonna need a new shirt, or something," he giggled.

"Uh-huh. Or something." Bud took another hit. "Try not to swallow it. It's just like smoking a cigarette."

"I know, I know. Taking a big hit was what fucked me up."

A woman with a face just like a shrunken head from a Disneyland gift shop tugged on Bud's shirtsleeve.

"Hey mister. I'll suck yo dick."

"That's okay. Here."

Bud took another rock out of the baggie and loaded it in the pipe. He handed it to the woman, whose friend had joined her.

"Much obliged," she said.

"Uh-huh. You guys can kill that."

The two women smoked, grinning and tittering.

"Hey Bud, didn't you say something about not letting people get over on you? Jesus, what the fuck."

"Do any of these crackheads look like they could do to me what those two bums did to you?"

Jimmy looked around at all the recumbent, slow moving bodies. Two more women had joined the pair smoking Bud's crack.

"No, I guess you're right. But there are so many of them. It's sort of like *Night of the Living Dead*. We should beat it."

"Yeah, we'll go back after another round. Ladies, let me get my pipe back."

They smoked another round, left the barn amidst pleas and catcalls from its inhabitants, and took the El back the way they'd came.

Sitting in the train tunnel, far away from the stairway leading to the street, Jimmy flashed on Sherlock Holmes and Jack the Ripper. The tunnel became a cobblestone covered cave, down in the sewers of London, dark and steamy, the sound of thunder rumbling from afar. He could hear the rustle and squeak of rats, the tap-tap-tap of dripping water. Mmm, this is good, he thought. Mysteries and shit. Kinda scary, but fun. You better snap yourself out of it, though. You still gotta make it home. He passed the pipe to Bud.

"Did they have trains back in the Sherlock Holmes days?" he said.

"What? Trains? Huh-uh, I think they had horse-drawn carriages and shit like that." Bud cleared the pipe and put it in his sock. "Why?"

"Hello, gentleman. What're we up to today?" There was a police officer of some sort standing not five feet from them, tapping his boot on the ground.

"I, uh, just sitting here, sir," Jimmy said.

"You boys taking the train?"

"We just got off it. We are - well we're actually waiting for the Greyhound, but it's a long wait, so we decided to wander around." Jimmy was practically stuttering.

"Sure smells funny over here. You two know anything about that?"

"No, sir."

"Well, okay, but don't wander too far, you're liable to get hurt. Looks like one of you already has." He turned and walked away, his heels clicking on the concrete. "And stay out of the tunnels if you're not using the trains," he called over his shoulder.

"Jesus, what the fuck was that?" They both stood up.

"Train cop."

"Train cops, yeah. They're fucking everywhere. I didn't know what a train cop was until I moved out here. Sneaky motherfuckers. That guy reminds me of the train cop that

arrested me in Worth."

"What did he arrest you for?"

"Carving my and Gina's initials in some train tracks."

"I thought you didn't like her."

"I didn't."

Gina had driven Jimmy to the train tracks on the first and only truly sunny day of the previous summer. She said there was a bridge they could stand on while the train passed, and Jimmy was excited. They drove down a side street on the outskirts of Worth, until they came to a dead end with a dirt road branching off to the right. Jimmy got out of the Jeep and unhooked the chain blocking their entrance. At the end of that road there was a series of logs that designated parking spaces in a little dirt cul de sac on the bank of a river. They had a bottle of Christian Brothers and half a six-pack.

"Anyone ever fish here?"

"Not really," she said. "The trains come by and the noise scares all the fish."

He put *New Morning* in the tape deck of the Cherokee and turned up the volume. Trees grew thick along the river and a slight breeze rustled their leaves. The river itself was tranquil and slow moving, with leaves and water skippers floating down the little green waves. Train tracks paralleled the river and crossed it at a turn, the little trestle bridge mostly wooden and narrow. Jimmy lit a smoke and cracked a beer, smiling, watching the water. He set his Rolling Rock on the hood.

"C'mere, baby."

She came to him. He hugged her, kissed her on the mouth, squeezed a little tit. She had blonde hair cut like Louise Brooks, green eyes, and a wide, generous mouth that was matched only by the abundance of smooth white softness beneath her shirt. She was about a head shorter than him, but he didn't mind; he liked to carry her around. He'd thought she was beautiful, he remembered.

"Man, thanks for bringing me here. This is great."

"I thought you would like it."

She put her face in the hollow between his neck and shoulder, kissing him. He goosed her a little and she gave a scream. Laughing and swearing, she punched him once in the chest, and he tried to tickle her again, but she ran around the Jeep. Jimmy cocked his head.

"'Went to See the Gypsy.' I like this song," he said. "Best one on the album."

"Yeah, it's a good one."

They walked arm and arm toward the bridge. Jimmy stopped and stood listening.

"It never gets the credit, but *New Morning* was Dylan's first religious album. Practically the whole thing's about Jesus."

"Oh, I don't know about all that. 'Winterlude' is about Jesus? 'If Dogs Run Free'?"

"Well, not those ones, but 'Three Angels' and 'Father of the Night' are totally religious. And I've always thought 'If Not for You' is about Jesus, too. Or maybe a seeing-eye dog."

"Whatever," Gina laughed. "'Went to See the Gypsy' is about Elvis, not Jesus."

"Listen. The guy, who I guess is Bob Dylan, goes to see the gypsy, who is Jesus, in Las Vegas -"

"Why would Jesus be hanging out in Las Vegas?"

"I don't fucking know. He's healing all the sinners, I guess. Anyway, Jesus is hanging out in a nice hotel with all his acolytes and toadies. That's where they meet, and the guy is duly impressed, but he has to leave for some reason. That's like straying from the faith. But in the lobby he meets a pretty dancing girl, who represents Mary Magdalene, and she tells the guy to go back to Jesus. Well, he goes upstairs and Jesus is gone. But because of his newly reclaimed faith, because he went back to see the gypsy, he's immediately transported back to his hometown, which represents innocence and rebirth. *New Morning*, get it? So it's like being born again and delivered from evil."

"Are you already drunk? Here, have some of this brandy. They don't meet in Vegas, they meet in 'that little Minnesota town.' That's Bob Dylan's hometown. Listen to the song."

"I don't know, it's complicated. Going home is starting over, becoming whole again through faith. The 'big hotel' is obviously a euphemism for heaven, so maybe rock 'n' roll is a metaphor for the divine spirit, and maybe Elvis *is* Jesus."

"Yeah. Maybe *you* should go see the gypsy."

When they heard the train whistle blow in the distance, Gina grabbed Jimmy's arm and said "Hurry!" They ran laughing to the bridge and jumped from tie to tie until she showed him a recessed compartment between trusses that they could stand in, very near the tracks. Hearing the train's approach grow louder, they squeezed in tightly together, laughing and hitting the bottle, until they fully embraced. Jimmy rested his face on her head and closed his eyes, feeling the warmth from the sun on her hair against his cheek, smelling its sweet scent. She pulled him in from the tracks and closer to her. As the train drew near its rumble and chug thundered and shook the bridge, giving Jimmy the sensation of being in an earthquake, or on a bed with Magic Fingers. The whistle howled its final wavering warning, and then gray, yellow, red, yellow, black blurred by, inches from their faces, like so much paint in a gale, but they could feel the weight and power of the engine as the wind whipped at their clothing and ripped at their hair. Jimmy took Gina's face between his hands and they kissed until the train was gone.

Jimmy pulled out his pocketknife, sat down on a railroad tie, and lit a smoke.

"This is the best place I've ever been."

They sat sipping brandy from the bottle in the sun and finished off the beers while Jimmy carved their initials in the tie. He had just begun the heart that was to encircle the letters when they heard approaching footsteps scuffling sand and gravel. Jimmy turned around, knife in hand, and saw a policeman who stood, hands on hips, a few feet away. The man wore a gray uniform, a gray cowboy hat, and aviators; he reminded Jimmy of Captain from *Cool Hand Luke*.

"That's a mighty big knife, son."

"This? It's just an old pocketknife. My Dad gave it to me."

"I'm afraid I'll have to take it from you, son. And if it's longer than my forefinger you're S.O.L. I'll have to take you in. Concealed weapon."

"It's not exactly concealed," Gina said. "He's not hiding it."

"I can see that, but I don't make the rules, I follow 'em."

"Did we do something wrong?" she said. "Why are you here?"

"The engineer from that last train got me on the horn, said there were a couple kids on the bridge when she blew by. Can't have that. 'Sides, you're trespassing. And probably drunk. He's vandalizing those train tracks. It don't matter for you none, darlin', I'll just take him on the knife."

"It's alright, Gina. I'll go."

The officer cuffed him and led him to the squad car. When he turned to look he saw Gina, still sitting on the tracks, take a long drink from the bottle.

Sitting in a bathroom stall at the Greyhound station, Jimmy slowly unrolled the little tinfoil package Bud had given him. He'd said "Here, take this. It'll help you on the bus ride." Bud had been acting strange, Jimmy thought, like he was really tired. Maybe he was just crashing from all that crack, maybe he was just tired, but Jimmy had caught him falling asleep a couple times in the bus station. "Hey, you're gonna miss your bus if you keep doing that," he'd said.

It was coke, maybe five or six lines. Jimmy made a big rail on the toilet tank, about the size of three or four lines put together, and snorted half in each nostril. He wrapped up the remainder and put it in his pocket. At least now I'm leaving, he thought. Now I can forget all this shit and go home. There was a guy in the next stall making awful noises.

Jimmy walked out of the bathroom and found Bud at a bank of lockers. He had a duffel bag and a CD Discman in his hand.

"Got your stuff?" Jimmy said.

"Uh-huh. My bus leaves in about five minutes. Hey, you like that stuff I gave you?"

"I don't know yet. It didn't taste like coke."

"Shit. Yeah, no, it wasn't. How much did you do?"

"About half of it, why?"

"Jesus, Jimmy, that was H."

"Oh. Well I feel pretty nice."

"You ever done it before?"

"No, why?"

"Nothing, you'll be fine. You might puke a little."

"Oh. That's OK. This shirt ain't clean."

"Uh-huh. Well -"

"Hey Bud? Are you really going home? To see your parents?"

"I - Shit, Jimmy. That's my bus they're calling for. You take care, man. Gimme a call sometime."

"Yeah, you too. Gimme a call."

"It was fun."

"An adventure."

They shook hands, and as Jimmy watched Bud walk away, he knew that he had never given Bud his number, that he didn't have Bud's. He wandered around the bus station, spent fifteen minutes trying to find the departure schedule that had been in front of him all along, and figured out that his bus was leaving, right now.

When the old black bus driver took Jimmy's ticket, he seemed to pause, giving Jimmy a thorough looking over, even though the line was long with impatient people.

"Where you going to, sir."

"Home. My hometown. Denver. Says so right there. I went to see the gypsy, but not no more. A gypsy'll kick you right in your fucking face. Sure as shit she will."

"Are you alright? You seem to be bleeding."

"I'm fine, officer. I mean bus driver. Oh. You mean my face. Yeah, I'm cool. Some fucking bums jumped me. You believe that shit? Jesus. Fuck a fucking bum, man. Fuck Stonehenge."

"We don't want any trouble on this bus..."

"You and me both, officer."

"OK. There are some paper towels in the restroom at the back of the bus. Clean yourself up."

"Yessir."

Jimmy fell asleep before the bus left the station.

Fall in Worth was cold and violent. Winds like tearing cloth shrieked and mewed as they spit out unabated rain, pushing the frozen northern nights like a sinking ship into Great Lake Michigan. Agricultural productivity was a joke, the Interior Plains entirely empty, and the sky was always either black or white. Christian Brothers was the only reason got Jimmy out of bed. He'd leave their clammy little basement apartment and head to M&B's, the little market up the street, every day at three or four, the sky already dark, the streets deserted, and buy a pack of smokes, some brandy, and a couple of cokes. Sometimes Bronia, the polish grandma who ran the place, would make him a liverwurst sandwich with onions and mayonnaise. "God bless, God bless" was all she said as she slipped it into his bag free of charge.

Jimmy had spent the summer tending the grounds at a Waters Edge Golf Club, and Gina had worked there as the refreshment cart girl. Up early at five in the morning, alone in the park with the sun rising over the treetops, he drove around cutting grass, fixing sprinklers and repairing the greens. Gina would show up a few hours later in uniform, a tight white polo shirt and a short white skirt. He'd hardly been able to control himself when she would drive her cart up next to his. She looked so good in that uniform, something like a tennis player crossed with a porn star. That was all over; now he spent his nights with the Brothers,

she spent hers with her ex. At least as near as he could tell.

She'd had two birds, two ferrets, two rabbits, and three kittens when they arrived from Denver to Worth. "Noah's fucking Ark," he said. "My dog Megan would love this joint." They'd had to get rid of the cats because of Jimmy's allergies, and one of the birds died, but he still felt like he was living in a barn. Actually, Jimmy thought, this place smells worse than a barn. The rabbits had chewed up his Crumb comics and sketchbooks, so he listened to music while he drank. Bob Dylan, Merle Haggard, whoever, just so long as he could drown out that fucking bird. At least she could have a bird with a pleasant song, he thought, but no. He hated the apartment but the weather was worse. Fucking rain. No use to go outside. Dreams of stories to write, pictures to draw, and girls to meet seesawed back and forth through his sodden thoughts, but drinking seemed like all he could do. He didn't know why.

Gina came home early one night and hugged him. She smiled. She sat next to him.

"We want to move to Chicago, right?" she said.

"Um. Okay."

"Okay? That's what we always talked about when you first moved here, remember?"

"Okay."

"Well, I want to have a party and raise funds."

"Raise funds for what?"

"For our move to Chicago, dipshit."

"Oh."

"Yeah, we'll get a keg and a tank of nitrous oxide and invite our friends and charge a cover! Then we can move."

Every party Jimmy had been to around Worth had involved a tank of nitrous oxide. People, he didn't know who, stole them from hospitals.

"I don't have any friends," he said.

"We'll invite my friends."

"Oh. Okay. I guess."

"Because I just want to get out of here. Don't you, honey?"

"Yeah. I do."

The tank of laughing gas arrived the night before the party. They bought the keg the next day. Jimmy got a good head start on the keg with a little help from the Christian Brothers, Gina telling him to cool it. Jimmy hadn't seen anyone beside Gina and Bronia for at least a week. As a place to hide, the basement worked well, but now there was a mob forming outside the doors, or that's how he saw it. Oh well, he thought. Perfect motivation to get extremely fucked up. A call to arms. Or was it the approximate cause of some desultory end result? He didn't know. He didn't want to be there.

Jimmy had taken a shower and helped Gina clean house. They put covers over the bird and rabbit cages hoping to ease the animals' nervousness. As the hour drew nearer, Jimmy sat on the couch by the stereo with a crate of tapes and a bottle by his side, a beer and a smoke in his hands. When strangers began to arrive, and they were all strangers, he would say "Hi, welcome. Beer's in back," and put in a new tape. Gina collected the money.

Skateboarders, dirtheads, musicians, junkies, wannabe artists and the socially inept – the people at this party were the same people Jimmy had always known and he couldn't pretend to hate them just because they were Gina's friends. Gina seemed happy to Jimmy, she was good with people, laughing and talking and smiling. How did she do it, he wondered. Every time he saw her, which had been less and less often before this idea of moving, she walked around like a fucking zombie. Some people can flip that switch, he supposed, and some people can't. *He* never could, he knew that. He didn't know if he wanted to be able to.

"Jimmy," Gina said, "I invited a Mexican girl to the party. For you. This is Mary. Mary, this is Jimmy."

"Hi Mary. What do you mean for me?" Jimmy feigned nonchalance.

"You know what I mean. I told Mary my boyfriend likes Mexican girls. You guys have fun!" Gina skipped laughing into the kitchen.

"Jesus, and you still came, Mary?"

"She didn't really tell me that. I barely know Gina."

"Me too. I'm sorry for that. You can have a seat if you want."

Mary sat down next to him and lit a smoke.

"Why did she say that, the Mexican thing?"

"I don't know. We're not getting along I guess. My last girlfriend was Mexican."

"So she thinks you like all Mexican girls? And now she's trying to set you up?"

"I don't know. I might have told her that I used to have a thing for, y'know, Hispanic women. But what a thing to say to you. To me. I guess she's trying to get rid of me."

"God. What a bitch."

"Tell me about it." He took a swig of brandy and passed it to her. "Have you ever done nitrous oxide, Mary?"

"Let's go."

Jimmy lay on the floor in the laundry room next to the laughing gas. He had been there for hours it seemed, unable to move anything but his eyes. Kids laughed and shouted in slow motion, too many of them crowded into such a small place. They pointed at him. Mary had left long ago. I can just stay here forever, he thought. I can make myself move or I can stay here and die. One more hit and I bet I would die, or at least coma out. Forever, maybe. And I'm okay with that. That sounds absolutely fucking marvelous to me.

"Jimmy, get up."

It was Gina. Jimmy struggled to break the sweet spell of paralysis.

"I – I just wanna lay here, Gina."

"You're embarrassing me, you idiot."

"Fuck you, Gina. Where's Mary?"

She kicked him in the ribs, hard.

"Get out!"

"Alright, alright. Jesus, you fucking domestic violence bitch."

He sat up and looked for his Christian Brothers. It was empty beside him on the floor, spilled-out. He grabbed the nitrous oxide tank, pulled himself up, and staggered into the

hallway. He tried to remember where the bedroom was. Spinning, he fell onto the little mattress on the floor and slept.

Hours later Gina walked into their room.

"Get on your side of the bed," she said. "Jimmy!"

"Huh?"

"Wake up, Jimmy. Get on your side of the fucking bed."

"Mm, what? I'm sleeping." He rolled over.

"Move, Jimmy! I'm serious."

"Make me."

The blow struck Jimmy in the side of his head. He could feel his teeth bend and loosen at the back of his jaw. He sat up, stood up, and steadied himself.

"Really?" He lurched toward her. "Really, Gina?"

He punched her face as hard as he could. He punched her again.

She lay on the floor crying.

He staggered out into the rain.

When the cops arrived Jimmy sat on the front porch with a glass of beer from the keg in his hand.

"You Jimmy?" a cop said.

"Yes."

"You wanna come with us?"

"No."

"We're gonna have to take you in."

"She kicked me in the head. *While I was asleep.* Jesus."

"He said she said - everybody has a different story. Whoever calls us first avoids jail. We have to take you in."

"Sounds like a lot of bullshit to me."

"Did you hit her?"

"Yes."

"Then you wanna come along?"

"Okay."

Jimmy exited the bus at the Denver terminal. Early morning and the skies were blue. Raindrops covered everything, and they shone. He walked to the curb and sat down in the sunshine. He lit a smoke.

White skies or green eyes, I can't explain why I do what I do. No amount of faith can change acts already committed. Not knowing, always leaving, wanting to stay, change yourself: These are the approximate causes of all end results. The ties that bind. I want nothing more than a bottle of booze, but what difference would it make? Come what may, come what might. Right? The Big Hotel is fucking vacant.

Jimmy checked his billfold, walked into the station, and bought a ticket.



"Six Pack" Story

- Casey Mulvihill

Beer #1: Load-in

Sounds of text messages from anticipating friends clanged from my pocket as we loaded our gear out of the basement and into our cars. Several people showed up at the house we practiced at for some pre-funking before heading down town to the venue to load in. This would be our first show in quite some time. The mood was high and everyone was feeling generous, offering beers out like little blond energy drink spokes-girls. Many cheap beers were consumed and finally it was time to leave. Everyone found their ride, or their car and the busy front yard suddenly became vacant, returning peace to our neighbors.

Lining up our instruments, guitar cabs, and drums went relatively quickly so it left lots of time for more socializing and even more libations. As friends continued to trickle in, a certain 'partier' friend of mine showed up with a flask conveniently in tow. As he guided me out the venue door and down to his truck I was informed of its contents.

Beer #2: Red stag

"Yea, it's Kid Rock's new whiskey or something," said my friend handing me his flask. I looked at him with a confused and almost disappointed face then took it from his hand and tipped it back. Though my first reactions to the alcohol were negative, you wouldn't have guessed that when the flask finally met its end. Due to my absence from the venue, I failed to catch the invitation to dinner from the rest of the band members and a few friends. Therefore I braved on through the evening without anything but the spirits of Kid Rock in my stomach, soon to be joined by similar ones back at the venue. I greeted my guitar player, "Jack" with an extra long hug after returning from dinner. He instantly knew his drummer was several more sheets to the wind than necessary and could do very little at the current point to change that.

Beer #3: Performance

Our time had come to take the stage. I managed to set up my drums with only two minor mishaps. Neither of them debilitating to myself or my gear. Instruments were mic'd and it was time to play. My take on my performance would be comparable to an opus of sounds from drum equipment being thrown down a flight of stairs.

I continued on through the songs in horror, missing stops and cues normally performed without any thought. The real deal breaker was when I noticed the girl I had a big crush on in the crowd that I'd invited all these times. She showed up! My performance now turned to pots and pans and finally we were done with our set. I didn't know whether to feel relieved

or embarrassed so I just felt both equally. I removed my drums from the stage receiving pity pats on the back from good friends and said girl in the crowd, hanging my head in disappointment. I apologized to the rest of the band profusely and they were all extremely understanding. Jack even said "hey, at least we have some good material for our DVD!"

I've got rad band mates.

After collapsing my drums I began to walk the few blocks down the street to where I'd parked my car, but before I got too far Jack asked where I was going and told me he would be the one driving back so I could load my gear in.

Beer #4: Robbery

As I rounded the block and my car was in sight, I noticed something shimmering on the sidewalk next to it. Jack was first to say anything.

"fuuuuuuuuck man..." He said, with an empathetic tone.

The rear passenger side window had been broken and my entire booklet of CD's (who the fuck even wants CD's anymore!?) was stolen - along with my messenger bag full of clothes and a few other random items. All this, when I had two iPods in the front console I would have been more than happy to part with as an alternative. My CD book had collections of albums from my favorite bands I had been putting together since Junior High and High School.

After calling the police and getting laughed at and calling my insurance only to get a similar response, I decided to just continue on with loading my drums into my glass-filled car.

Jack pulled my car up in front of the venue and we began to place my drums carefully in the back in attempts to avoid any glass shards. We finished up and there I stood on the sidewalk next to my windowless car, embarrassed from my show of musicianship and extremely irritated from being burglarized. That's when I noticed the commotion down the sidewalk. Lots of arguing and yelling and it seemed to be moving down my direction.

Beer #5: Fight

"Fuck YOU, motherfucker!" Shouted a bald-headed man shadowed by two girls somehow more intoxicated than him.

The exchanges between the three of them and people down the sidewalk sitting at tables went on and on and my irritation grew. It was at the point that my conversation with my friend kept getting interrupted by extremely lewd comments and I felt I had to say something.

"HEY!" I yelled. The bald-headed man stopped shouting and turned to look at me.

"Have a good night, man," I said as I pointed down the street.

He was immediately distracted by my comment when someone he was exchanging with yelled another comment at him and the arguing continued.

"Hey man! Have a good night!!" I yelled again, pointing down the street.

He turned and looked at me again, this time with more intent.

"What'd you say, pussy!?" He said, now walking toward me.

Now, I'd been in one little wrestling match before when I was in eighth grade but that was the only thing remotely close to a fight that I'd ever been in. For some reason, because of all the accounts that had happened to me throughout the night I had a little extra aggression.

The bald-headed man walked quickly toward me, and socked me in the side of the head. Luckily, I threw my left arm up and deflected most of the blow otherwise that would have been the end of the fight. My hat flew off and I stumbled backward regaining my composure. Honestly, after getting hit, I didn't even want to fight. I was over it. Right at this point my singer lost his shit after seeing me get hit and delivered one of the most devastating punches I've ever witnessed to the bald-headed dude's nose. It exploded blood in an upside-down V formation down his tall, white t-shirt. I watched in amazement as the bald dude shuffled backward, regained his footing and started towards my singer with his fist pulled back.

This is the point where I snapped. I wasn't about to let my friend get hit in a fight that he just defended me from. Before I even realized, I had shoved my singer to the side and was clenching the bald dude's throat as hard as I could with my left hand and delivering blow after blow to his already hamburgered nose with my right. I punched and punched and punched and when he would try to bend down to protect himself I turned my punches into uppercuts. This continued until he was against the building and bouncers finally pulled me off with some contortionist maneuver to my arm.

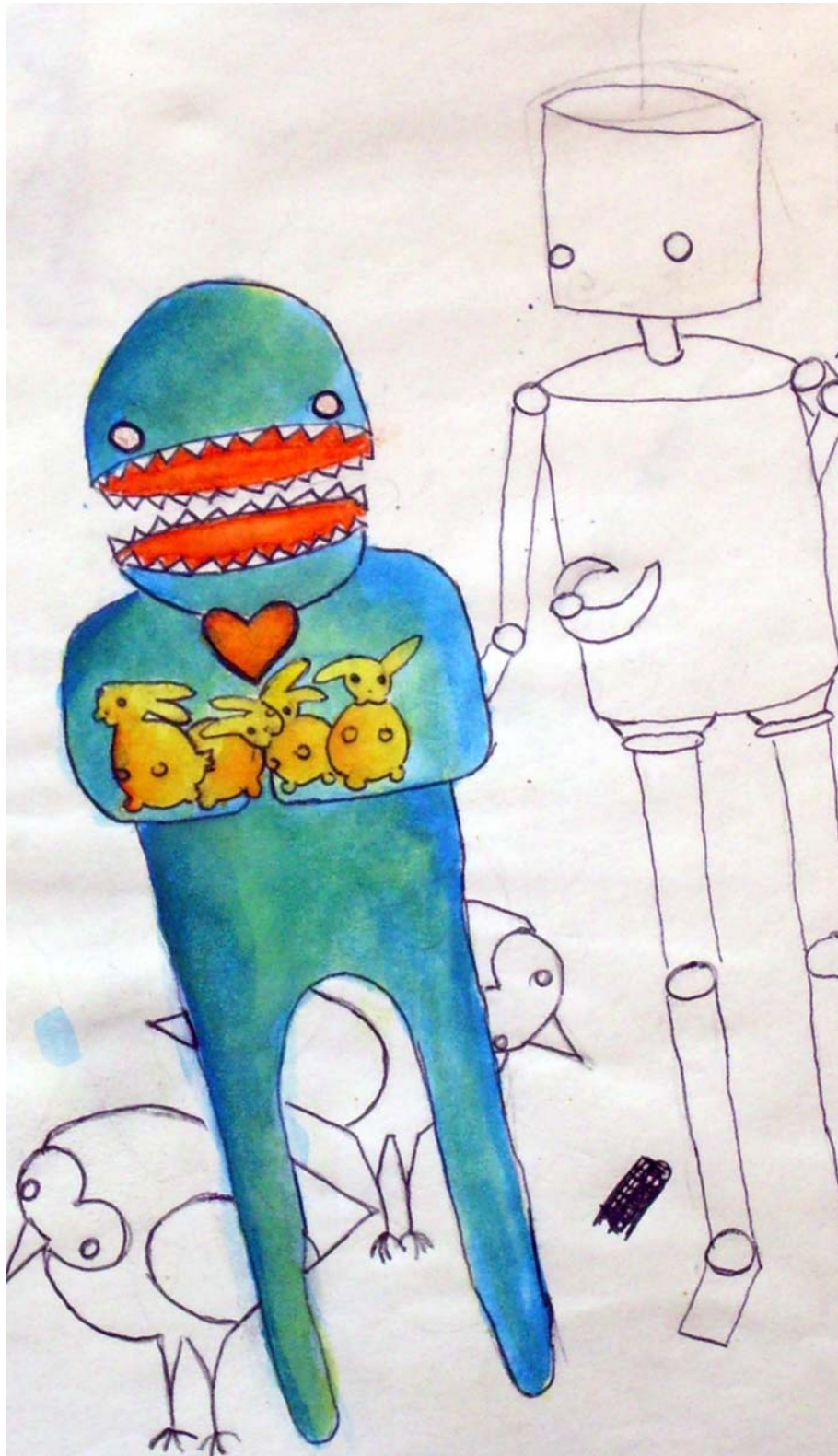
"I'm done, I'm done!" I yelled, as they pinned me against the building. I was held for a short time after as they made sure I was indeed calm as I'd claimed, then let me go.

Beer #6: Vandalism & Police

It was when I was back inside the venue with a friend who was helping me wash the blood off my arms that the final incident was occurring outside. Apparently the bald dude was asked to leave for obvious reasons by the short, female show promoter and was pushed. He didn't feel the fight was over and was waiting for me outside. The show promoter informed him that she was calling the police and out of frustration he donkey kicked in the passenger side door of one of my friends cars that was parked out front. This friend (who happens to be a female) was the wrong persons car to be kicking. Not only did she follow after him screaming but because of this, the police were able to find him by following the sounds of her yelling at him down the street. After my friend identified him to the police I told them I

wanted to take full responsibility for the fight that I was just in. They looked confused because they had answered a call for vandalism, not violence. It was when they noticed his bloodied shirt that I think it made more sense.

By character, I'm not a fighter, I'm a mediator. But if you break my car and steal my Bad Religion collection after I've already embarrassed myself, then threaten to hit my friend I guess anyone would be.



Two Fictions

- Otis Crook

I.

A young man thought he was Jesus. He swore he heard things talking to him, whispers in his sleep. One time he fell in the river and drowned, died. He then awakened on a high sort of light mist, but his body is gone. He then currently sees all the faces he's ever seen HIS WHOLE LIFE, every one he's ever met gathered individually singular present in one face, and it says to him, "Charles, we've been studying you your whole life in order for you to become one of us, you kinda fucked it up with the whole Jesus thing so we're gonna have to let you go."

Charles then saw his already luminescent body start to fade and then he saw what looked like the mist of an ocean wave splashing onto rocks. Charles then currently changes into a grain of sand on the beach where the river he drowned in meets the sea. He doesn't think those silly thoughts any more. He only hears the ocean.

II.

Herman saw all babies as the same, they think the same simple things, they're incredibly cute and can be ferocious with the way they cry. Our friend Herman is your average guy, he likes lilies, Japanese culture, veganism, anarchy, nature walks, go, music, but he is repulsed by the fact of photography.

"Their soles are lost you know," referring to an ad in A magazine he spotted over the shoulder of an elderly person at the bus stop downtown. Herman felt bold in saying so because (a) the elderly person probably didn't know what Herman was referring to, having stated such a vague observation. And (b) it felt boldly rewarding cause he was self-validating his belief that photographs robbed part of the souls of the persons being photoed. It was this boldness that would be responsible for the mystery soon to unfold in the deeper parts of Herman.

The dust seemed prettier in the light shining through the bus windows, it seemed to be moving in a fashion that Herman liked to the way slow motion bullets in movies travel "except they're not out to shoot any one" he thought to himself. He pulled the chord to stop the bus for he'd made it to Albertson's. As the bus stopped the dust seemed to wave see you later or see you soon or hi or bye or a mixture of all of the above. Sushi makes Herman

happy (albertson's). It wasn't long that Herman was in the store before Herman noticed what seemed to be an over-abundance of babies with their mom's. He dared look one in the eyes by the avocados and for a split second saw the dust particles form the communication "go away." Herman noticed A slight change in the baby's face as the dust appeared and disappeared, it was as if the baby itself manifested it but then started to cry loudly repelling Herman's look for he wanted no responsibility for such A hideous sound.

On his way to the cucumbers he suddenly found himself re-collecting the pretty dust he'd encountered on the bus simultaneously with out realizing it he was staring at the behind of another baby's mamma, the little feller tilted his head as it's mom got out of the way of Herman's view of it. The baby winked at Herman and said by means of Herman's imagination "nobody's different than anybody that's how we're the same. no game can be won because no sounds like know and people like me and you don't no any thing." Herman dropped his food and ran out of albertson's to find every one gone, no cars , no people or anything except a plane with A note being pulled behind it big enough to read from the ground and it said " you're dead Herman, you traded your sole for that confused elderly persons cause you confused it and that's punishable by the loss of your own confusion (see horoscopes at rear of magazine). The plane was turning to land on 16th st. just as Herman started to miss his idea of sushi.



The Park

- Shea Newton

In the morning the roof is gone. The walls are still intact but dust has blown from the bookshelves and October leaves have fallen onto the kitchen table. Sitting down I watch the blue morning sky as the boys prepare for school. Their mother pushes amber bed worn hair across her forehead handing both their backpacks.

"The roof is gone." I say once the kids have gone.

"I didn't sleep well, did you notice?" my wife asks. She takes a cup of coffee in her hand and sits across from me at the table.

"Yes. Did you see the roof go?"

"I've quit my job," she says.

"Oh? And the roof?"

"I think it's gone for good." There is a breeze. The leaves between us lift for a moment.

I take the highway to work in the city and there is a woman on the shoulder picking up peacock feathers that blanket the road. Traffic does not slow down and there are feathers falling from her hands.

By the time I arrive at work my shoes have gone. In the parking lot gravel sticks to the bottom of my feet.

"Your socks don't match," the receptionist says when I walk through the front door.

"My shoes have disappeared," I tell her and she goes back to the papers on her desk.

At my desk I stare at the computer screen. Looking up my eyes meet the woman's across the hall. She smiles. I think about the rain that will come soon. It is fall and my roof is gone.

Getting coffee in the hallway my supervisor stops me.

"How's your proposal draft coming? We'd like to proof it before our meeting next week," he says.

I had forgotten it.

"Fine," I tell him.

"Your socks don't match," he says walking away.

"My shoes have disappeared," I offer, but he's already turned a corner.

Driving home in the evening a peacock feather blows onto my windshield. I look for the woman but she is no longer there.

"My shoes have disappeared," I tell my wife who's reading when I walk into the living room. She looks up at me then turns a page in her book and returns to reading. Through the

sliding glass doors I see the boys playing in the backyard.

"The roof is gone," says the oldest as I step outside, "and there are leaves in my bed."

Upstairs I pick leaves from the boy's beds.

For dinner I make pasta. I wash dishes in the sink. Because of the cool night air I let my hands rest under the running warm water.

At the table my wife eats slowly.

"It's nice not to work," she says, "I should have thought of that before."

"Before what?" I ask her.

"I'm not hungry," the youngest says as I spoon pasta and red sauce onto his plate.

In bed I can't sleep. I lie awake until the sun rises. I watch the walls waiting for something to change. My wife is sleeping as I rise from bed to dress. There are no shoes in the closet. I put on matching socks.

The living room and kitchen are gone by the time I am downstairs. Instead of walls I see what is left of the neighborhood. Staircases with no houses, cars without garages. A slide in the park. I don't remember hearing any sound. I leave for work early. There are no feathers on the road.

My office is gone, its absence is evident from blocks away. The entire building is gone. Pulling into my parking space, I am the only car in the lot. Letting my hands fall from the steering wheel I sit thinking about the rain. Water running down the staircase. Lying in bed looking up as it falls around me. I wonder if the house will be there until then.

When the afternoon sun begins to warm me I wonder if we will sit under the oak tree in the backyard for shelter. Maybe the oak tree will be gone.

The car is warm driving home.

Near our house I see my wife lying in the park. I see our oldest boy playing alone.

I stop and call out to them. There are people in the park who look toward me.

The boy runs past me and I follow him to my wife, who reaches out a hand and pulls me to the ground. She pulls me to her and I watch the pieces of grass that have not become woven into her hair fall.

It is time to go home, I say to her softly.

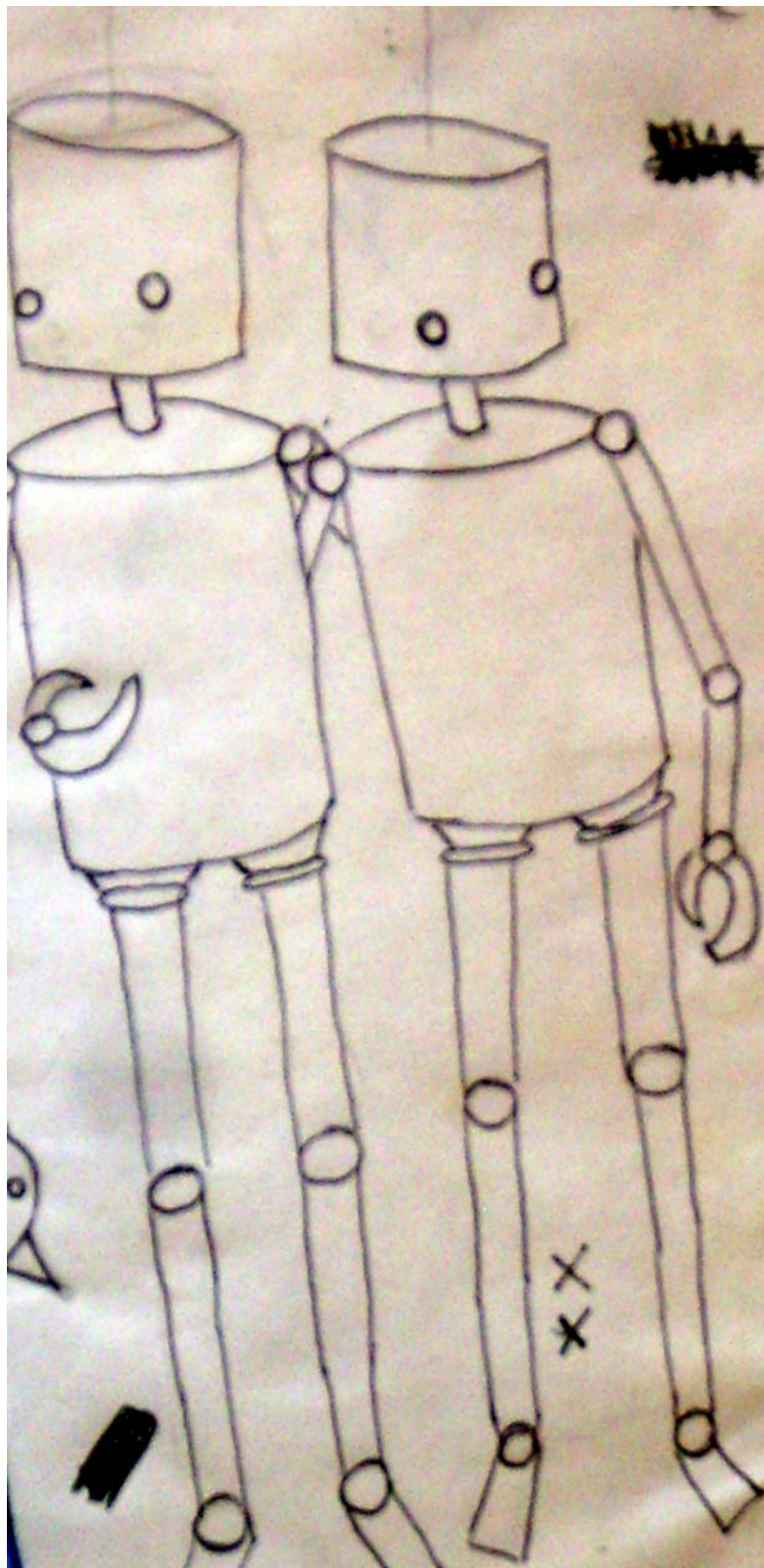
Oh, she sighs looking up into the sky.

I think, she says slowly, we're staying.

I feel the sun heavy on my face. The boy runs by laughing and points to the sky.

Though the sun is shining above us the horizon is far away and hard to see. We are alone.
Lying in the grass my legs are heavy.

When the child comes to lie between us I close my eyes and wonder if his brother will
be able to sleep too. I wonder if he will ever find us here.



The Chronicles Of Tim Part IV: Pandora

- Mike Wiley

Each of the seven daughters of Geryon had their own room on the topmost floor of the castle. The rooms were all next to each other, one after the other, along a corridor that ran the length of the castle. Suffice it to say that each one of these rooms was well accommodated and sufficiently large enough to house several families. The girls were well looked after and occupied much of their days commingling with one another or simply passing time alone in their rooms, dedicating themselves to various pastimes and hobbies.

While Tim was serving his sentence in the think box, Geryon went to visit his second youngest daughter, Pandora, who was alone in her own room at the time. Geryon knocked at the door.

"Pandora? Honey? It's daddy," he said in his typically soothing paternal tone. There was no answer. He waited a moment before trying again.

While Geryon did take good care of his daughters, and he saw to their every whim and fancy, there existed a strained relationship between the most of them and himself. The first reason resulted primarily from the fact that not a one of them knew anything about their mother and he took great pains to conceal this information from them. The second reason was one and the same for which he was about to have another argument.

"Pandora?" he said again. "Can we talk please?"

There at last came a response from behind the closed door.

"There's another one here isn't there?" she asked. Her tone was altogether displeased. She had seen the young man wondering about the grounds the day previous. From her bedroom window she had watched him surveying the lake at the rear of the estate. He looked different than the others- for a reason she couldn't quite put her finger on.

"What is his name?" she said. The door remained closed.

"His name is Tim," Geryon responded.

"Tim what?"

"His name is Timothy Cutlass."

She thought that was a rather peculiar name and deigned to say as much. The others previous had all had titles, like Duke Such and Such or Sir Something Something the Third.

"Is that all? Timothy Cutlass?" Geryon detected a hint of intrigue. She went on. "Where is he from? Was he married? I want to know everything."

Geryon sighed.

"Why don't you just meet him and let him answer all these questions of yours? He's quite harmless... and he cooks fantastic eggs."

To this last remark she fell silent. The fact that this Tim character had impressed her father with his egg cooking abilities was no simple feat. Many had attempted and few had passed the first week of her father's tasks; those that did never received audible praise before. Being that he could cook, the man was clearly of a more common variety than she had presumed, and thus made him an intriguing character. Curiosity had now gotten the better of her.

"When is he due?" she asked.

"From what? The think box?"

"Yes, of course the think box!" she snapped. "That's where you send them all during the first week you old fool."

Geryon did not like being spoken to this way by his offspring, but as the threads of his relationship with this particular daughter were already thinly worn, he endured a certain amount of abuse at times and pretended to ignore the insult.

"He is due in several days. I would like you to meet him when his sentence is complete. He did nothing too serious to deserve it, I assure you. But as you said, they all go to the think box one way or the other..." Geryon paused. The sound of the door unlatching stopped him. Pandora pushed it ajar and Geryon could see only her silhouette in the small opening.

"I'll do it, papa," she said. "I'll meet the Timothy Cutlass."

...

Meanwhile, Tim had been left alone in the dark. Several days had passed, or so he thought. It was difficult to say. What was certain was that he was hungry. Having lost his bread somewhere to a fountain or (more likely) a cesspool, there had been nothing to eat besides the small square of butter left him by James. It didn't last through the first night.

He had spent that first night completely motionless in a corner he deemed safe enough to while away his sentence. Here he spent the next ninety-six hours in a heap on the floor. What it was that he was supposed to be doing in the think box he couldn't fathom. Tim had logged a substantial portion of his life in self reflection, but it was always at his leisure. He hadn't been forced into mandatory thinking time since they stopped using those awful dunce caps in elementary school. It wasn't long after the state of Michigan banned corporal punishment in the public education system that Tim had dropped out. He had a hard time remembering whether the decision had been made by necessity or by happenstance. Most

likely it had been the latter scenario. There seemed to be no definitive moment at which Tim had made a conscious decision to quit school. His aunt had ceased to pay him much attention after those years when he had become old enough to make himself a peanut butter sandwich. It was during these formative years, when his legal guardian cared not where he went or what he did, that Tim began to steal away during the working hours of the day and fasten himself to the shade under a tree near the lake behind his Aunt's house. It was here that he was primarily raised, by the skittering fishes and the stealthy raccoons. From the cloony-friskers he learned to be patient. He would watch one of them resting on their giant laurels for hours, waiting for a measly field mouse to wander into its grasp- and that was all that it would eat for the day. Tim figured a beast of that size could eat half a cow in one sitting; but it didn't need to. From the double-breasted fancy moose he learned of the bonds a true family could endure. They nurtured one another. Through thick and thin the mother kept the calves warm and the father produced meat for them to suckle on. It was the only positive image of a nuclear family that Tim had.

But there were other not-so-virtuous things Tim had learned from the animal kingdom. For example, it had been the pigeon-monkeys that introduced him to beer.

Deep in the recesses of the forest beyond the lake there lived a troop of the flying monkey breed that used to play cards and smoke cigars late into the night. Tim happened upon them one evening while he was tracking a fancy moose with a flashlight. When he came upon the clearing that was their playground, the group fell silent. Tim's flashlight rested on them only momentarily before he slowly lowered it to the forest floor. Nobody made a sound. One by one the pigeon-monkeys set their cards down on the table and stood up. All eyes were on Tim. He couldn't breathe; never in his life had he seen monkeys with wings and beaks before. Most of the animals in the woods behind his aunt's house weren't out playing cards after dark either. Without speaking, they simultaneously expanded their great wings and flutter hopped closer to Tim. He made a step backwards, retreating from the team closing in on him, but he fell. The troop came closer, their eyes glowing with wild curiosity. Tim was on his back, trembling with fear. They had completely encircled him, leaving no escape. Tim closed his eyes as one of the monkey birds leaned over him, sure that they would do him in.

Instead he heard a curious sound. It was like the sound of a soda can being popped open, only it was a deeper sound, a more satisfying sound.

When the moment had passed and Tim realized that they weren't going to kill him, he opened his eyes. The creature had something in his hand and he was extending it to Tim. It was a can of Milwaukee's Best Ice. Tim, still shaky, reached out his hand to accept the offering. The can was cold and a white froth was overflowing from the opening in the top. He raised it to his lips and took a drink. The monkey-birds all began to clap their hands and jump from side to side. They grinned maniacally as they let out great squeals of delight and Tim raised himself up to his feet again. He chugged the ice-cold liquid down to the last and they offered him another. Then there was much dancing and rejoicing. There were many more beers opened and though the creatures did not speak English, and Tim did not speak

whatever language they spoke, musical instruments were produced and there was a fantastic celebration until the sun began to rise in the morning.

The next day Tim felt awful when he woke up around noon on the forest floor. The sun was directly overhead, forcing its way through the trees and into Tim's retinas. His head was spinning and he desperately craved water. The card table, the musical instruments, the beer cans- all gone. His friends were gone too. There was only the dull, fleeting sense that something magical had occurred the night before; that things had happened through the aid of this mysterious liquid that might not have otherwise been achieved. It didn't matter that he and the creatures didn't speak a common language, or that none of them could really play a musical instrument. They had gotten roaringly drunk together and that made them as close as anybody can get to spiritual communion. Despite his throbbing head, and the uncontrollable shaking of his limbs, Tim already knew that this was a state of mind he would long to achieve again.

It was some weeks before Tim found his way back out to the clearing where he had first discovered the pigeon-monkeys. When at last he went back, they welcomed him as a brother and gave him beers and taught him to play cards. They would howl and dance until everybody forgot how the night ended and Tim would once again wake up alone. This was how Tim had learned to drink.

Tim now dozed in and out of consciousness as he passed away the time. He would wake periodically to continue on with his soaring thoughts, remembering trivial details of his past, letting them fade away again. He was now dehydrated, cold and hadn't moved from the spot at the bottom of the steps since he reached them. He slipped away again into a deep sleep, his head resting on the shoes he had removed from his feet. He dreamt he was ascending an escalator- an endless escalator. He was climbing the stairs forever. Sometimes he would rest and let the machine do it's job. After some time he would grow impatient and begin to run along while it perpetually pulled him up, up, up. A woman in the dark was whispering, "Oh, you must be so tired." There was no end in sight. No lights, no exit...

A crash and a boom.

There was of a sudden a light visible, still nearly out of sight, but it was growing. Tim raised his head, shook off the sleep. He pulled himself up off the floor and put his shoes back on. He took the first step up.

Tim climbed the steps, blind in the dark, feeling his way along the cold, stone wall. Though Geryon had told him he would only be spending three days in the "think box", Tim was fairly certain he had spent somewhere closer to a week down there. He couldn't be entirely certain, however, because the passage of time meant nothing without the aid of a clock or a rising and setting sun. The only cue he had that his sentence had been served was

the ominous beckoning of a young woman's voice from overhead. It had come to him in a dream at first and gradually worked its way into his dark reality.

"Oh, Tim," she cooed. "Won't you come for a bath? You must be so tired."

Relieved to hear the sound of another voice (particularly one that did not belong to Geryon) Tim eagerly found his way to the staircase and clamored up.

Having been in the dark for so long, his eyes were unaccustomed to the light enveloping the figure at the top of the staircase. The voice said it was female, but nothing could be certain as Tim's retinas screamed against the brightness. One hand on the railing, the other against the wall, Tim ascended mostly blind. He was not just a little fatigued and he dragged his legs, falling against the wall from time to time. His beard had grown another inch or so. Though he did not know whether he looked it, he felt dirty. He stunk. He was a mess from top to bottom and longed for an embrace and a bath.

He assumed the voice beckoning him belonged to one of Geryon's daughters, as that is what he had been promised the day he was escorted to the think box. But what would a daughter of Geryon look like? It had been announced that Geryon was human (of a sort) just like himself. Couldn't he reason that the daughters, if they were not so old as Geryon, would be normal human females?

The prospect excited Tim not just a little.

He raced up the steps now, falling over himself in his haste to meet the first daughter of Geryon. When at last he reached the summit of the interminably long staircase, he paused at the landing. As his eyes began to adjust to the light, there slowly formed before his eyes the image of a woman. She was indeed a human woman. The silhouette was coming into focus. She had long, brown hair that rested on her shoulders. Tim was out of breath and he leaned on the rail. The details were still coming to him as his eyes grew accustomed to the light. A face was now forming. She was looking him over, quietly. There was a smile. Her eyes were shining. Tim could almost look at her without squinting. He must have seemed a horrible wreck there on the landing of the staircase. His disheveled hair was matting over the side of his head. He was crouched around the banister, breathing heavily. Surely he was a sight there coming out of the darkness.

When at last Tim was able to see perfectly clearly, he looked at the woman before him and stopped breathing. She was simply radiant. There were no monstrous features, no clubbed feet or wings or teeth poking out through the cheek. She was as lovely and human as any woman Tim had ever met before.

"Hello Tim," she said at last. "My name is Pandora."

Tim had not yet begun breathing, stricken as he was with the beauty before him. He was speechless. And soon enough-- out of breath again. He pulled in a lung full of air and began to cough. As he was gasping for air, Pandora pulled him off the staircase and back into

the full light of the hallway. She beamed nothing but smiles as she looked him over now in the full light. There was indeed something different about this Tim character. He did not belong amongst the classes of dukes and kings. Not in the traditional sense anyway. He wasn't proud; that, she could tell right off the bat. Perhaps he was a simpleton on the surface, meek even. But Tim, too, exuded his own quiet radiance behind the dirty face and the shabby beard.

"Let's get you cleaned up," she said.

Upstairs, in Pandora's room, Tim had disrobed and gotten in the tub that Pandora had prepared for him. She sat at the windowsill and watched him as he scrubbed and shaved his beard. Neither one said anything for some time. Tim was nervous and didn't quite know what he was supposed to do. He was happy to be getting clean again, but he felt awkward bathing in front of a stranger. He wished they could find something to talk about. It was she who finally broke the silence.

"Where do you come from, Timothy Cutlass?" she said.

"Arizona is where I recently came from," he said. "But I've kinda lived all over the place."

"What is this 'Arizona'? It is a kingdom I presume?"

"Uh, no. It's a state in the United States of America," he replied. "That's where I was living when your father brought me here, wherever this is."

"Wherever this is indeed, Tim. And wherever this Arizona is too, I suppose. I have never heard of your United States of America, but I am sure it is a lovely place. You've had a proper look about the grounds here, have you not? Is your home as lovely as this place?"

Tim hadn't thought about comparing the two places based on their level of 'loveliness' before. There had been so many other things to process in his short stay thus far. He decided that he ought not to cause a row so he told her that her home was much lovelier than his. And, given a moment to consider the question, he decided that it was in fact so. At least better than the parts of his country that he had been to before.

Pandora seemed pleased with this response.

"And are there many women in your homeland?" she asked.

"Well, there are women, yes. But we usually marry and have just one woman..."

"You were married then?" Pandora said.

"I was, yes. I mean, I am still I suppose" he stammered. Her questioning was making him more nervous than he had been in this already exposed state. Pandora stood up and stepped closer to the tub. She was wearing a long, green evening gown that dragged along

the floor as she walked. Though her questioning was intense, she was merely curious and quick to satisfy that curiosity. The effect this was having on Tim had not been her desire and she noticed his ill ease. However, intentions aside, Pandora was unaccustomed to sympathizing with creatures weaker than herself.

“Well, you really aren’t married anymore. Not since you came here anyway. That life is over for you now. That’s the way it usually works.”

“What do you mean, ‘usually’ works,” Tim demanded. He was confused.

“You didn’t think you were the first one my father has brought to this place did you? Ha! I suppose that would be an idea... but no, it’s not true. It’s quite alright though, the way this works, I mean, what we do here. There is no one to judge, Tim.” Pandora had come up to the edge of the tub, her slim figure looking down at Tim, still in the tub. He was clean and shaved now. His hands trembled as he put away the soap and razor. He stayed the lower half of his body under the suds.

“Pandora, let me ask you a question,” he said, sitting back down.

“Of course.”

“When I first met your father and we were traveling to this place, he told me that it would be part of my mission to please his daughters. What did he mean by that?”

She smiled. A strap of the gown fell from her shoulder.

“Why, you’re supposed to have sex with us, of course,” she said. “Whatever did you think he meant?”

Contributor Bios

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Casey Wooden smells like socks and shouts at his television. Flies chase him.

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Dan Davis was born and raised in Central Illinois. His work has appeared in various online and print journals. You can find him at: www.dumpsterchickenmusic.blogspot.com.

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