

Birkensnake 6

Thing Theory
/θɪŋ θɪr-i/

Editors

Carol Samson /kær-əl sém-sən/

Emily Kiernan /ém-ə-li kír-nən/

Table of Contents

Five stories tucked into bed in an empty household: <i>Katy Gunn</i>	1
Pythagoras Too: <i>Miles Klee</i>	9
Thirty Notes on the Literary Architecture of the Panic Room: <i>Sarah Elizabeth Schantz</i>	13
With Ash In His Teeth, Cutting Teeth Into Keys: <i>Rhoads Stevens</i>	18
Four Short Prose Pieces: <i>Jefferson Navicky</i>	20
BIOGRAPHY of EARLY LIVING: <i>Matt Comi</i>	24
Product Gallery Triptych: <i>Jaydn DeWald</i>	30
Statue Garden: <i>Sarena Ulibarri</i>	32
Paws: <i>Henry Hoke</i>	37
Remaining Buoyant: <i>Joe Trinkle</i>	40
Jack-In-The-Box: <i>Jacqueline Doyle</i>	45
Soft Breast Mechanism: <i>Janalyn Guo</i>	48
Night Telegram: <i>Eric Boyd</i>	53

The Object Absolute – is nought –

Perception sets it fair

--Emily Dickinson /ém-ə-li dɪk-ən-sən/

bowtie. The island had only two gray cats and this was the only one with so many accouterments.

That cat was like a baby to her and she rocked it and held it to her little bosom and cheek whether it was asleep or awake, and even when it sneezed or just ate a rat. She loved it even when the hairs around its mouth were hung with strings of blood.

That is being a mother.

Now Marina liked to play putting the baby to bed with the gray cat, and she would tell it a story just like the stories she loved her mother to tell her. In fact, Marina was never out of her mother's lap except when she was playing putting the baby to bed, or retrieving popsicles.

There was the game where Mother shut her eyes and tried to guess the flavor Marina had brought her. Then Marina would climb into her lap and lie exceedingly still, for stories.

Marina learned the story of the girl who was a coat rack, the story of the girl who grew very tall, and the story of the girl who rode a train with milkshakes. She relayed the stories to the gray cat one at a time, so as not to spoil it.

How I have spoiled you. But circumstances.

Five stories tucked into bed in an empty household

Katy Gunn / *ke'ti gán*/

Tell-a-Tale Teddy Says

Marina, dear, everyone lived on an island. There was one small cat with orange stripes, and it slept with all the little girls, one by one, and never tried to steal a breath from even the smallest one.

Even when she put her raspy pink mouth to its face and flattened it with kisses. Her mother was always wiping fur from her lips and had to tell her cautionary stories to stop her from getting worms.

Worms would not be the problem in the end. Better though to be cautious. Her name? The mother's name was Mother.

The girl's name was Marina. Yes, spelled like you too.

Marina's mother told her about another girl who had a cat. This cat was gray with four white socks and white earmuffs and a

As soon as she said happily ever after or so the very sad story ends, she kissed the little gray cat right on the gray spot between its two white ears. Which was usually all right. Until the one day.

Marina had eaten too many popsicles. Her mother had spoiled her and given her grape after grape. This was because Marina wouldn't eat the usual mashed potatoes or corn. She wouldn't eat meat for a week, and her mother didn't know what else to do.

Hear, now. Babies need to eat their vegetables. If they won't, they must eat something. What else could a mother do? Mother gave you popsicles and really isn't to blame.

But this isn't the story of Mother.

On this day Marina said to the cat, so the very sad story ends. She leaned over to kiss it on the forehead, and hear this!

Her mouth stuck there.

It wasn't your usual paste stuck or even honey or molasses stuck. Certainly more stuck than you would ever imagine popsicle juice to make your lips.

But her mouth stuck, and because she had puckered up for the kiss she could only breathe through her nose. The little white

furs of its ears bowed away from her nose in the air she blew out, and when she breathed back in, they uprooted and went inside her like little swords the influenza took up.

Mother, mother! she wanted to shout but her mouth was stuck to the cat's head. She coughed into the cat in a grating hack, hack that sounded like the cat was dying.

All cats must die. But babies, no.

Her mother lifted Marina and the cat into her lap. Tell us the story of the girl in the sky! they told her between coughs.

And I told her.

Even a mother can't know everything. Like how the flood was coming.

Miss Beatrice Songbird Says

You want to hear again about the girl in the sky, then? Only because you are such a good daughter and so rarely interrupt.

The mother also had a daughter who danced more lightly than any other person anywhere on the island or the world. She didn't die, like most of the people washed to sea by the great flood. This is because she had already left.

Her name? Alice.

The daughter who danced lightly did so because she had nothing to weigh her down. This is a rare state of being. Neither of us can expect to understand.

It must be admitted that the hovering troubled her mother, who hung her with coats, muffs, and heavy knitted scarves until the daughter who danced lightly looked like a coat rack and the mass of fabric weighed her feet to the floor, or at least kept her hovering hidden by sleeves and lace trim.

Her mother did not do this to punish or shame her. Know you that.

Just that someone dangerous might see the daughter dance lightly and fall into lust, lasso her with a thin sharp thread, and pull her away. Without her feet on the ground the daughter could not dig in her heels and so would be taken against her will.

So it is not that the mother wanted to tether her. She loved her and saw no other way. Don't cry, kitten.

Besides, the mother is no matter here. Alice found herself tethered.

When the woman with the thin sharp thread came and saw the light under Alice's feet unbroken by the soles of her shoes, she

bowed before Alice and Alice reached for the lasso herself.

She kicked off as she could and pulled the both of them off the island and away.

Away.

Now they both wear the coats to stay warm in the night heaven where there is no surface to support a fire. Alice taught her woman to dance and that's what you see sometimes.

Her mother is very sad, very sad. But she stays busy. Like they say, a woman with a daughter in heaven never fails to keep all the dolls prettily dressed. A woman with a daughter in heaven always finds time to brush everyone's hair.

You sort of have to love up there glimmering, as things go. Especially when you remember how sad she looked with all the heavy blankets pressing down her heart.

Yes, I mean the mother. The mother sort of has to love them. She is the mother, after all.

Brownie Hear-Bear Says

Marina, did I hear you say Violet?

I know you did not say violence, sweet girl. My hearing is off in my old ears sometimes. But this story isn't about my ears. Violet it certainly was.

Yes, named for a flower but she wasn't the kind of daughter who stretched toward sun. Or let it wilt her. She never gave it the chance.

She loved her mother and her blue sea lap in the nursery chair, and she loved stories. Violet sat

all day while the sun rushed people to work and to the bakery and to plow the fields, and she said, tell me about the people who rush.

Violet listened hard so she could tell her sister Marina, so she could tell the little orange and gray kittens that tumbled around the room with abandon.

Don't cry, Marina. This is what her mother told her.

Violet, people walk in circles hunched over. Bent like the old outside dog but older, like you wouldn't believe. This is because they have jobs on their back, like banker and storekeeper and teacher and housekeeper. All the jobs are faulty.

No, mother is not a job. Mother is an island.

But could cherry farmer really bend a back to breaking? When he makes such tiny fruits like the love of little girls or like stones set in rings you can put in milkshakes? When he gives you a pocketful every time you come in to look and see, how red?

Yes, Violet, her mother explained gravely. Even cherry farmer is a job to break your back. Even toy seller and toy carver. The man who carved your pretty train, his nose is scraping the floor.

Toy carver doesn't want to see your pretty nose dirtied by the floor because you had to go away into town and get a job. He knows your mother loves you, especially after Alice flew away. That is why he made your train with no motorization. So nobody else gets carried away.

Keep her nose scrubbed pink and clean, the toy carver told the mother. Here, I have made your daughter a very safe train.

Violet drove her train up and down her mother's arms. She drove the train in circles around her mother's lap. Choo! Choo! Look Mother, she said, train is like the people in the town, in circles. No, Violet, the people don't stand so tall upright as your good wood train.

Choo! Choo! Up and down her mother's neck and head. Look, Mother! She put the kitties on the train and rode them around and around. It was so silly.

Kitties ride train! you said.

So the mother knew she had to tell you about the people who ride trains. Especially the motorized train, in town. But first we must be sure you're visualizing correctly. Remember they're all bent over like horses with their front hooves hanging.

When they ride the train they're going to get married.

Yes, dear, because of love. But there are many kinds of that and theirs is hinky and blushing kind. It makes no good marriage or they would do it in their mothers' gardens. That's right. Nothing so pretty as a wedding in a mother's garden.

Granddaughters in the garden house, soon enough. The mother always thought. We lament the lack of stories about granddaughters.

I'm sorry, you're right, the train. We'll miss it if we don't tell fast. Perhaps for the better—

The train has plush red seats and little trays with cherries on the tops of pink milkshakes the size for when you get peckish. No happy cherry farmer there and no extra handfuls, though. Train takes you to a place where nobody knows you and you'll start to get bent to the dirt. Your only friends, ants. Crawling up your nose, and out your ears.

So never leave your mother, sweet Marina.

Teacher Talk Goose Says

Marina, once there was an influenza. It travelled in small clouds you could never see but it found a little girl and blew down her throat and set up camp there.

She wanted ice cream and popsicles and puddings for all her meals and syrups in spoons between them, because that is what her sisters got to eat. Then she got to have it too. A strawberry pudding! Marina shouted. A banana ice cream with blackberries mashed up on top, and cherry syrup!

Her sisters cried and cried but she didn't understand because she loved cherry syrup. They let her eat theirs. You remember.

Where have the sisters gone, little Marina asked with her mouth full. It was bad manners but under the conditions her mother could not reprimand her. So she told her how her sister Alice learned to fly.

Yes, you do know that story. You used to ask if she wore a little green hat. Mother told you no, that's for little flying boys.

Marina liked her mother's story. Where did sister Violet go, Mother?

Well, Violet took a long, long train where people drank milkshakes with whipped cream and cherries all day long like you do, Marina. She is off to be married and the cake will be made of cherries with a frozen cream mother and a frozen cream father. But cream mother looked more like Violet than her mother because Violet was to be a mother one day too.

The train goes all around the island, and even off it.

Oh, Marina loved those stories. I want a train! she said. I want a cream father! It was so good, so good for the mother to see her daughter happy, since she had the influenza inside her, and daughters with war in their bodies are not often so gleeful.

You would still giggle, would you? While you kissed your little orange cat?

Here's your lesson. Violet's cream father was actually made of porcelain, and she didn't even get to keep it because when she bit down, it broke into shards in her mouth. Her mouth all strings of blood and she was coughing on the porcelain dust, and on her wedding night.

You can't be married in your state, said the train conductor, and he took back their wedding. All round her on the train, the people coughed up their milkshakes, and Violet coughed up her milkshake, and it

was even more pink from the porcelain cuts.

The train stank and Violet had to lay down and shut her eyes. Her dress grew all wet from the sea coming in, for they had come to the edge of the island, and met with the flood. She hated it.

You hear me. She cried for her mother, cried and cried. She wished she never did go away for anything.

The very only person who heard her crying on the train was her sister Violet who twinkled in the sky above her. Violet was very cold, because it was night. But she didn't wish the night away because then the sun would come and burn her. Always too few coats, or too many.

She could not take a single one off for fear of dropping it. Her coats were the very last thing her mother had given her, when she was so cold from the influenza in her body that it lifted her up like a snowflake. She missed her mother terribly.

Oh, mother! she cried in the sky. Oh, mother! Alice gurgled on the train. We are so sorry! Don't be sorry, dear girl, be smart. Sit still. Eat your syrups and listen here.

My Nurse Nancy Says

Marina, darling, the island was on the back of a very old fish. On the back of the fish were the people and on the backs of the people was a pestilence. The weight of the pestilence was the reason the old fish couldn't move and why the people hunched over as they aged.

Influenza is heavy.

Are you considering all the ways the people might be freed and in turn free the fish? You might have fine ideas, but understand all the plans are faulty.

You may come to me with diagrams but the pestilence was heavier than that.

The daughter who saved the island in the end was named Marina. I know, I know. Never let anyone tell you a thing is impossible, let me teach you that if nothing else.

Marina had the pestilence on her mind but not on her body. She thought hard about how to save the people from it while she grew taller and taller straight up like a mast on the back of the fish. She grew until she left the range of her mother's voice.

Marina don't worry about that now. You know how I can shout and whistle even louder. From above the people, Marina could see the valleys with their curved scales where the pestilence pooled. She

saw influenza in the young boys' pocked shoulders and the old men's bony shoulder grooves.

She bent down to sweep the influenza out of the crevices in a young bridegroom's back, but her fingers had grown with her height, and her fingernails were terrors. She scratched the skin off the man and he bled down onto his new wife and the fish and his blood mixed with the pestilence but did not change anything.

Marina, darling, stories must be told.

She tried again. Marina used her broad hands to collect all of the rainwater before it fell from the sky. She carried it until she found the woman with the deepest pools of influenza on her back. Marina tilted her cupped hands forward over the woman, letting a lake of water stream onto her back and wash the pestilence away.

But the drop from Marina's hands was so great that the water hit the woman hard as a train and flattened her against the cold scales of the fish.

Yes she died. Just like a baby.

Again Marina collected rainwater, but this time she stooped over the people with care. She would not repeat a mistake, being a smart girl, like you.

Do not get a big head though Marina. You are still such a little girl.

Marina let her big hands spread so the water fell through the spaces between her fingers. She meant it simply to unseat the people so the pestilence would fall off their backs and into the water and be washed out to sea.

She only wanted to save them like a mother would. Do not forget her feelings on the matter. The water Marina poured unseated the people and sloshed the influenza off their backs and washed it out to sea. It washed the people out to sea, too.

The fish was free of the people but still unable to move. The miles and tons of tall Marina weighed it down. Marina was sorry, and she stepped off the fish into the sea. She paddled through the people. She coughed for air and gulped the pestilence.

My dear I am sorry. Don't give me those wet glassy eyes.

The people swam around in the sea, and when they grew tired they climbed on top of Marina to rest. Marina had grown tired too, and still. The people saw the bit of pestilence that clung to her back and swept it off, as they now stood straight enough to use brooms and their swim had given them new strength and they had found in themselves the will to be tidy.

You have always been tidy, Marina.

They built little beds from the bumps of Marina's bent spine and tucked their daughters all in a row. It is what you must do when you are a mother.

I'm sorry. We called Marina our island because she was the only body left to hold us up.

Pythagoras Too

Miles Klee /*májlz klí*/

Pythagoras does not write—he speaks. In five days a pupil, by some enthusiastic error, attributes his theorem to him. It is five hundred years until Cicero writes that attribution down. Pythagoras knows this because for him the law of time is no law. He interrupts the inflexible line as water does a beam of light. He goes to the edge of humanity, and beyond, to moments when the gods alone exist. The gods, and Pythagoras.

He does this now. Comes upon the gods bickering. It sounds like the warp and shatter of trees, frozen trees in Hyperborea, due north. In Hyperborea the sun is fixed, eternal. But the forest is cold—the snow never melts. “Traitor!” Apollo shrieks at his twin, Artemis, across the glowing Olympian hearth. “Whore!” Artemis and the other gods laugh, sounding like heavy rain in the jungle. Apollo has always been somewhat pathetic.

Pythagoras leaves without being seen. In a past life, as the Trojan hero Euphorbus, he ran a lance through Patroklos, allegedly with Apollo’s

help. The gods cannot help him now, of that he is confident. Besides, it was Hektor who finally killed Patroklos. How can this indignity, this injustice of another age, that happened to a different body, sting his present mind? The gods cannot help him, and they want more gratitude for help they never gave.

After Pythagoras dies, the Persians will conquer Ionia; the enlightenment there will fade. The Athenians claim and develop its ideas. The gods, those foolish gods, will go on quarrelling as if they remember why they do. He doesn’t believe in them, any more than he believes the myths about himself—all of which are nonetheless true. Except for that theorem thing, of course. Pythagoras is neither god nor man, but he’d rather be a man.

How many men he has been: he’s half-certain he’s been everyone. It’s a chore to live so many lives, it’s an insult to live so few. Pythagoras briefly eludes consciousness and does not like what lies outside a self. It is just the howling absence of thought. Pythagoras loves whomever he loves—forever. None of it goes away. Beautiful faces flicker through him. Even worse: he started with the love, and found out who was willing to take it.

Stopping his heart to do so, Pythagoras teleports into school. He gives a lesson he has given, is giving, will give. It’s easy. His mouth, his voice, do it for him. His fingers tell him where to point. Pythagoras hovers above these practicalities, a ghost. This, he figures, is not so bad. A fast green world happens itself. The surface of an object

has a surface also. A paradox: this barely counts as pleasure, but anything more is too much.

At a dinner of intellectuals, Pythagoras told the host, a respected physician of Croton, that humans would create an artificial lung. The doctor was furious, thinking the very fantasy profane, not to mention a ghastly comment on his work. After more wine, and someone's lecture on the cause of infertility (white mold), Pythagoras told his host he could write on the moon using blood and mirrors. The doctor was overjoyed.

The Hippocratic "First do no harm" was a thing Pythagoras said first. It is part of the vow that those who join his Brotherhood all swear. Actually, Pythagoras stole it from Pherekydes of Syros, along with his view on the transmigration of souls. He suspects Pherekydes doesn't care. He cannot fathom why he's accused of mysticism. "My faith is in reason," he wants to shout. "And the Sacred, my Holy, our Divine Pentagram."

Pythagoras is neither god nor man; maybe he'd like to be a tree. He asks the trees how they like it. "It's fine," say the trees, "when it's not so cold we break." He queries animals after a similar purpose. "Not bad," says a rabbit, "but you must watch out for the wolf." "Not bad," a wolf agrees, "but catching the rabbit is hell." He tells a snake of his desperate curiosity. "Why, Pythagoras," the snake says, "how beautifully you hiss."

In the sect of Pythagoras are matematikoi and akousmatikoi, learners and listeners, the inner

and outer circles. Pythagoras teaches the latter from behind a veil, has difficulty telling the camps apart. Novices make startling leaps; the vanguard settles into dogma. Pythagoras wants a math to interrogate the tides, but others are mired in esoterica. In pure and useless natural fact. A few insist that things are made of numbers.

Young Heraclitus—younger than Pythagoras, anyhow—lives alone in Ephesus, having abdicated its throne to write his beastly riddles. Pythagoras visits the weeping philosopher there. "My friend," he says, though he once told the man what little of his work would survive, "you look exactly as Michelangelo will paint you!" Heraclitus takes hold of his beard and throws him bodily out of the house: "Begone, you interested old goat!"

Pythagoras holds reincarnation to be a four-part cycle: man, animal, plant, mineral. The source of this insight he cannot name. But it is entirely too plain, when a black cat appears in his window and meaningfully meows, that this is the meowing of a dead mentor. He tosses bread to the cat, whose hair rubs off on everything. The mentor, in his prior existence, was bald. Here is a symmetry that won't be pinned to a table.

Hey wait, Pythagoras realizes ... I'm not having any fun. He zooms around the universe, caroming between galaxies, and the space that cradles them is anything but empty. It's crowded with hot atoms and photons, asteroids and magnetic winds. From within a gas planet, he observes a storm that lasts a billion years. He goes home to complete depression. He sits with

a knife in his privy, carving scalene triangles in the wall.

When Pythagoras looks at the future, he studies the decline of cults. He is shocked at the brute charisma, the obedience of hopeful victims. The prophets are lunatics if not murderers. Pythagoras is a twenty-first century lawyer, defending a cult that worships earthquakes on charges of embezzlement, fraud. Working late, with a town car waiting, the bulb of his desk lamp goes out. The darkness around him expands.

No no no no no no no, Pythagoras wakes up screaming—None of it. The wheeling, celestial symphony. The badly tight skeleton. He aches in his joints the way he aches for the species: periodically, pointlessly. The Croton doctor grants him a clean bill of health, which only makes him worse. He vomits black fluid. His jaw won't close. Then, for no reason, he's fine. Another internal dispute, that's all. Another resolution.

The athletic games of the Panionia. The Pythagoreans, fit and disciplined, excel. A proud Pythagoras discovers them jubilant in their tent, messily eating a meal forbidden: pig. One is eating only beans, yet he is first to apologize. "Abstain from beans," Pythagoras says, "is a maxim referring to the beans we vote with in elections." The student is stricken, can't help but confess: "I thought you wanted us to quit farting."

Pythagoras is not more than he is, if that's a coherent way to put it. Eternal nonexistence to

either side of him, and even that he is awake for. The single way to describe it is: having a headache but no head. What he is meant to learn from this, as usual, is unclear. It's unclear whether he's meant to learn at all, but the single drive he has is to know. Which frames the odd delusion that suddenly, he may.

He is leaving behind a way of life. The worship of logic, which makes no rational sense. Temperance: a way to remain perpetually confused. "This will not do much longer," Pythagoras mutters to himself. What can he mean by "this"? Other days, there's that—a kind of thatness, really. Pythagoras is running short on luck. He will not solve the great mysteries. When he comes at all close, the gods turn his brains inside-out.

What then, at last, is the use of a Pythagoras? Why create this minor deity, whose very powers limit his mastery over them? Heraclitus would find his condition quite funny, and apt. Pythagoras, in a street not so familiar, hears the blacksmiths grunting and striking their hammers harmoniously. There is no need for music when the hammers sound like that. There is no reason to keep seeing while your eyes are closed.

That theorem, by the name of every god there is, by Zeus and the Titans themselves— that theorem. They knew it in Babylon long ago. India as well. All he had wanted was to do was give the world a proof. Pythagoras, when next he finds himself drifting the Elysian fields, is unsure what's killed him. Hades can't be bothered to answer, busy tending to his bitch.

She nurses a trio of three-headed pups from all nine of her hairy nipples.

Above ground, Pythagoras summarizes. “You’ve got to be kidding me,” he says, “if there’s such a thing as intent.” The cosmos ignores the outburst it clearly sought to provoke. Pythagoras walks up a hill to a temple at midday, is overpowered by thirst and weakness. He lies on the hot dry path and hallucinates a song. A wood nymph steps weightlessly over him. “Trying to touch your fate,” she sings. “When only it can touch you.”

Pythagoras returns to his childhood. It is a slow journey to the island of Samos. He watches his father, a jeweler, cut a gem so brilliant it makes the sea go dim. The trees outside are shivering. The engineer Eupalinos has designs for an underground aqueduct, dug from both ends, using geometry. Pythagoras is to study in Egypt, and under the Phoenicians, and with a priestess at Delphi. He leaves before the great tunnel is done.

Thirty Notes on the Literary Architecture of the Panic Room

Sarah Elizabeth Schantz /sɛˈrə ɪˈlɪz-ə-bəθ ʃɑːnts/

30. A Panic Room is also known as A Safe Room; the panic room falls under the architectural category: “Private Room” which includes A.) all bathrooms such as Jack and Jill who went up the hill to fetch a pail of water, B.) the bedroom, C.) the guest room, D.) the nursery (despite access through the nursery window), E.) the suite, and F.) the closet (walk-in or not—categorized as private even if the person has “come out”).

29. Wikipedia instructs, “See Also”: Bomb Shelter, Blast Shelter, Fallout Shelter, DUCK AND COVER and/or Storm Cellar. Chicken Little reported: “The sky is falling! The sky is falling!”

28. In L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the storm cellar is accessed by a trapdoor in the floor of the one-room farmhouse; the house blows away before Dorothy can crawl to safety. Baum writes: “Once Toto got too near the open trap-

door, and fell in; and at first the little girl thought she had lost him. But soon she saw one of his ears sticking up through the hole, for the strong pressure of the air was keeping him up so that he could not fall.” OBSERVATION: the storm cellar becomes the storm.

27. In the 1939 MGM film, *The Wizard of Oz*, the storm cellar is located away from the house; when the tornado comes, Aunt Em (who is now more affectionately called Auntie Em) distresses over the missing girl—calling for Dorothy several times before Uncle Henry makes her take cover. When Dorothy attempts to enter the storm cellar the doors are locked from the inside and the wind so strong and loud no one can hear her calling or kicking at the entry—she must retreat into the house for it is the safest structure available in her moment of Panic.

26. Panic is a sudden sensation of fear which is so strong as to dominate or prevent reason and logical thinking, replacing it with overwhelming feelings of anxiety and frantic agitation consistent with animalistic fight-or-flight reaction. Panic may occur singularly or manifest suddenly in large groups as Mass Panic (closely related to herd behavior)—and the Lord Jesus is our Shepherd. The English term “mob” was derived from the Latin phrase *mobile vulgus* meaning “the fickle crowd”—as in Mob Rule, as in the Bandwagon Effect, as in lynching; Atticus Finch is a hero in *To Kill a Mockingbird* because he thinks for himself and stops

- a lynching. Witness protection involves a very complex construction—the Safe Rooms involved include a brand new identity, as well as house. HYPOTHESIS: Panic is related to shape-shifting.
25. Example of literary Mass Panic, Fahrenheit 451. Mass Hysteria, rooted in Gilman’s yellow wallpaper, the Salem Witch Trials. The Witch of Blackbird Pond.
 24. Architects and city planners try to accommodate the symptoms of Panic, such as Herd Behavior, during design and planning, often using simulations to determine the best way to lead people to a safe exit and prevent congestion (also known as: Choke Point), or Stampede. Never yell “Fire” in a crowded theater.
 23. Mythology: the word Panic derives from the Greek, “pertaining to shepherd god Pan.” Literary reincarnation: Peter Pan and The Lost Boys. The terminology for safe rooms on a ship is “citadel”; constructed in a concealed location, commonly employed on warships, the use of citadels on civilian ships is increasing as countermeasure against piracy (Captain Hook) and/or hostage-taking.
 22. Features in a Panic or Safe Room may include: cell phones, land-line telephones, transceiver radios, security cameras, alarm systems, peep holes, escape shafts, flashlights, blankets, first aid kits, water, packaged food, self-defense tools, firearms, gas masks and a portable toilet.
 21. Panic Room, starring Jodie Foster and K-Stew, is an American thriller (2002).
 20. Panic Room, Welsh band who released their debut album “Visionary Position” in early 2008. FIELD QUESTION: What do visions or the visionary have to do with Panic/Safe Rooms? Is the uterus a Safe Room? How is it a Room of Panic? The most common treatment for Hysteria was being bedridden (despite the wishes of the woman).
 19. “Hide and Seek” is a popular game played by children. If games serve as role play, “Hide and Seek” is role play for a future involving the Panic Room.
 18. Panic Rooms are often hidden behind Mirrors: Alice falls through a Looking Glass and into Wonderland. “Mirror, mirror on the wall, Who is the fairest of them all?”—the Mirror becomes the Scrying Glass.
 17. Panic Rooms are often hidden behind Wardrobes: Lions and witches live beyond the wardrobe. OBSERVATION: while adults retreat to the safety of a Panic Room, children seek the safety of make-believe instead. QUESTION: which is the safer place to go?
 16. Panic Rooms are often hidden behind Fireplaces: Santa Claus and Dr. Seuss’s, Grinch enter into the houses of children via Chimney; the Brothers Grimm

recorded a less common version of “Little Red Riding Hood” where the girl and her grandmother lure the wolf down the Chimney to boil him alive in the hot pot of broth below. Victorian literature explored the exploitation of children as apprentices to Chimney Sweepers in works such as *The Water Babies* by Charles Kingsley, *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens and William Blake’s poems, “Songs of Innocence” and “Songs of Experience.” Mary Poppins celebrated a new brush system that eliminated the need for child labor, causing Dick van Dyke to cheerily sing, “Chim Chim Cher-ee.” In the casebook, *Studies on Hysteria*, Josef Breuer discovered the psychoanalytic technique “free association” while working with his patient, Anna O. (pseudonym for Bertha Pappenheim); Anna O. called the process “chimney sweeping.”

15. Panic Rooms are often hidden behind Bookcases: Anne Frank penned *The Diary of a Young Girl* while in hiding. The 500 square foot apartment where she and seven others hid was called the Secret Annex—the entrance concealed by a Bookcase. They lived there for two years and one month before they were discovered by the Gestapo.

14. Safe, a noun, meaning “chest for keeping valuables.”

13. Other fairytales which explore the Safe or Panic Room are: “Rapunzel,” and the tower in which she is kept. One

can’t help but consider Blue Beard—more than a fairytale, Blue Beard was once very real. He not only gives his new wife the keys to every room in his palace, but the keys to his safe. He tells her she can access any room she wants except for one. As we know, she cannot resist; she unlocks the Forbidden Chamber where she finds the corpses of his previous wives. THE LEGEND: Blue Beard practiced a divination practice called anthropomancy; he read his future by disemboweling his wives and interpreting the ways in which they cried and/or bled out.

12. Safe, an adjective, is defined as “uninjured, unharmed, intact, whole, not exposed to danger, free from risk.”

11. QUESTION: Does *The Secret Garden* count as a Safe Room?

10. OBSERVATION: the adjectives Panic and Safe are antonyms. For example, Virginia Woolf’s “A Room of Her Own” is a safe place for women writers; however, this space may cause Mass Panic in a patriarchal society.

9. As with any architecture, socioeconomics can affect the Panic/Safe Room. A simple Safe or Panic room is usually a glorified closet; generally the door is replaced with an exterior-grade solid-core door complete with a sufficient deadbolt and long screws to resist battering. SIDENOTE: a battered

woman requires more than a Safe Room; she will need a Safe House instead.

8. The ceiling of a simple Safe/Panic room should be reinforced or gated to prevent entry from crawlspaces, heating systems or attics. Basement Safe Rooms can be constructed with all walls being made from concrete.
7. Celebrities or government officials can afford Safe Rooms made from reinforced steel, Kevlar and/or bullet-resistant fiberglass; often these Safe Rooms employ separate telephone lines and systems for ventilation.
6. On January 1st, 2010 a Panic Room was instrumental in saving the Danish cartoonist, Kurt Westergaard from an axe-wielding Islamic fundamentalist attacker who wanted to kill the artist for his controversial depiction of Muhammad. SIDE NOTE: in Stanley Kubrick's film *The Shining*, Jack Nicholson's character also wields an axe (it appears there was no Safe Room in *The Stanley Hotel*); NOTES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH: what is a supernatural Safe Room made from? As a child, my mother used to surround my bed with a protective dome built by her hands and maternal love—invisible, it protected me from the Bogey Man.
5. Designed to meet the Federal Emergency Management Agency criteria, a Safe Room is a hardened structure which provides “near-absolute protection” in extreme

weather events, including tornadoes and hurricanes; the occupants of a FEMA Safe Room have a very high probability of being protected from injury and death. SIDE NOTE: Selah Saterstrom's latest work has to do with slabs, and the architecture of these simultaneous tomb stone/blank slates left in New Orleans in the wake of the catastrophe, Hurricane Katrina.

4. Bunkers are glorified Safe Rooms designed to withhold from natural, nuclear, biological and chemical attacks; military bunkers feature operation rooms and cafeterias. Due to the underground nature of these bunkers, windows are often painted onto the walls to prevent claustrophobia and/or Panic.
3. Do-It-Yourself: In Stephen King's *Cujo*, the mother uses her car as a Safe Room; her son does not survive. The reoccurring theme in horror narratives is to try and find a Safe Place; often these “safe” spaces are proven unsafe by the villains/monsters. This speaks to the universal need to survive; theologically, Heaven could be seen as the one true Panic Room.
2. The architecture of the Safe and/or Panic Room speaks to the psychological states of hyper-vigilance, paranoia, fatalism and mob-mentality. It is involved with notions of the apocalypse. Contemporary graphic novels and television shows concern themselves with the idea of the world coming to an end; survivalists populate the worlds represented in *The*

Walking Dead, Jericho, Night of the Comet, Survivors, Terminator 2: Judgment Day and Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles. The Cold War, Zombies, and Y2K. Survivalism is a movement of individuals or groups who are actively preparing for emergencies as well as possible disruptions in social or political order, on scales ranging from local to international (and sometimes universal). Survivalists often have emergency medical and self-defense training, stockpile food and water, prepare for self-sufficiency, and build structures that will help them survive or “disappear.”

1. When they disappear, where do they go? Do they go to Narnia or Wonderland or Never, Never Land? Or do they go to Heaven?

With Ash In His Teeth, Cutting Teeth Into Keys

Rhoads Stevens /ródz stív-ənz/

I consider Mr. Camps to be my mother, but I don't tell him that. I see Mr. Camps in a hospital birthing me. He is pleased when his labor is over and that all went well and that he didn't need a cesarean section. The nurses tell him that they've seen many babies but that none have ever had the elegance about them that I have. I don't tell Mr. Camps anything about any of that, but it's still what I think, and there is nothing that says I can't think it if I can't get it out of my thoughts.

I am in Mr. Camps' key shop. It's where he makes keys—even the keys that say, "DO NOT DUPLICATE." Everyone knows that Mr. Camps will copy such keys. It's just that he'll probably charge you more. He could charge you one dollar more or maybe five K more. It's all in how you look when you ask. At the key shop, Mr. Camps also bakes bread and repairs umbrellas.

"There are many umbrellas in this city, and no one is willing to fix them except me," Mr. Camps often says. He repairs umbrellas for half the price it would be to get a new one. For some extra money, he will even make it so that you can conceal a knife in the handle of your umbrella. If this is what you want, then you can expect Mr. Camps will replace your old umbrella handle with a new handle that's a wooden duck's head. He carves these duck's heads himself, and whenever I am walking around the city and see someone with an umbrella with a wooden duck's head, I often cross to the other side of the street.

I bring all the keys I find to Mr. Camps and have him make copies for me. He even duplicates the ones that say, "DO NOT DUPLICATE," and he never charges me extra because there must be something in the way I look that says I have no desire to break into anyone else's room. I have no desire to get at something good.

I bring him five keys today. The key shop smells like bread because Mr. Camps is making some wheat bread with wheatberries and oats. He gives me some bread. He has a jar of brown spread, which he offers to me.

"Put some of this on your bread," he tells me. I put it on. It tastes like strange chocolate and is grainy on my teeth. It has grit in it. He says the grit comes from a volcano that killed 50,000 people. He says he puts that grit in his chocolate to

remind himself that, yes, I am lucky to eat chocolate on excellent bread, but let me not forget things like volcanoes, which can kill 50,000 people.

I eat the bread and feel the grit. My mother, Mr. Camps. Mr Camps looks at his shining, shimmering wall of blank keys and selects the ones for me.

is too large an event in the history of the world to be contained within one tableau and they will decide to divide up the final work, but should it be a triptych, should it be more?

Catapult

The last student walks into the room. We sit in a circle. The harbor is waiting. A catapult sits in the center of the classroom, spring loaded in plywood and leather. Fully functioning, just as the facilities staff promised when they found it in the basement of Facilities. We discuss the construction and engineering of the catapult, its long sordid history, some of its mechanical intricacies. One student asks if she can put her weed in it. Others laugh. We start with the student closest to the door. When he is hurled out through the window and vanishes somewhere into the outlying harbor, the mood of the room becomes like the line to ride the Turbinator at the State Fair. Will this count for our final grade, someone asks. If you can find your way back, I say, and strap the next round of human fodder onto the machine. I pull the leather straps tight. Someone's elbow cracks. Students fly through the mid afternoon sky in rapid succession like singular raindrops, the weight of their lives amassing into speeding convexities. Someone should keep track of where they land.

Four Short Prose Pieces

Jefferson Navicky /dʒɛf-ər-sən nəv-ik-i/

Theme for a Tapestry

The general is generally not an angry man, not the type of man to cut off ears and collect them for future dinner parties. And yet something will have to inspire him to inspire his troops. Rumors have the general's men at eighty-one and the enemy's at one thousand two hundred. A massacre sometimes sounds like an extremely dark country night full of ripple and stir.

On the night before the battle, the general wakes from a dream he cannot remember, suddenly as if emerging from water. The sensation left him is of a tunnel through which he hears occasional gun music, but cannot sense any light. It feels like his soul has been pick pocketed for a prolonged moment, not without a certain uncomfortable pleasure. Years later, when the craftsmen and weavers work on the depiction of the historic event, the tapestry will bear an uncanny resemblance to the dark tunnel of the general's dream, as if the maker had been present in the general's mind for his stunning tactical vanguard. They will decide it

Map of the Provinces: An Exposition of Plot

Escaping Flatland

The map is riddled with shapes, many unmarked rivers and provinces, lettering so fine it is at times impossible to decipher. The coherence of land is in jeopardy. Rivers, tributaries, estuaries, lakes: a continent defined by water. But to escape the flatland of the map, to transcend its lines, one must pass through the map, through its grid and elevation, into its netherland where one ceases to hold to identity. In the abstract, before the introduction of character and space and time, everything exists in its entirety, complete, unproblematic.

Micro/Macro Reading

In the smallest sense, the Priest travels from North to South, from Mountains to Ocean, where he expects to find passage. To where, he does not know, but a safe passage somehow, a divine map. The Jesuits pursue the Priest, men on horseback, clamps and edicts meant to purify Mexico, to cleanse her of a priest as will in moonshine, the clandestine figure taken to the road from his small parish amidst the higher elevations of the St. Leone Mountains.

In the larger sense, it is a story from high elevations to low, a fleeing, a descent, a persecution. The Priest's exact route is undecipherable, but yet there exists a

map, somewhere, of his route. There is always a map. He travels at night, stays in the shacks of those who have heard of his story and pity him, or know him personally and respect his taciturnity. The Jesuits know they are not far behind the Priest; they know they are never far away. Their trail through the provinces is a map marked by dust and a coldness to which the region is unaccustomed.

Layering & Separation

The Priest in his efforts to flee. The Jesuits in their efforts to capture the Priest. Between the two of them, they create a layering of experience, layers of escape merged with those of pursuit. Out of their desperation another map arises: a desperate attempt to continue life as he knows it, and an equally desperate attempt to end a strand of life, to enact retribution and reckoning for perceived folly. These dialogic efforts continue until one party realizes the presence of form. And then it becomes a race for separation. As the Priest recognizes the form, he realizes he must disappear, must separate himself from the Jesuits' cartography. Once the Priest ceases to actively layer, and separates from the map, he is free. The Jesuits' separation is a giving up; if they realize the layering only exists because of their engagement with the map, and if they're able to realize this futility, then the separation occurs and the plot loses its tension. But power does not concede unless forced, and so the Priest must be the one to

enact the separation. He must be the one to disappear.

Small Multitudes

The Priest, as the protagonist, finds peace and love from the small multitudes who shelter him. Burned out from exhaustion and trampled on his trail, the small multitudes take him in, feed him, clothe him, and bathe him. He sleeps in basements beneath a half dozen blankets, in chicken coops beneath the hens, beneath a boy's bed. He reads them scripture in return, an impromptu service, a clandestine confessional. At night, he reads by candle to the small multitudes' young girl as she falls asleep, prays for a sick uncle and does the work for which he lives. And it's from the small multitudes that the priest takes the strength to know how he must separate from the layering. The Jesuits are closing in. They are many, mounted on horseback; he is only one and weary. At some point, he knows.

Color & Information

The color of his robes was brown, his hair brown, almost like fur. A man whose hair defined him, its prevalence and thickness. His body, which was perpetually concealed beneath his robes, seemed to match his exterior – squat torso and full fingers like dull spades, a broad nose, quiet dark eyes.

One afternoon, he walked to the river, careful to keep to the tree line. Once there, he removed his robes

and underclothing. Holding the pile of clothing over his head, he waded naked to the middle of the river. The water wasn't cold, nor swift; the water wasn't anything but brown with mud. He dunked his clothes in the current, held them under, watched them fill and saturate, and when they had drunk enough, he let them go and swam back to the shore. As he waded dripping from the water, he glanced downstream to see the last piece of his former self round a bend in the slow river and disappear. The priest walked back to the village. Water dripped from him. He moved with a plowman's volition. The man in whose house the priest was staying for the night gave him a shirt, a pair of overalls and other articles to wear. The Priest moved off to the fields to work, for that's what men did in this region. Little children kicked up dust; a woman made tortillas for the evening meal.

Narrative of Space & Time

All narratives stop. Work ends. Maps reach their borders. A Jesuit in the hunting party, as they stop along the riverbank for water, spies a brown robe and under garments caught in the river weeds. He extracts them and shows them to his captain. They are unmistakably a priest's habit. The river continues to the ocean. The end of space and time is in the folds of the habit found in the riverweeds. To be more explicit, it contains the end of this narrative, such a small encapsulated space able to hold,

along with the futilities of identity, so much meandering. Once the Jesuit soldier touches this fold of wet cloth, the story ceases. The borders are drawn. The ink begins to dry, subsequent aging, a gain of history, a loss of subjectivity.

Epilogue

The map was given to me as a parting gift from a friend who was moving across the country to attend seminary. She told me this map had been waiting for me. It was, she said, a map the Jesuits used in their early days in Mexico to further their missionaries. She pressed the square block of wood into my hand, saying, make your own story.

The Gatherer

It stands in the courtyard of an adobe longhouse next to the well. The white orb sits atop a three-foot high stone pedestal that tapers out near the ground like an evening gown.

The Gatherer is used on Sundays, around four o'clock, when the afternoon begins to thin. People in sandals are drawn to the Gatherer and convene around it, murmuring expectantly as if before a fireworks display or a séance.

Everyone knows what the Gatherer will do.

No one knows what the Gatherer does.

The white orb hurtles through the arid landscape of red clay, high plateaus and dust. It travels like a comet, dodging in and out of the stone traffic of the mesa.

The Gatherer emits a high-pitched whining noise like distant but weak motorbike. There is a slightly acrid burning smell. Some people consider this sound and smell a form of prayer. But this is not the truth; it is only the Gatherer doing its work.

All those present when the Gatherer departs have dreams that night of flying through the landscape as if on the back of the white orb. In the morning, on a topographical map that stretches an entire wall of the longhouse, they cover with white paint the land they traversed the previous night in their dreams, and together they forget.

***FROM MATT COMI'S MOST PRIVATE
DIARY!***

Without blood, my mouth
opens,

tells me how my lips are white

and filled with paste.

Go back to pre-
school, kiss
crafts together.

Construction paper
turkey poult,
traced from my hand.

Snowman, made
from three circles
of 60lb business stock

+

I want to color black eyes,
a brown pipe, and red scarf.

But when the tips of my fingers are pricked,
and my hands move

automatic—markers whose felt tips are dry
leave nothing: pale ink and the
scrapings of pulp off paper.

BIOGRAPHY of EARLY LIVING

Matt Comi /*mæt kám-í*/

This is a story in decoupage. It is written by Matt Comi who is prudent and wise and enormously wide. Especially in the shoulders. Which has often earned Matt Comi the average passerby's startled acknowledgment Hey! That guy! He's got the broadest shoulders! But it has also earned Matt the difficulty of normal tasks. Tasks like walking through doors. Or climbing out windows. It makes him astonishingly easy to recognize. You could pick him out in any crowd.

Matt Comi never feels lonely.

Matt Comi never goes unnoticed.

Matt Comi has an infinite number of friends. They spend all their time making him happy.

THE FIRST GREAT TRAGEDY!

Matt Comi is three years old. He is very close with his lady friend, who while being both petite and delicate, is also adventurous and scarily beautiful. His lady friend's name is Maggie. She has no second name like Matt Comi. While on a long walk together, near the back of the playground, she confides in him that she would very much love short hair. Matt Comi, being the gentleman that he is, readily agrees to cut her hair at craft time, where he will have access to the appropriate tools—scissors, napkins, and crayons. But before he can finish the deed, earn her love and the subsequent fifteen year after-school-make-out session that would have inevitably followed (and which would lead to their future marriage (at age eighteen they pause to say I do then begin kissing thereafter)) something terrible happens. The teacher, whose name he cannot remember, catches him. She totally misunderstands the situation, calls home, and, at Maggie's parents' command, the two remain estranged forever. So far apart that one could not hear the other. Even if the other was yelling at the top of his lungs.

MATT COMI ADMITS THAT HE CARES NOTHING FOR NATURE!

Because it has nothing to do with himself, and it cannot love him back. Except for dogs. He makes a special exception for dogs because petting a dog feels nice.

MORE FROM MATT COMI'S MOST PRIVATE DIARY!

Let's hang our laundry to dry,
clothes-pinned tight to folds that come
off our cheekbones, jawline, ridge-line.

I'll dry the sheets and you'll puff
your cheeks so the blood rushes
where the wind rushes out.

Or, let's leave them on the floor,
creased and molding.

PLEASE NOTE!

An understanding of the author's up-to-present autobiography (as compiled by the author) lends surprising insight into the identity of the "you" present in this poem.

HE IS SO INTELLIGENT!

NPR is a constant comfort to Matt Comi in his later early years. Once he achieved infinite wisdom and no longer relied upon learning, Matt Comi, while at college, learned that the internet-based textual re-iteration of public talk radio, is, without a doubt, the most important single source for knowledge in the modern world. A genius named Michael Krulwich writes a blog for them. He writes this. It changes Matt Comi's life forever.

Now I understand why all those pre-Columbus sailors thought they might just fall off the Earth into the void. On the moon, that horizon seems like a perpetual cliff. It's different on Earth. On a clear day, the Earth's horizon — say you are standing on the edge of Lake Erie looking at the water and you are six feet tall — the horizon is about three miles away. On the moon, it's dramatically closer: 1.5 miles away. The horizon on the moon looms closer because it is closer, plus the lunar ground is bright and shiny, the sky menacingly inky and black. Living on the moon would feel elementally different from living on Earth. You'd always know you were on a ball. Deep space seems to be waiting, just a few miles in front of you.

ENOUGH OF THAT, HERE'S A SELF PORTRAIT OF MATT COMI!



ALSO, THIS IS A HIEROGLYPHIC THAT MEANS I WANT TO BE CONTENT FOREVER!



THE SECOND GREAT TRAGEDY!

Matt Comi is in the third grade. He goes to recess and climbs on the monkey bars. Matt Comi falls off the monkey bars. As he fall, he turns upside down, his eyes stuck on the horizon. When he touches the harsh, spinning ground he hears a snap. He spends his day in the nurse's office, then the doctor's. He gets a sling. Then a cast. He walks home after school. His leg bone's connected to his hip bone. His shoulder bone's connected to his back bone. His arm bone's connected to his shoulder bone. His wrist bones shake like a maraca. He sits inside, or walks or runs. At recess he plays kickball. After school he walks home again. He's always walking somewhere with the cast. The cast comes off. His arms are held together by little white bones growing into big white bones.

EIGHT YEARS OLD, OVER THE ATLANTIC!

Matt Comi sits in the window seat, beside his older brother, and in front of his parents and sisters. He looks out the window through the cloudless noon sky. He sees the pale blue of the far-away ocean. At first it goes on forever. There is nothing alive to see from here. It is the greatest swathe of desert: unchanging save the slight bend on the horizon that says this water does not own the earth. How many people would it take to drink up the ocean?

**BEN DOLLER GIVES MATT COMI
ADVICE!**

Hey Ben, will you help me with my biography? Why is it broken? “Thank you for your question. Your ode is too short”

A LONG WALK IS A SHORT TRIP!

If Matt Comi drives 140 miles it will take him a little over two hours. Let’s say three hours, on a highway. Let’s be generous, four hours. If he walks 140 miles at an average pace, with a full, heavy pack on his back, with food, clothes, a tent, a sleeping bag—it will take him at least a week, or as long as two. If he walks 140 miles at an average pace with nothing and he does not forage or look for water or receive help from friends or strangers. He will not arrive.

MATT COMI’S DIMENSIONS!

Chest Size: 34-36 inches depending on breath.

Waist Size: 28 inches.

Inseam: 30 inches.

Foot Size: 9 U.S.

Weight: 130 pounds.

SIX YEARS OLD, OVER THE ATLANTIC!

Matt Comi sits in the window seat, beside his older brother, and in front of his parents and sisters. He looks out the window into the cloudy noon sky. He sees nothing but the milky fog, and if he cranes forward, the wing in front of them. The curved edge of the globe is missing. He’s spinning out into the white.

THE SINGLE GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT!

Matt Comi is a legendary walker. He walks for more than a mile at a time, at times he literally walks miles. Sometimes he walks a half-mile to school without so much as pausing for a breather. Today Matt Comi is with his friend. Together they are in Boise. Boise and Matt Comi and his friend are together and together they are in Idaho. Boise is spelled like boisé. Boisé means ‘wooded’ in french. There is a path in Boise called the greenbelt. Matt and his friend do not walk the greenbelt that winds through the trees along the river. Today they walk along the highway for nine miles back, from downtown, to the house where they stay. Matt Comi is especially courageous. He leads without fear when they stop for the mercifully hospitable massage chairs at the furniture outlet. He pays without thought for lemonade when he gets thirsty. They arrive back. Matt Comi has sore feet. But he has realized something. Never before has he achieved what he achieved today. He rests in an easy chair. He applauds himself rightfully. He drinks instant coffee.

HE'S GOT THE BROADEST SHOULDERS! like a blanket

The story is progressing along well. Matt Comi is developing marvelously. The reader is engrossed in the story. We are well over half-way through. The fiction of this is the truth of this. This is especially exciting.

around bony shoulders.

Or make

a boat.

EVEN MORE FROM MATT COMI'S MOST PRIVATE DIARY! Leaves stretched over
frail bamboo frame
floating

For the largest leaves I
had ever seen

downstream, out of the
jungle, to the wide
mouth gaping.

in a green house,
at a zoo deep in wheat
field Kansas.

**DRIVING THROUGH WYOMING AT
SUNRISE!**

They poured out of
fruitless banana tree
branches.

Make me feel small.

*Make me feel
exotic.*

Same as bright Mowgli,
colored-in animated
wolf-kid, pick

Sitting in the front seat of a grey nineties Honda, Matt Comi and friends drive east in the dark. The sage brush and soft undulation of the lunar dirt glows in the empty night. At six thirty in the morning, the desert sky turns orange, and the sun rises up at the very end of the horizon. For a moment everything is brilliant. No one can see where they are going. Their eyes adjust, they see the long, distant flatness. They see the sun reflecting off dry soil. And on the narrow curving edge Matt Comi swears he can hear the light telling him about water, that rippling tides are up ahead, that on the eastern end of this state is an ocean called Nebraska.

the smoothest and
waxiest, to wrap up

THE THIRD AND FINAL TRAGEDY!

Matt Comi is twelve years old. He fishes with his friend at Twin Echo Lakes. It is beautiful outside and despite Matt Comi's penchant for silent brooding and instinctual knack for angling, he is unable to catch a fish. This brings his sum total of fish caught throughout his life to a new high of no fish caught. When he is fourteen he tries again. Though he walks the patient walk of the quiet fisherman down to the shore out to the dock. He is unable to catch a fish. Nineteen he again fishes. Again he catches no fish. At twenty, he watches someone spear hunt for suckerfish. He supposes it's all a matter of luck. Or fate. Or the angriness of the water and the land and his own broad shoulders. How they must scare the fish. He cries the quiet cry of his latest, greatest tragedy—unchange.

THE TRUTH ABOUT EVERYTHING!

If Matt Comi walks from point a to point b. No matter what else happens, when he arrives, he is at a different place than when he started. If, over the course of a few minutes, Matt Comi walks from point a, in a circle, and ends again at point a. No matter what else happens, when he arrives, he is at a different place than when he started.

A NOTE, SCRIBBLED IN MATT COMI'S MOST PUBLIC DIARY!

While bathing in hot springs in the Payette Valley, Matt Comi looks at the trees. They are not shaped like him. Matt Comi thinks about Mary Oliver. She loves na-

ture very much. She says the sun holds us, like great arms of light. Matt Comi knows better, he has arms, but light doesn't have arms. He tries to relax in the hot spring. He pours coffee from his red thermos into the red plastic cup that doubles as a lid. The mountains hide the horizon. He tries to ignore the beer cans, and the dry white he hopes is candle wax.

NOTES

P4—Now I understand ... in front of you—From Michael Krulwich's article, "Falling Off The Moon" written for NPR sponsored blog Krulwich Wonders, 2013.

P6—Thank you for your question. Your ode is too short—One of Ben Doller's poems entitled "FAQ." Published in FAQ:. Asahta Press, 2009.

P10—Great arms of light —From Mary Oliver's titular poem "Why I Wake Early." Published in Why I Wake Early. Beacon Press, 2004.

Product Gallery Triptych

Jaydn DeWald / *džé-dájn du'ald/*

lightning over the plains. With built-in defoggers. Stunning design aesthetic. Arched, flat, rectangle, round. To accompany his antique dresser, his beloved's armoire. To see behind you, over your shoulder—see? You may be closer than you appear. With serene, Asian-inspired floating lamps. To bring you back. In which to whisper your name, again and again, after lights out.

Mirrors

With a spectrum of frame options and specially selected lighting. Oval, octagon, Venetian, sunburst. To reflect your style. To prepare you for the image-conscious. To replace the pond, where the black geese are flying. Innovative details and quality construction. That is mountable. That coordinates well with medicine cabinets. That seals out dust and moisture. In which our loved-ones appear, carrying colorful suitcases, walking out the door. To dress up your wall. Add sparkle to your décor. Add depth and light to even the gloomiest places. To duplicate the pink geraniums, my single cup of coffee. In which I, beside myself, see you. Built to the highest standard. A work of art in any space. Hard to face, sometimes; other times, hard not to stand there all morning, naked, like a buck in a still pool. Like

Drapery

Sandwiched between two layers of matching fabric: a luxurious center of black silk thread. Chic, unstructured, box-pleated, hemmed. With a decorative, multi-colored valence. Providing a gentle filter for natural light. Maintaining, when closed, its waterfall effect. To contrast with the laciness of her emerald slip, the scent of her full legs opening—a stylish, centuries-old decision—on the edge of the bed. With multiple dimming and blackout options. A selection of exotic Indochine designs. To part with his sun-bronzed arms in the neon-blue of morning, watching her back her yellow Ducati, one last time, out of the drive. For a clean, uncluttered appearance. Ornamental rods and rings, ruffles and fringes, tiebacks and trim. Leaving inside him an almost imperceptible presence,

like a strand of her brown hair sewn through his organs. A softer, less tailored arrangement. Rich in textures, palettes, patterns, and weight. While he brushes his ill-shaven cheeks (he semi remembers, standing at the window, staring out at the frozen lake and frost-crusting conifers) against the apricot flesh of her inner thighs. Just a peek of a view. A little sweeping drama for your casual home. Bouclé, raffia, grosgrain, baft. With which to repel this winter cold: thin flames darting up the fabric, thin flames swallowing up the past.

Doors

Rustic, hand-carved, double-arched, French. To complement your architectural requirements. Make the perfect statement. In which to stand, in silhouette, letting your dress slip to the floor. With premier paint and stunning veneer finishes. For a lifetime of comings and goings. To be regarded as a work of art. Not a functional decoration but a series of events. For the discerning customer. With these easy-to-install directions. Through which he will leave you, never looking back, hefting his cardboard boxes. To enhance the natural graining depth. Shut everything out. Or in.

The night he spit-roasted squab on Mount Tam, shirtless, his back shining like pale wet stone. The door to something deep inside you. With deeper embossment contours. Traditional craftsmanship requiring the occurrence of radical attacks on tradition. Your childish hands in somebody else's hair again. To hear the click of the lock, the creak of opening. Each room uniquely yours. In which you can see him sometimes, slurping his morning coffee, like a mirage after many months in the desert. With intricate stained-glass patterns. Maximum light into your home. Deriving its character from the individual standing under it. Wood, particleboard, wrought-iron, steel. To see him returning, clutching (for a Far East feel) a bouquet of lotus blossoms.

She was in someone else's office now, peering out a different window.

"I don't really have time to chat," her co-worker said.

Statue Garden

Sarena Ulibarri /səˈrín-ə ul-i-bár-i/

Lisa watched the man's stillness. He remained solid and motionless while the wind flipped his tie over his shoulder and tossed the edges of his suit coat around.

"He's still out there," Lisa said.

"He's been there all day."

She stood at her office window, the blinds pulled open with a finger.

Her co-worker glanced out the window. "Nice suit."

"Do you have the report done yet? Boss is asking for it."

He was still there at five, and Lisa hung back in her office, watching everyone file out and get in their cars. None of them approached the stationary man. None of them even gave him a second glance. The cars on either side of him left. The parking lot was nearly empty, and there he stood, alone, immobile.

"This man, he's just standing there. Have you seen this?" She moved aside and her co-worker looked out.

"That's just Tony, from Accounting."

Lisa put her briefcase in her car and walked over to him. He might be a mannequin or sculpture, some poorly placed public art project. She approached slowly, as if he were a wild animal she would scare away. He had dark hair and olive skin, and was dressed for work. His brown eyes stared lifeless at the pavement in front of him.

Tony, from Accounting, if that's who he was, hadn't moved for three hours. He stood between two cars in the parking lot, still as a statue. Lisa noticed him when she glanced out the window on her morning break. Now here it was, after lunch, and he was still there.

"Have you seen this man outside?"

She touched his arm and felt the give of flesh beneath the suit sleeve. His chest

didn't move but his nostrils gave the subtlest exhale of breath. His hand, which gripped the handle of a briefcase, felt warm to the touch, but refused to release its grip.

It was not the logical thing to do, but Lisa had never been the most logical person. She pulled her car over to him, opened the hatch, picked him up by the armpits and drug him into the back of her SUV. He was about the same height as she was, and she got him into the car with only a little struggle. He lay awkwardly on top of her empty grocery bags. She scooted her emergency kit under his head in case he suddenly awakened and needed neck support.

At home, she walked him like a life-sized doll up to her front door. She stood him on her porch and went back to shut the SUV hatch. A long rip crept up the side of her nylons. One of her neighbors walked by with a dog.

"Who's your friend?" the neighbor asked.

Lisa hesitated. "Tony, from Accounting."

"Kind of cute."

The neighbor opened her mailbox and turned away. Her dog growled.

"Wait," Lisa said, and the neighbor turned to her. "You don't...you don't notice anything odd about him?"

The neighbor waved her away. "No one's perfect. Just have fun."

Lisa placed him in her living room, then sat on the couch and stared. Nothing had changed except that his clothes were disheveled from the trip home. In his current position, he seemed to stare at the pile of mail on her coffee table.

"Well," she said, "Tony, from Accounting. You want a drink?"

He didn't answer, of course.

"I'm going to have a drink."

She poured herself a glass of red wine and sat on the couch, still dressed in her skirt and button-up blouse, her shoes on the floor. She sipped the wine and stared at the man. Had his skin changed? He seemed darker now. No, it was just the light. The dull orange of her floor lamp cast tall shadows around the room, turning her small bookshelf into a tower, her wine glass into a purple stain. Tony's shadow stretched up the wall and bent onto the ceiling, and she got the sense that his shadow eyes were watching her even while his real eyes stared down at the coffee table. She took another drink.

“Tony, from Accounting, I’m Lisa, from Human Resources. I suppose I should have introduced myself before kidnapping you. You’ll be much safer here than in that parking lot, though.”

She let out a sharp burst of laughter.

“Can you hear me, Tony? Are you in there? Have you been watching and listening this whole time?”

She drank the last of her wine and straightened her skirt.

“I hope not. I mean, I hope so. I mean, I want you to be okay, but, well, I don’t want you to judge me, is all. I don’t normally bring strange men into my house.”

She went into the kitchen for a second glass of wine and drank half of it before she got back to the living room. She stood in front of the man, squinted and investigated his face.

“How did you get this way?”

She took another sip, then set the wine glass on the coffee table.

“And why doesn’t anyone else notice?” She looked at his lips, slightly parted. “My neighbor was right, though. You are kind of cute, Tony from Accounting.” She shook her hair flirtatiously. “Could this be

a Sleeping Beauty kind of thing? I kiss you and you wake up and sweep me away?”

She slid her hands on either side of his face. His head wouldn’t move, so she hunched down, tilted her neck and found his lips from underneath. When she backed away, the motionless man had a smear of red lipstick across his mouth.

“Oh well,” she said, “I won’t tell anyone. It can be our secret.”

She woke up embarrassed, hoping the whole thing had been a bizarre dream, but no, there he was, standing in the living room in the same static position. She walked out in her night clothes and stared at him for a moment, then quickly dressed and left. The morning sunlight worsened her slight wine hangover. She skipped breakfast.

At work she took a mid-morning break and walked over to Accounting.

“Does someone named Tony work here?” she asked the woman at the front desk.

The woman pushed her glasses up her nose and squinted at Lisa as if she weren’t quite sure she was there.

“He’s on vacation,” she said.

Lisa took the long way home, driving through side streets rather than the clogged

highway. She considered not going home at all. She could keep driving. Keep moving.

At a stoplight, she rested her head against the car window, seat belt pressing against her cheek. She looked at the traffic swishing past. In the median, amongst the motion, was stillness. A woman, standing motionless, her head turned to the side as if watching for the traffic to slow before crossing the street. She was as still as Tony.

The stoplight changed and Lisa didn't drive. She opened the car door and stepped out. Other cars honked. She flipped them off. Lisa approached the woman, hoping she would turn her head and walk away. She didn't. Lisa opened the back of her SUV, awkwardly walked the woman over to her car and stuffed her in. Cars swooped around her. No one stopped.

She looked at Tony and the new woman, standing side by side in the living room. She stood up, shook her arms to make sure she still could, and went to bed, leaving the two statues in the living room.

There were no news reports. No warnings from the medical community. Not even a viral video. And yet in the next week, Lisa's statue garden grew. A teenage girl with bright red lipstick and an imitation designer purse. An old man so bent at the waist that it was difficult to stand him upright again once she'd moved him. A couple holding hands in the lobby of a

restaurant. They were the most difficult to move, but when she did maneuver them out of the restaurant, the hostess simply thanked her for coming in and wished her a good weekend. She gathered them all in her living room, a silent, motionless party. They filled the room now so that she could barely negotiate between them.

She stood on the coffee table to survey her collection. She pressed her ear to their chests and heard their heartbeats. Slow. Almost nonexistent, but there.

It had been a week and a half since she brought Tony home, but nothing had changed. He hadn't starved or withered. None of them had.

"You'll outlive me, won't you?" she said to the crowd.

She looked up at the wall, the bodies blending together in shadow, creating a landscape of overlapping heads. She thought she saw subtle motion amongst the shadow heads, slight swaying of the shadow arms. She watched them for far too long, until she felt like she had to move or she would never move again. She shuddered, letting the vibration of the shudder sweep through every cell of her body.

It was enough, she decided.

She drug each of them one by one to her car and piled them on top of each other.

Her neighbor waved from the kitchen window as she pushed the teenager into the passenger seat. She drove out of the city, to a place where trees blocked the moonlight and her headlights broke the darkness in a small window. She pulled onto a dirt road and stopped.

She pulled the statues out of her car and left them lined up side by side in a sloping ditch. None moved to protest. Tony, from Accounting, seemed to stare at a broken twig. He still wore the smudge of lipstick. Without looking back, she drove away, leaving them there.

On the outskirts of the city, Lisa stopped to get gas. A man stood motionless at the next pump, but she refused to look at him. She finished pumping her gas and drove home. Her living room was empty, but the wall was still full of shadows, slightly moving, reaching out to her with shapeless arms.

with your handler. Your handler may speak to you, and you may in turn respond with head nods or shakes (preferably out of sight of park guests).

Paws

Henry Hoke /*hén-ri hók*/

Regardless of how well you believe you can impersonate your designated part, your voice is not the official (trademarked) voice of your character.

Infants (Face and Masked Characters):

Park guests may pose their infants for pictures, but under no circumstances should you hold an infant.

Allow the park guests to place the infant near your person, but politely decline, with a spoken word (Face Characters) or clear shake of your head (Masked Characters), any attempt by the guest to place the infant in your hands.

Even if the guest insists, or the infant is in a state of distress, remain composed and polite when following this park-wide policy.

Speaking (Masked Characters):

In no instance should you speak while appearing as a Masked Character. Learn the simple hand gestures to communicate

Touching (Face Characters):

You may only touch a guest (of any age) above the shoulders. Head pats are acceptable, as are mimed cheek pinches (at least an inch away from contact with actual skin). You may place an arm around the shoulder of the guest, but either keep your hand from making contact with the guest or rest your hand flat on the guest's shoulder.

However, if possible, avoid these types of contact.

An exaggerated lean toward the guest, a friendly wave, or especially a winning smile, should be employed to replace this contact.

Touching (Masked Characters):

The guest may touch the material of your synthetic clothes, skin, or fur, but you may not initiate any contact with the guest.

Pointing is your most reliable way to interact with the guests, as is waving. Head pats must be mimed, be sure to maintain a two-inch distance from the top of the guest's head.

Also remember that despite the layers of fabric, your inward energy level always affects the outward energy level of your character. Always try to smile behind your mask.

Emergencies (Face and Masked Characters):

If a guest (of any age) becomes ill or faints, due to overheating, dehydration, or excitement at your appearance, make no attempt to assist them. Be very careful not to cry out or project any signs of alarm. Your handler will alert emergency services and they will deal with the situation on arrival.

In all cases your handler has been instructed to escort you away so as not to cause any added duress to the ailing guest.

Handlers (Face Characters):

Your handler will be dressed in a costume that fits the world of your Face Character, often in a servile role. This lesser character will not interact with park guests on any performance level, only shepherding them to interact with you or taking action in

the previously mentioned emergency scenarios, so you may remain in character.

Handlers (Masked Characters):

Your handler will always be in regulation park attire, not costumed. They will remain five feet away from you or further at all times.

This is important because as a Masked Character you should never give the impression that you are being controlled remotely. Remember, you are not a puppet. Puppetry has no place in this world we are committed to creating.

In the case that you become ill (Masked Characters):

It is park-wide policy that if you find yourself becoming ill while performing as a masked character, regardless of heat or duress, it is mandatory that you remain in character and do not remove your mask.

If it becomes impossible for you to refrain from being sick, be sick inside of your mask. Under no circumstances should you remove your mask.

The Wishing Well (Face Characters):

The Wishing Well is exclusively the domain of Face Characters. No Masked Characters should ever enter this area, as it is an oasis

for specific vocal interactions with guests as they approach the well and make their wishes.

In fact, Masked Characters should not interact with Face Characters at all outside of scripted shows or character breakfasts, even if they are from the same fictional world. The difference between Face Characters talking and Masked Characters gesturing can be too great, ruining the illusion, and disrupting park-wide performance standards.

Even if you envy the performers who have been selected as Face Characters, as Masked Characters you must refrain from watching the Wishing Well. No matter how radiant Face Characters may seem to you, as Masked Characters you must remember that you are chosen for your roles often because of your heights, and should know you are equally important characters in the world.

The Passageway (Masked Characters):

Once you have reached the air-conditioned passages that lead away from public park areas, you must remain both in costume and in character, as park guests have been known to stumble into the passages accidentally.

For this reason, even in the passageway, you should not interact with Face Characters. Not even if you have known them all your

life, or met them recently off-duty and have a rare chemistry. Not even if they lightly brush your costume as you pass on the way to their next meet-and-greet, putting pressure on your skin or fur, the part of you that is not you, causing you to smile so wide under your mask that you can actually feel the outside fabric, the frozen face, stretching even wider.

Even if you want more than anything to turn and watch them go through the door and into the sunlight before you disappear into the chafnging room, do not turn your head, as your mask may become off-center. Nothing disturbs guests more than an imperfect character.

dim, almost after-hours cathedral-esque or den of thieves-esque, reinforced by the fact that most of the actual illumination comes from an army of white votive candles which float noiselessly in hemispheres of ultra-thin glass below the faces of people laughing and beaming and otherwise demuring in their diaphanous mantles and tightfitting one button suits.

Remaining Buoyant

Joe Trinkle /*dʒó trín-kəl*/

Their laughter is thick like the demi-glace on the pork chops and grilled brussel sprouts, their eyes sparkling like champagne, their words sweet and well-formed like the bundt cakes swimming in creme anglaise.

Two men eat:

baskets of artisan bread and herbed butter with napkins on lap to catch the debris and pints of dark, well-crafted beer to make the chewed pieces suitably wet to slide down their throats; petite mason jars of sun dried tomatoes, anchovies, and olives, all brined and syruped — prepared, smoked and aged (inhouse) and served with tiny cutlery; bartendress slim and affable and quick, sharp in a pre-med-student way, refilling water and repeatedly checking to see if they're "okay" as if they, for some reason, wouldn't be, while not ever ceasing movement akin to a perpetual motion machine or a Tai-Chi sensei; heavily salted soups; palm-sized copper pots of red wine-marinated escargot which is mouthwateringly pungent and cooked until rendered delicate and supple, but with just the slightest hint of crunch, the discovery upon which both men silently nod in approval, mouths full and busy with tearing, grinding; anticipating the main courses; lights beyond or below merely

They speak, less a conversation than two simultaneous monologues, the men confident and grinning at their own wit. Two men, seemingly, whom it is impossible to get the attention of and even less likely to impress.

Phones/supercomputers buzz, beep, make other noises. The men consecutively excuse themselves to the bathroom, but never talk about what they've done in there. The bartender has no savings but earns \$50/hour, and has chosen the right jeans for the job. Green and brown bottles pass hands and some of the corks pop; others just slide out as easily as the images of football players from the silent plasma screen above the shelves of single malt scotch.

There are no children present, although children would certainly enjoy the cannolis stuffed with chocolate chip custard, the

flutes of gelato and neon sorbet, the tiramisu brownies topped with Japanese tapioca and ground nutmeg.

Some of the people are still “working,” some just “out,” some a little of both, and in many ways it doesn’t seem to matter. Questions and jokes are being funneled through the conversation. The men’s ties are solid, muted, the younger man’s loosened, the top button of his dress shirt undone and revealing a triangle of bluish-peach chest.

All other voices are loud, irregular, ecstatic, but theirs are hushed with facial gestures being louder than the words themselves. They’ve moved on to two thick glasses of correctly-pronounced tequila, blanco and well-rested, opened up with a few drops of water and being swirled slightly although that will not affect the taste.

A woman joins them, not sitting, but standing between and behind and having to raise her voice to order a Barbera when the bartender is close enough to notice her. Her dress is well-cut but modestly so, evocative if only because of its wearer who stands with relaxed grace in what should be called an empowered pose. She and the two men converse for a few minutes and the woman comments on her wine, says something neither cynical nor identifiably naive, a statement such as the two men dislike. She tries to recover, but she’s already outed herself; she becomes supremely pissed-off, shouts several unfriendly remarks, pours

off the remainder of her Californian red into the soil of a potted orchid, and exits into the winter’s cold.

The older man’s eyes twinkle as he toys with a cigar as if he has a good mind to light it and the telephone/supercomputers continue to buzz and make other noises, flickering personally selected images to signal various ways in which the people should be interacting with the devices.

The two men do not speak for close to ten minutes, but quietly sip their drinks. The younger man lifts a hand, signaling for the bill.

“I’ve got it.”

“Your money’s no good here.”

“I’ll be damned if it isn’t.”

“I said put it away,” and the older man slams his American Express into the check presenter, making a cutting motion across his throat, signaling that the charade is complete and the lights get even dimmer.

“Thanks, Rick.”

“Don’t thank me, thank this lovely woman,” and he points to the bartendress who smiles but says nothing, having perfected the smile that deflects conversation completely, as she muddles sage and bourbon and sugar

while listening to another guest tell a joke. It's the one about the cat continually getting stepped on (which everybody has heard before, as this particular guest loves to reiterate the joke, even when one person who has not heard the joke is present, forcing all others to have to hear it again), how it keeps screeching louder each time it's hit like meooow, meooOW, meeOOORRt, but it won't stop landing underfoot of its owner, etc., and each time the owner tries to dodge the animal, to walk in a different direction, the cat seems to have also chosen that direction to avoid being stepped on, and the stepping/screeching continues until one of the neighbors (the ancient, blue-haired, curmudgeonly type who's always quick to file noise complaints) calls the police, and the police show up at the apartment, and after ringing the doorbell and hearing endless screaming as of an animal being burned alive from within the residence for several minutes, the door opens to show a man, the owner, crying and otherwise babbling about the cat and how he'd had no evil intentions, but it was an example of absolute enthalpic synchronicity, and pointing down toward the beast which is, by this point, nothing more than a bloody mess of fur and whose lights are clearly on the way to going out, twitching, the punchline being how they arrest the man because neither of the police officers had taken physics in high school.

Two women emit the sort of polite laugh that's perfunctory and always on hand, although it's possible that not even one person has been actually listening, except

the older gentleman with the solid, muted tie who legitimately laughs, gives a nice bellow, shakes his index finger, saying, "That's so true. Cats — always under your feet!"

"I know, I love telling that joke."

"Damn fine joke."

"Thank you so much," and the joke-teller stands up, making his way to the bathroom to do whatever unspeakable things it is that people do in bathrooms. The chef emerges from the kitchen in uniform and begins approaching the tables, making sure that everybody is having a nice time, enjoying his/her rosemary port lamb confit, and to field compliments of his restaurant's recently being favorably reviewed in such and such magazine, recommending wine pairings, etc. He's generally making his way around the perimeter until he arrives at the bar and begins shaking hands and entering into a hushed conversation with the city councilman who is present, and they take turns talking and smiling. The chef fiddles with a thermometer in his breast pocket.

The television program has changed to a college basketball game, and alma maters are brought up, voices increase in volume, especially in the bar area, and intensify by bouncing off the shiny bottles of liquor and polished stemware, which is why the chef and the bartendress and the rejoining joke-teller and the two men are the last to hear and/or see the woman seated near

the entrance to the restaurant vomiting onto her half-eaten pork chop — the type of advanced emesis that is sudden and paralyzing as when the body needs to evacuate all recent input on the double. Her dinner guest does the sort of thing that one does in that moment: backs away from the table politely.

Silence is suspended; the woman's retching is audible in all corners of the restaurant. It is a very wet kind of vomit. The two men at the bar sip their tequilas, and the joke-teller makes a weird twitchy motion. The vomiter is eventually joined by many others — well-over half of the guests begin vomiting their tempura shrimp and broccoli rabe satay, their foie gras burgers and pickled red onions, etc., onto the floor and tabletops, into their water glasses — emptying themselves of everything: caprese salads with oak aged balsamic vinegar (the chunks of mozzarella coming up whole), rum cakes with caramel sauce mixed in with the apple-cranberry sausage; pita points with basil chiffonade, pooling, puddling around the feet of the guests, an unstoppable torrent of regurgitation and convulsion.

The manager grimaces, stays still as if to become invisible, but Chef only rolls his eyes. He sees that the city councilman is not emetic, and continues their conversation, but in a lower voice.

A reproduction of a famous Flemish painting hangs below a cork sign that reads

Moules Frites in hand painted calligraphy, and below the facsimile a woman ejects dijon artichoke crabmeat salad onto the floor. Most of the people have vomited, but not the bartendress nor the two men, nor the joke-teller. After a few minutes all the nonsense has sort of stopped, and everything is relatively silent except for someone's telephone/supercomputer buzzing or beeping to the tune of ZZ Top's La Grange.

The bar is coated in second-hand jambalaya which drips over into the ice bins.

The joke-teller uses his left thumb to absently spin his wedding band as a siren is heard from outside. La Grange stops. The main entrance to the restaurant allows in several workers in white and blue uniforms who disperse themselves amidst the people who are tired in the way that only people who have just blown chunks for several sustained minutes can be tired — i.e., drained.

They come equipped with mops and buckets of the conventional variety; squeegees, shammies, etc., and begin sopping the nastiness up, and a man with a handheld two-way radio gives directions and writes notes on a white and blue squared piece of paper which pleasantly matches the men's coveralls. Chef smiles, sees things all being put into their right places. The manager goes into the back and raises the volume on the speakers, and some sort of

polyrhythmic world music overtakes the restaurant.

“I love this music,” the joke-teller says as he pokes at the ice cubes in his drink with a pair of straws

The uniformed men are fastidious, expert. They clear layers of reversed meals from all surfaces, going at the thicker stuff with a shopvac, all while without looking up or directly into any of the customers’ faces. They crisscross the restaurant floor in a strange pattern, but it all makes sense after a while. Bits of chicken breast panini with cilantro mayonnaise and micro arugula are swept away, extricated from pant legs and coat sleeves. All traces of premasticated gorgonzola steak tartare disappear. The bartendress uses her down time to search for gum in her purse as one of the men mops up the bar area.

The man in the suit places the cigar he’d been toying with in his breast pocket, and downs the rest of his tequila as the last of the workers exits the building, everything having been more or less restored to its pre-vomit condition. Eventually conversations rise up again, and the bartender resumes drink-making: cappuccino martinis with ground cinnamon, a few cordials on the rocks, a glass of Chenin Blanc — light drinks — until she’s generally back in the swing of things. Chef walks over to a potential restaurant reviewer’s table and asks how she’s enjoyed her meal. She smiles and says it was excellent, dabbing at her chin with a silver linen napkin. He offers her a

complimentary glass of wine or beer, her preference, but she declines based on her having to drive, but thanks anyway.

The joke-teller asks to take a “peek” at a menu as per his “feeling a bit peckish,” and he is handed one.

“Another round?” the younger man in the suit asks his colleague/friend.

“I certainly can’t get drunk tonight.”

“Not with that attitude, you can’t.”

“Another round,” the bartender echos, brings the tequila down from the top shelf, as the city councilman heads toward the bathroom, likely with the intention of perpetrating some disgusting, animalistic activity. The joke-teller seems to be beginning another joke, but the bartender taps a finger against her closed lips, i.e., skip it.

up and bobbing on top of the spring, was dead white, with black staring eyes, his smile a manic rictus. You knew he was going to pop up, but something inside you jumped every time anyway.

Jack-In-The-Box

Jacqueline Doyle /dʒæk-wəl-ən dɔːj-l/

Years ago a jack-in-the-box was buried in the jumble of toys on top of the crowded bookcase in the corner of my bedroom. I don't remember whether it was my brother's toy or mine, or where it came from, or what became of it.

The jack-in-the-box was dented metal, about six inches on each side and seven inches high, with colorful pictures of clowns on the panels, framed in yellow curlicues, like circus posters. When you rotated the metal crank, a loud, tinny version of "Pop Goes the Weasel" played. Not the words, though I always thought of the words. "All around the mulberry bush, the monkey chased the weasel. The monkey thought it was all in fun. Pop! goes the weasel." If you turned the crank faster and faster the tempo of the music increased until it was almost unrecognizable. Jarring, jagged, cacophonous.

At the end of the song the metal lid sprang open, releasing a clown head and upper body comprised of a cloth costume with a large coiled spring inside of it. The grinning plastic face of the clown, abruptly shooting

The lyrics of the song suggested that something fun could turn ugly and scary fast. Like when an adult tickled you and at first you were giggling and squirming and then you were laughing so hard that you were gasping for breath and then you really couldn't breathe and it wasn't funny any more but they thought it was and you were trapped and they wouldn't let you go.

Once when I was in my twenties I was at a party and there weren't enough seats and everyone was smoking dope and I sat in this guy Larry's lap, not a boyfriend, and he had his arm hooked around my waist from behind and started tickling me and then grabbing at my crotch, his hand like a weasel's head, fingers together and pointed as he jabbed at me, and it wasn't funny. I was struggling to get up, angry at first and then breathless and scared, even though there were lots of people around.

Drinking was fun until it snuck up on me from behind and I was hooked and would rather stay home and drink wine and read a book than talk to anyone, including my boyfriend. "You know you have a problem, don't you," he said, his voice shaking with emotion, and I didn't believe it. Like the unwelcome messenger popping up out of nowhere to tell you something you don't

want to hear. And meanwhile the music gets faster and faster and crazier and crazier and you're whirling in circles and not really listening.

I remember my father chasing me in a circle around the second floor of our house when I was little. I was shrieking, and if you didn't know better, it might have looked like we were playing a game of monkey chase the weasel as I ran down one corridor, and then another, through the master bedroom, into the connecting study, and hurtled into another corridor that connected with the first one. But he was chasing me with a hairbrush because he wanted to spank me. Did spank me, and my brother, for jumping on their bed and saying we'd taken a bath when we hadn't.

"This is going to end in tears," a friend's mother used to say whenever we became too boisterous and began to leap about the house. "Take this outside. Now."

My brother and I spent a lot of time outdoors, away from our parents' rules and their constant bickering. During the long days of summer, we roamed the sun-dappled, northern New Jersey woods, climbing trees, and crouching by streams to collect tadpoles and salamanders, build dams out of mud and stones. We caught sunnies in the lake and cooked them over campfires ringed with rocks.

There were mulberry trees in front of the Mountain Lakes train station and we filled

small plastic beach pails with the sweet berries, eating as many as we gathered, our faces smeared with purple juice. The trees were on a slope, and we closed our eyes as we leapt to the ground from the upper branches, then rolled over and over down the slope, faster and faster, staining our clothes with crushed berries. We were dizzy with laughter when we sat up.

When I was very young, I was afraid not only of the hidden jack-in-the-box on the bookshelf, but of tigers under the bed at night. If I had to go to the bathroom, I would stand on the bed and jump as far as I could, running for the door before they could catch me. After the movie "Ben-Hur," I was also afraid of lepers in the closet, who stretched out palsied hands in the dark to grab me, staring with disfigured faces.

In my twenties and thirties I was intrepid, traveling alone for months at a time, expatriating myself for four years in Ireland and Germany from family and language and country. When I got sober in my late thirties, I was flooded by fears I'd never known I had. Just driving to the supermarket and negotiating the parking lot left me sick and trembling.

Carson Sloan, the boy next door, worked as a bagger at the Acme supermarket, unless I'm confusing him with some other clean-cut, athletic boy. His younger brother Timmy, who was heavysset and afflicted with acne, often babysat for us. He was obsessed with the Nazis. Instead of reading

us a bedtime story, he would tell us stories of Nazi torture he claimed to have read somewhere. We sat on my brother's bed, Timmy at the foot, my brother and I huddled together at the top, pressed against the headboard, while Timmy told us stories of naked Jewish girls shrieking and writhing as they were scourged with leather whips embedded with chips of glass. We never told our parents.

Later I learned that Third Reich fetishism is not so unusual among teenage boys. I don't know if Timmy grew out of it.

The Sloans' house was a white clapboard ranch, unusual in New Jersey in the 1950s. Ours was a ramshackle, three-story, unpainted stucco house built in 1914. A towering oak tree in the front yard rained acorns on the street and grass every fall. Sometimes I sat at the base of the trunk, back against the rough bark, hands in the velvety green moss that surrounded the tree. The damp moss smelled of wet earth. I used to pry off the acorn caps and peel away the silky smooth brown covering to look at the cream-colored flesh inside.

I liked to collect odd bits of things that I kept in the bookcase in my bedroom: acorns, chestnuts, feathers, shiny pebbles, the fragile shells of broken robins' eggs, pale aquamarine. Once I found a shed snakeskin, papery like parchment, which I laid out carefully on my dresser.

I still collect feathers and shiny stones. I don't like snakes and spiders. I don't like

driving alone in unfamiliar cities. I don't like making love in the pitch dark. There are no tigers under my bed any more, but the night sounds of raccoons in our attic frighten me. I am still clean and sober. Sometimes when I'm very happy, I think, "This is going to end in tears."

Birchwood Lake, where my brother and I used to swim, was golden brown, murky where leaning trees cast their shadows over the water. If you stood in the shallows near the banks, silt swirled around your ankles and you could see small fish darting to and fro. Farther out, black water snakes swam by, sleek and ominous. Underwater you could find entire fallen trees buried in the soft mud. The water was colder and darker the deeper you went.

They said there was a town underwater in the municipal reservoir off Highway 46, evacuated to make way for the man-made water supply. Sometimes I imagined swimming like a mermaid through rooms of waterlogged sofas and mildewed chairs, wending through kitchens with cabinets full of unmatched dishes and chipped teacups, slithering up stairways to explore bedrooms littered with abandoned clothing and children's toys.

A doll with glassy blue eyes missing an arm. A stuffed horse, soggy and bursting at the seams. A music box repeating the same song over and over, faint and almost inaudible. A rusted jack-in-the-box, ready to spring open.

Soft Breast Mechanism

Janalyn Guo /dʒáɛn-élən gáw/

I once was a plant nurse. Plants were in fashion because they added a splash of color to an office. I went from office to office with a watering can, all the way up to the fifty-sixth floor, spending the most time in the executive suites because the executives had the plants that were the toughest to care for, plants that were breathtakingly grand but finicky. I carried a little electronic scanner to tap against the barcodes taped to every plant that was under my care so that there was record somewhere that each plant was visited and tended to.

Horace took care of the animals. Animals were in fashion because they added a splash of life to the office. Fish were popular. Horace took care of all the office pets. He had the harder job. These were living things with brains: fish, lizards, hamsters, and chinchillas. He had to feed all of them and check on their water. He had to make sure they couldn't chew through things and accidentally get electrocuted.

Carnivorous plants lived in a crimson corporate negotiation chamber on the very top floor of the skyscraper. Some Venus flytraps and monkey cups stayed alive and hungry in elevated terrariums. This was where our paths crossed, mine and Horace's. The Venus flytrap was my responsibility. The monkey cup was his. The Venus flytrap didn't need any insects to stay alive. It just needed good plant-care: light, water, soil, a good conversation. The monkey cups, on the other hand, needed insects in their cups to survive, a thawed out cricket every once in a while.

We had the whole place to ourselves Friday afternoons in the summers. This was where he wooed me, in the clean aftermath of the departure of the executives. Sometimes Horace would hold my head in his hands and massage it, which was something he did from time to time with the animals. I'd read to him from my stash of adventure novels the way I read to the finicky plants. (It is scientifically proven that they respond to the sound of the female voice). We pilfered imported chocolates from the candy dishes until the executives started hiding them from us.

For the longest time, ever since I was a girl, I had a problem with insomnia. I couldn't remember the feeling of sleep. There was an incident when I was

young. Once in the winter, I woke up in the middle of the night to the face of a stranger staring into mine before he disappeared through the open front door as I screamed for my parents. Who was that man?

I did not miss sleep at first. In the home of my now deceased parents, I collected hair from the carpeted floors and shaped the strands into figurines when I was supposed to be sleeping. My first figurine was a bunny sculpted out of hair and dust and lint. My hair gathering became a habit: at sleepovers in strange homes, in motel rooms, in the wilderness surrounding a tent. I grew my hair long, past my waist, infused it with olive oils and honey, and brushed it with one thousand strokes every evening. I moved my hair figurines from home to home until I'd amassed two suitcases full of them; the suitcases were light.

After work, Horace took me out, somewhere in Chinatown, where we ate steamy pork buns, got our hair cut on a balcony, and did our shopping. We purchased supplies there because they were cheap: plant food, frozen mice for the snakes, cockroaches for the lizards, crickets for the bearded dragon and the monkey cups. Horace kept all the feed animals at his house. He kept them alive until they were to be eaten. His last stop in Chinatown was always the same. He

knew a vendor who set up her station on the sidewalk and sat on a stool all day with a fan in her hand. She wore a straw hat and flowery kitchen pants. Five plastic washtubs surrounded her, and inside each washtub were slippery swirls of anchovies in water. The anchovies came in all sizes, from fingernail-sized to half my arm in length. Horace selected anchovies out of a washtub and she plopped them in a plastic bag full of water that he balanced on his lap as he drove us home.

When Horace stayed over on certain evenings, I'd pretend to drift off to sleep beside him as I'd done with lovers in the past, waiting until he fell into a deep sleep before slipping out from under his arm to do what I'd always done. His hairs were thick, black, and gleaming.

The anchovies were for the catfish. Horace's toughest client was a celebrity, a chef. In his office, one huge catfish named Ivan drifted alone in a large tank that glowed a rich Yves Klein blue. I called it the dream chamber. The tank though wide was very narrow. The poor fish had to swim at an angle, his whiskers brushing against the glass. Horace had to climb up a stepladder to reach the top of the tank so that he could toss each flapping anchovy into the water. The catfish would prowl at its slow pace, moving no faster than before, and we would watch it devour entire anchovies whole with its

vacuum cleaner mouth and casually join the leftovers afterward. It was a tight fit. At the end of the feeding, Horace and I would remain, eating peaches. We would turn off the light and let the Yves Klein blue light the room.

I was working on a scene of a miner in Colorado one night using a mix of my and Horace's hair when I found him standing over me, rubbing his eyes. "Come back to bed," he said. I shook my head. I was looping my long hairs around his short ones to make a shovel. He pulled me back into bed, telling me he had a remedy. I was dubious. "Do you know how often I've heard that?" I said. I crawled into bed with him. He slipped his hand under my right breast, squeezing in a rhythm, kneading it like an expert bread maker. I tried to discern the rhythm.

I woke up at dawn weeping, having slept for the first time in years. I couldn't make myself stop. We all learned once that our brains process things in sleep; there must have been a lot in the queue, a line of anchovies for my catfish-brain. Horace told me the tempo at which he squeezed my breast matched the song "Staying Alive."

I asked Horace to come over every evening. All I ever wanted to do was sleep. My eyesight improved. I became more beautiful. I lost twenty pounds. I grew four inches. Horace had firm but delicate feminine hands; that's all I really remember about him. That's the only thing I can still picture. I loved those hands.

I noticed that the plants began to look healthier after my rounds, as if there was something I gained during sleep that the plants needed, a sort of limpidness that I think the plants liked about me. I thought this would demonstrate that I deserved a raise of some sort or some words of affirmation. But one day I walked into work to find these timed spritzers everywhere that would wet the plants at the appropriate hours. These automatic feeders had been attached to the cages of the office pets so that a pellet or two would be spit out every so often. The celebrity chef apparently cooked the catfish when he had important French visitors one weekend. There was nothing left for us. Building management had hired consultants who were trying to find ways to save money. We were the losers. The old construct was what held Horace and me together. We received our severance packages.

Horace eventually grew tired of me. He told me I was directionless. But, it was

more like he met another woman. I saw them in Chinatown together and followed them. They performed all the same rituals Horace and I had once done. I was cleanly replaced.

Sleep left me for a second time, and it was more painful than the first. I wanted that feeling of beginning anew every morning, not that of one long endless life. Sleep was like getting a little taste of death. Life had to be squeezed into the time in between sleeps. The little deaths were important. I returned to my hair sculptures.

Reenacting our rituals, I wandered through Chinatown on my own. I was Jeanne Moreau walking through the streets in Elevator to the Gallows with the jazz music. I passed the lit up storefronts of psychics, karaoke taverns, restaurants full of families, trinket shops, and massage parlors. Men smoked in the alleyways next to their motorcycles with their shirts off. Then I saw something, as if it were meant for me: A neon sign advertising a soft breast mechanism glowed against a shop window right above the storefront of a foot massage parlor.

I climbed the stairs. The room smelled like medicine. A woman in a stiff white suit that looked like a karate outfit pointed me to a testing chamber. It reminded me of a doctor's office, all the apparatuses.

I had to take off my shirt and my bra and lie down on a small bed. A hand would appear from a hole in the wall, holding a different mechanism each time. There were many soft breast mechanisms to try, all with a different pulse to them. I hummed "Staying Alive" against each soft breast mechanism until I found one with a pulse that matched.

"It works best if you have some help," the woman said. I told her that really wasn't an option

She went into the back room and procured a kit that allowed me to screw a metallic appendage into the wall by my bed. It would hold the soft breast mechanism in place.

If someone were to ask me if there was anything I'd run back into a burning house to save, it would be the suitcases if only for all the midnight hours spent collecting in the silence. When I returned home, I unzipped my suitcases and waded through my figurines. My collection of hair belonged to my mother and father, to all my lovers, the animals I've had, the people who occupied my life at some time. A human being sheds up to 100 strands of hair a day.

I amassed all my hair figurines into one giant humanoid. I laid it beside me, the hairs pressing against my body. Then I considered my new purchase. The soft breast mechanism came in a beautiful clamshell box with a pick enclosure that you slid in and out of a red loop. I opened the box, took out the object, and set it in the flexible arm that I'd attached to the wall. It swooped over me just like a lover's would in the spooning position. In that manner, I found a sleep all my own.

Night Telegram

Eric Boyd /ér-ik bòjd/

POSTAL TELEGRAPH - COMMERCIAL CABLES	
CLARENCE H. MACKAY, PRESIDENT.	
TELEGRAM	
TELEGRAMS TO ALL AMERICA	
CABLEGRAMS TO ALL THE WORLD	
THE PULSE OF THE WORLD	
THE MACKAY SYSTEM	
POSTAL TELEGRAPH COMMERCIAL CABLES	

CLASS OF SERVICE DESIRED	RECEIVER'S NUMBER
FAST TELEGRAM	
DAY LETTER	CHECK
NIGHT TELEGRAM <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	TIME FILED
NIGHT LETTER	STANDARD TIME

The sender must mark an X opposite the class of service desired; otherwise the telegram will be transmitted as a fast telegram.

Send the following Telegram, subject to the terms on back hereof, which are hereby agreed to. Form 2

New York, Ny., September 2, 1939.

D. Madinger
Lenox Hill Hospital
New York. New York

Sorry for last night. Was drinking. Father called.
Bad news. Going back home to ensure they are safe.
Will call upon return. Forgive me. Funny that Lenox Hill was formerly German Hospital.

Love=

PAID

Daniel Kaminski

Authors' Notes:

Katy Gunn is an MFA candidate at the University of Alabama with recent writing in Crazyhorse, PANK, Puerto del Sol, and more.

Miles Klee's work has appeared in Vanity Fair, Lapham's Quarterly, Unstuck and McSweeney's, as well as BirkenSnake #2. His first novel, "Ivyland," was published by OR Books in 2012.

Sarah Elizabeth Schantz lives in Boulder, Colorado where she is a writer, an artist, and a mother/stepmother. She has panic attacks on interstates, airplanes, and in grocery stores that are larger than necessary (which is most of them). Sarah has won the following literary awards: 1. First place for fiction in 2011, Third Coast. 2. Fall 2012 Orlando Prize for Short Fiction hosted by A Room of Her Own. 3. First place winner of Monkey Puzzle's 4th Annual Flash Fiction Award (2012), and 4. Fiction winner of the 2012 contest hosted by the feminist press known as Saturday's Child. Her work is featured in Hunger Mountain, Midwestern Gothic, Alligator Juniper, Bombay Gin, The Los Angeles Review, and a few others. Sarah collects owl pellets, Lotus slippers, antique doilies, porcelain dolls, old cologne/perfume bottles, and the occasional brass or ceramic swan

Rhoads Stevens was born in Baltimore and grew up in Honolulu. His first memory is of sucking on crab legs.

Jefferson Navicky was born in Chicago and grew up in Southeast Ohio. He earned degrees from Denison University and Naropa University. Recent work has appeared in Horse Less Review, Off the Coast, Smokelong Quarterly, and The Boston Theater Marathon. "Map of the Provinces" originally appeared in The Tangled Bank Anthology.

Matt Comi lives and writes and makes art in the Pacific Northwest.

Jaydn DeWald, a graduate of Pacific University's MFA program, lives with his wife in San Francisco, where he writes, plays bass for the DeWald/Taylor Quintet, and serves as an Associate Poetry Editor for Silk Road. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Beloit Poetry Journal, Columbia Poetry Review, The National Poetry Review, West Branch, Witness, and many others.

Sarena Ulibarri is currently pursuing her MFA at the University of Colorado, Boulder, where she is also on the staff of Timber Journal. Her fiction has recently appeared in Lightspeed, The Coachella Review, Monkeybicycle and elsewhere. Find more at sarenaulibarri.weebly.com

Henry Hoke was a child in Virginia and an adult in New York and California. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in Gigantic, PANK, and the New Short Fiction Series. He created and curates the ENTER > text immersive literary events at Concord art space in Los Angeles.

Joe Trinkle lives in Philadelphia. His writing has previously appeared in Pear Noir!, Atticus Review, New Fraktur Arts Journal, among other places. He is the author of White on White, a collection of short stories due out this fall.

Jacqueline Doyle lives in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she teaches at California State University, East Bay. Her work has recently been published in South Dakota Review, Front Porch Journal, Thin Air, and Ninth Letter online (winner of their meta-essay contest). She has creative non-fiction forthcoming in Sweet, New Plains Review, and South Loop Review, among others. “Jack-in-the-Box” was originally published in Otoliths. You can visit her here: www.facebook.com/authorjacqueline-doyle.

Janalyn Guo writes and bookbinds in Norwalk, Connecticut. Her fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in Anomalous Press, Interfictions, Bat City Review, Tarpaulin Sky, and other places. She is an editorial assistant at Unstuck Books.

Eric Boyd is a literary editor and short story writer. He was born on October 16th, at 3:33AM, 1988 in North Carolina. He briefly studied at the Maharishi University of Management in Fairfield, Iowa. He currently lives in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Boyd is a winner of the PEN American 2012 Prison Writing contest. His work has been featured in over two dozen magazines, journals, and websites.

This story is part of a larger collection Boyd is working on. The project consists of stories created through objects and is entitled Kaleidoscope. His website is here: <http://ericboydblog.tumblr.com/>