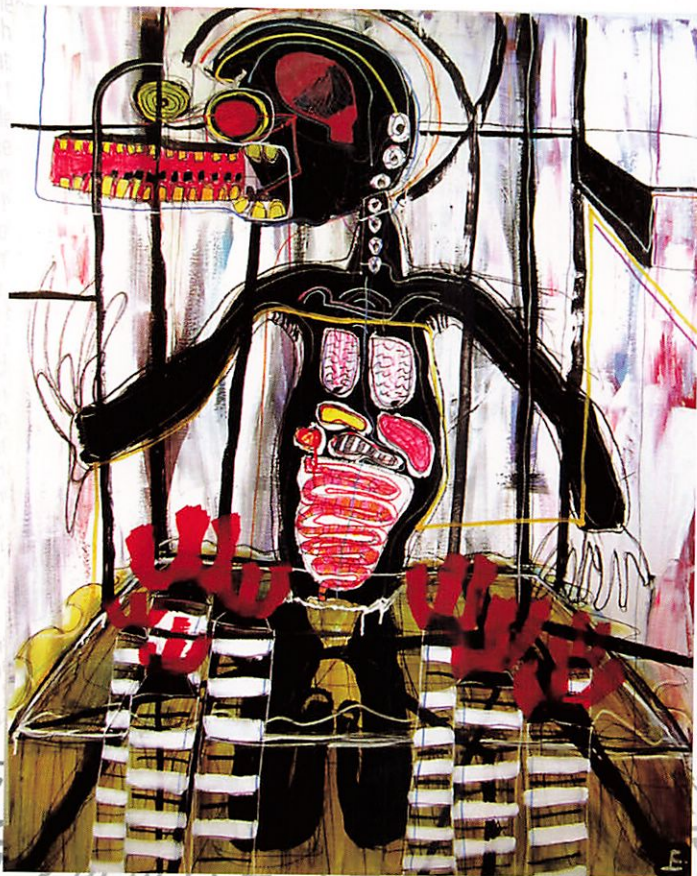


# Denali

Literary & Arts Magazine

2011





# Denali<sup>2011</sup>

Literary & Arts Magazine

Presented by Lane Community College  
*Presented by Lane Community College*

## **Editor/Designer**

Jessica Haeckel

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Johnny Beaver

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*Natasha Stringer*

## Shadowed Branches

Nicole Taylor

Streaked frosted winter trees  
Spread shadowed branches.

Thin wandering oaks.  
Other thin dream bodies

Sketchy unknown roots, family  
Trees or far-reaching foreigners.

One branches out early  
for a short time and possibly returns,

as if the young asking  
for spare change.

## Woman in a Pink Hat

Emma Glaspey

This is the first time I have ridden the bus in some time. I had forgotten its rhythmic hum, failed to recall the diversity of its population, each of them with their own story playing out silently.

At the front of the bus sits a little old woman wearing a pink hat and scarf which clash with her red coat, though she doesn't seem to mind. She sits in silence, dark glasses hiding her eyes. What makes her stand out to me, what catches my intrigue, is not the silence, or the glasses, or the hat and scarf which clash with her coat. What interests me is the small smirk on her face. The woman in the pink hat is smiling quietly to herself, as if she knows a secret which nobody else is aware of. Perhaps this woman has learned to see the humor in the monotony of daily life. Maybe she is on her way to see someone special. The sun is quickly sinking behind the clouds and there is no further need for sunglasses, yet the little woman does not remove them. Instead, she continues to hide her eyes, and I wonder if these glasses make her feel mysterious. Perhaps they help her feel safe, as a special blanket or toy does for a young child? There could be a much simpler answer, but this thought is far less romantic and so I fail to linger on it. I could ask her all these questions, but more than answers, I like questions. The little old woman in the red coat could be anyone, I will never know and the mystery will stay intact. The bus pulls over and the little woman gets up. This is her stop and so she exits as if leaving a stage after a great performance. The bus continues on again. I quiet my mind and go back to listening to the rhythmic hum once again, joining in the lonely, disconnected silence of my fellow riders as I, too, await my stop; my exit, the end of my journey.



## Kenai - Rough-Legged Hawk

Candice Westberg



## Dangling Conversations

Penny Wilkes

They attract as couplets  
near the hors d'oeuvres.

*I'm an apostrophe in his life.  
just a place saver. She shoves*

a bitten chip deep into  
the bean dip. *He never talks*

*about us. Always of his times  
with others.*

"You seem a misplaced modifier,"  
The newcomer shares.

"You serve champagne  
to the men in paper cups."

He leans forward to wipe  
the dip from her cheek.

*"No. he hates commas.  
Feels they slow him down;*

*a semi-colon adds sophistication  
he doesn't understand."*

She turns away,  
fancies herself

an ampersand  
A ballerina.

head down, with drowsy eyes,  
she throws ellipses

to another man with whom  
she will not miss a period.

## Family Matters

By Elena Daniels

There are some people, sometimes even related, that come into your life for only a brief moment, for no apparent reason but to turn you upside down like an unopened jug of orange juice—to shake up the sediment that has collected at the bottom. That was Uncle Dick. Hardly more than a sperm donor, he gave his half of DNA to my father, as well as his formal name—Richard. To my two brothers and me, he was just Uncle Dick. Papa insisted on “uncle,” without telling why. For most of my years growing up in Germany, my father’s father existed to us only by his pseudonym, until one summer day, I met, first-hand, my estranged grandfather.

I retracted momentarily at first sight of him: a pot-bellied sixty-year-old, adorned by a western-suit and a tan Stetson, in scratchy baby-blue polyester that would make the most affable house cat retreat, yet quite at ease in his meretricious get-up. He didn’t hold back either on flashing countless stained teeth or holding my reluctant hand. Only his eyes seemed unimposing and small. At age ten, I spent the next seven days perfecting my sidle away from grandpa, or if already trapped by one of his hands, slipping out as soon as possible, without anyone knowing: I was counting every minute. No one—not even my father—had held my hand that much. Maybe this is what people do in America. I knew very little about the place, a land as foreign to me as my Uncle Dick.

It wasn’t until my college years, on my way to Mexico the summer of 1989, that I had opportunity to get to know the man my father never claimed as his kin. My lover, Ingo, and I had rumbled south aboard *The Green Tortoise* through stunning panoramas of Douglas-firs, sugarwhite mountains, and mysterious lakes, to arrive one afternoon with the same

deep thirst as was visible on the landscape of southern California. This is where our journey together ended. On an empty stretch of highway that etched a burn mark on the face of the earth, the old hippie bus coughed to a stop and spit me out, along with a man-sized army surplus bag, my closet for the next three months. "Head down this off ramp and you'll soon get into Visalia," said the Rastafari behind the wheel. My eyes followed his outstretched arm pointing to somewhere behind my head. Before I could turn back around, the bus doors swung shut, and I stood in a cloud of dust and diesel gas, alone.

Years later, my husband would refer to southern California as "the desert turned rice paddy, irrigated with money." Even without this insight, I couldn't believe anyone would choose to call the powdered-cinnamon landscape home. I wandered in the direction of town and caught a taxi to my aunt's house. There, a lawn sign out front announced the house for sale. When I knocked on the front door, no one answered. I waited a while, sitting on the glazed tiled steps just long enough to concoct crazy thoughts in my head: What if they've moved? We had briefly telephoned days ago before I'd left Oregon. It was unlikely my aunt would pack up and leave just in time for me to show up at her doorstep. Then again, I didn't know her any more than I knew her father, my Uncle Dick. Before I could drive myself nuts with any more speculation, I decided to ask a neighbor for the whereabouts of my aunt.

"Oh, Pat should be right back. She probably just slipped out for an errand. They just put their house on the market...It for sure isn't sold ... and they still live there." Thanking her, I wondered if there was more to the story the Jane Fonda throw-back could've told me, but I read her I'm-not-telling-more smile and headed back next door. Thirty minutes later, my aunt pulled up in a brown Jeep, her face looking like a crumpled grocery

bag, part frown, part forty-some years of too much sun. "You been waiting long?" she asked in a weary tone.

"A little bit. I saw the sign and thought for a minute, maybe... you'd moved already."

"Here. Come on in." And dropping a couple of octaves: "There's something we have to talk about." Then in a louder voice: "Let me get these groceries put away." It's the kind of trick that parents play on their kids when they want you to think they're talking about one thing, when really, it's something else.

Her child, my cousin Rachel, didn't seem to care either way. I barely caught sight of her as she beat a hasty retreat to a bedroom at the far end of the house. She was no longer the little towhead sitting criss-cross-apple-sauce on wet beach sand, preoccupied with her shovel and bucket while someone snapped the photo that found its way into my baby album by conviction of my parents: hard evidence—I had a cousin! No, this creature had grown body fat, some of which crested in two good-sized womanly mounds on her chest. Her tresses weren't so white-blond anymore—just yellow blond—and probably helped along with some of those bleach jobs women buy at the local drugstore. She must have learned that legs aren't just for parking the body on sand, for they were now on public display, decorated with a mere wanting of fabric. There was nothing elegant either about the maillot she wore underneath, just like you'd expect from a sixteen-year-old girl who'd picked up random items of clothing littering her bedroom floor in the morning, as long as they didn't stink.

"Can I get you something to drink?" my aunt offered.

I wanted to say, "Yeah, a shot of tequila," but Aunt Pat didn't strike me as the drinking type. "Do you have any orange juice?" I asked instead.

The way she poured the juice, closed the fridge door, and moved about



**Horsehair Raku**  
Kat Niebel

the large kitchen reminded me of Papa. There was the same kind of stiffness in her movements and the same tightness around the mouth of her square Mainville face that convinced me I belonged.

"Oh, I should call Grandpa sooner than later." I had almost forgotten about him.

"What for?"

"Well, I was supposed to stay with him while I'm here, so I could get to know him. He's probably wondering where I am. I didn't have his exact address, so I thought it best to come here first." I could tell by her expression, I'd said something wrong.

"I wouldn't go over there if I were you," she said, strangely quiet.

"Why not?"

"He's a sick old man. He molested Rachel for the last ten years . . . we just found out." I didn't know what to say. I waited for the right words to come, but there weren't any. Wait a minute; did she know this for sure?

"How did you find out?"

"Rachel got her first boyfriend a few months ago. They were trying to have sex and I guess she just . . . couldn't . . . that's when she told him everything and he convinced her she should tell us. She finally did." My aunt's voice trailed off into painful territory. For all of her usual stiffness, the one side of her mouth suddenly sagged in opposition like the shape of Lake Michigan I'd seen on a map. Her brows became canyons, deep receptacles where guilt and anger get lost in plummeting darkness. Transported by time, she rode their depths until they consumed her whole: red head, small frame, painted toe nails—all! I wouldn't fully understand the gravity of her experience until I was a parent myself, almost a decade later.

Angst imprisons its victims like a stalled movie traps its story

characters; both get stuck in one haunting scene. I wanted to free my aunt from bondage. In a desperate act, I thought it might help her to hear a story, buried deeply in my memory, untold until now:

"I remember when Uncle Dick came to visit us the first Thanksgiving we lived in the States. It was the second time I met him. I was around twelve. Mama and Papa needed to buy some groceries for our barbeque that evening and decided to drive to Junction City, about six miles out. I told them I wanted to stay.

"Then Uncle Dick said, 'Me, too.'

"All the while Mama and Papa were gettin' ready to go, I couldn't shake the feeling of a merry-go-round spinning in my stomach. Til I couldn't take it anymore: I whispered to my mom in German, 'Don't leave me here alone with him!'

"She said, 'What's the matter? It's just your grandpa.'" And I begged her: 'I don't know . . . just don't leave me alone with him—please!' Luckily, my mom went with it.

"Elena has decided to come along, after all,' she told Grandpa.

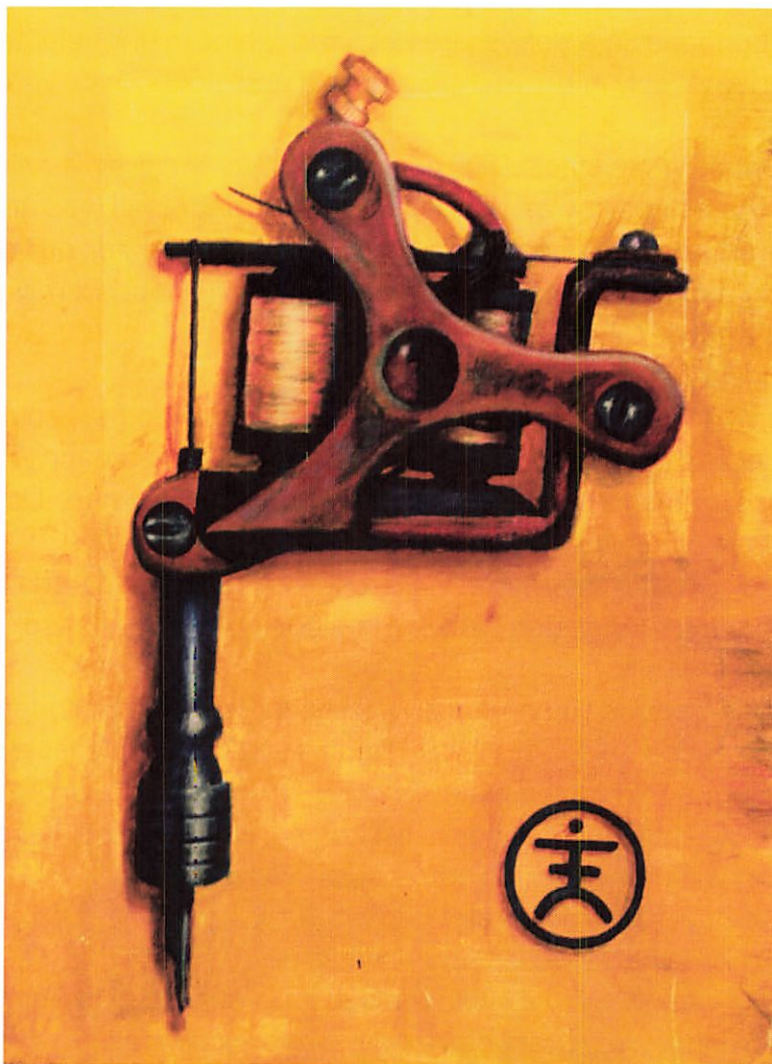
"And then Grandpa said, 'Oh, I think I'll come along, too.' What a surprise. I shot my mom a told-you-so glance. I could tell even she started to get it, the way she was shifting her body. In the end, Uncle Dick did end up going shopping with 'em. I stayed home alone. Safe."

Aunt Pat's eyes narrowed and darkened.

"I wish I'd known that years ago," she said.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know if I was making it up. It's just this funny feeling I had." In retrospect, my story could have been a bad idea.

People always think they're gonna do something different if only they'd known such and such. If only they'd known there was something to that



## Yellow Tattoo Machine

Jessica Haeckel

weird hunch they'd had about getting off the airplane before it took off. Right. Actually, people want hard evidence to support that hunch. A gun or a bomb, or the hijacker himself maybe. At age twelve, I was lucky not to have hard evidence. I had something better: golden intuition.

When I saw him the next day, Uncle Dick had become an old man, his arm skin sagging as much as his cotton shorts. Even his pot belly lacked its former liveliness, melting along with his ass muscles like the fondue cheese blanketing a speared cube of bread. He was shuffling aimlessly in felt slippers across his living room, slowed by tar-encrusted air pipes whistling in protest of such a wasteful task.

As he drew close, I saw his face: bristle brows drawn together, the surrounding skin ruffled, half hiding an absent hazel stare. Clearly something was eating him, but I waited for him to spill the beans.

"What'd she tell ya, huh?" And once more, "What'd she say?" I felt sorry for him in his state of torture, evident in the open pupils and uncontrolled mouth spray of his face.

"Aunt Pat? She said you molested Rachel since she was six years old." My eyes searched for his, but they were busy elsewhere. The box face reddened a few shades deeper, as he suddenly pelted me with these words:

"That wasn't me who did! She oughtta look out for that bastard husband of hers. . . T-Terry i-is the pervert." It was a proposal that hadn't entered my mind. I pictured Terry's rugged frame: the thick, wavy hair, the eyes as deep as the pool in their back yard, and the solid-gold smile. In the heavy winter that had come to settle on my aunt's home, he was the first breeze to brush over unopened crocuses. Pervert? A hard sell. But for now, I pretended to buy.

"I don't really know the guy. He seemed nice enough, but whadda I

know? It wouldn't be the first time a stepfather took advantage of a child," I said, with a slight shrug, carefully keeping my gaze on the dimpled center of Uncle Dick's chin. Whether he was truly convinced or just plain worn out, I'll never know. With a shuffle in the direction of the kitchen, he asked, "Do you wanna drink? I could use a whiskey myself."

"Got any red wine?" He did. And from then on, we no longer talked about the monumental family matter.

I hadn't come to investigate any crime. Pretty sure of what I already knew viscerally about my Uncle Dick, I left my kin to jury over his innocence or guilt. My family's past was already punched with holes like a peg board; I wanted to fill in as many missing parts as I could. Who was this man, the person who occupied a rachis on the branch of my family tree? How did he become the man melting in front of me today? Somehow I had to know him to better understand myself.

I caught a glance of my own reflection in the glass of the china cabinet close to where I sat. Most of my high school days I hated my square jawline, clearly a trait gifted to the family by Grandpa. I thought it looked unfeminine, even enshrined with my waist-long, golden hair, which now tied in a loose ponytail, cascaded down my back. My blue eyes with their centered gold rings, carefully studied many times in front of a mirror, must have come from my mother's side; but their close proximity to the nose bridge—that was one hundred percent Uncle Dick. And, for reasons hard to explain, I felt at peace with that. We spent the whole rest of the day, and well into the night, him telling stories, and me listening. Slowly, color enriched what had, up until then, only been a two-minute sketch of the man who was my grandfather. The old man retrieved memories from deep within the folds of his skin, from the connective tissue where recorded lie all moments, even the passage into our world through the womb

tunnel, of a younger version of himself, when smooth skin stretched over the square shelf of his chin and his eyes still reflected hunger for life itself—a handsome player. There were joyful moments of a boy winning baseball games, exhilarating ones of awakening to teenaged carnal lust and a rushed wedding (to my father's mother), painful ones following the break-up and the adopting-out of his two sons, and ones that almost killed him: of his life's love, Betty (Aunt Pat's mother), as she slowly slipped away from him in her battle with cancer. His stories repaired the missing pieces vital to any family scaffold; they ended the unexplainable pain I had carried with me my whole life, pain that was my father's, pain that had caused the family tree to splinter, leaving those of us on the broken branch feeling disconnected, like we didn't belong. The next morning, I departed for Mexico a stronger—but not hardened—young woman, knowing that I would never again see my Uncle Dick; knowing for certain, family matters.

## For Lady Paula Merry on Her Birthday

Travis Dandy

In less than three years, I will be thirty. This means I will have to start going to dinner parties, right? At that age the police stop in periodically to make sure you aren't eating Samoan girl-scout cookies with martinis at six in the evening, don't they? I don't know anyone who really eats dinner. I mean at a table, with a cloth and something shining in the center. I guess they'll take me away.

Will I start walking slower? Subtly, over time? I've always assumed that those who walk slower than me must place less value on their lives than I do on mine. Don't they know that humans have a teleological nature? I've got places to go. Things to do. It's a pity that pace doesn't affect the passage of time.

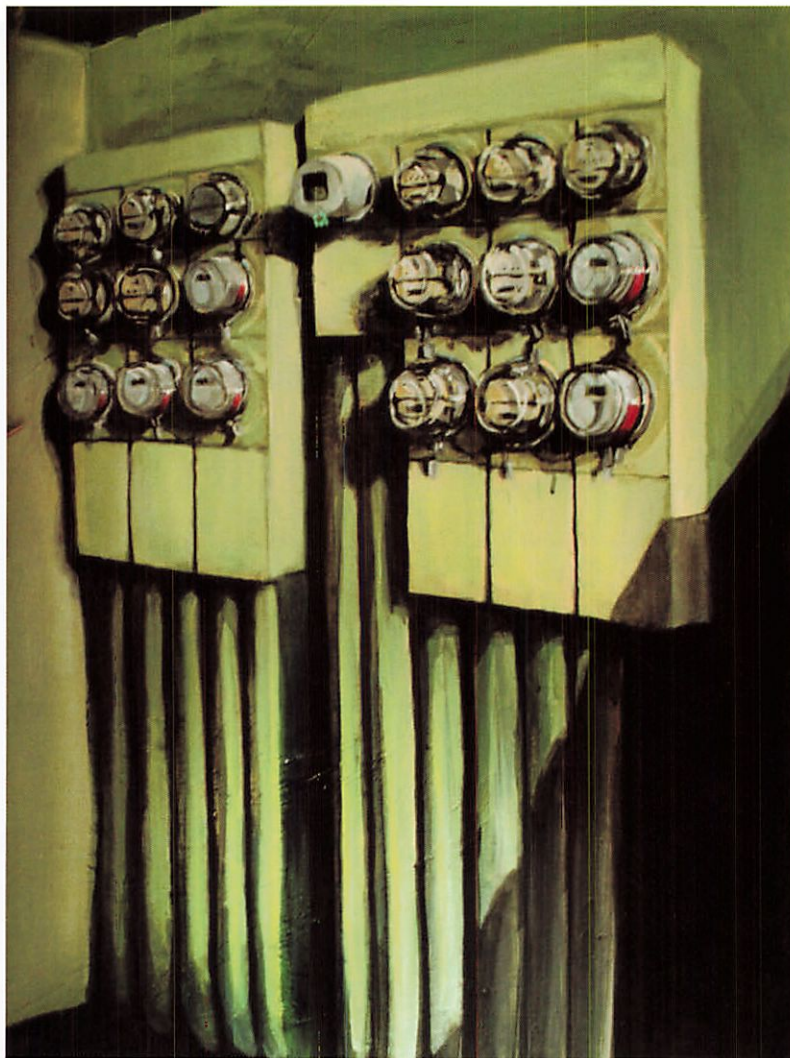
There's nothing you can do that's impressive when you're thirty. No child ever even thinks to imagine it. It's an impossible place. You either wasted your youth or did what you were supposed to. You're on the right track or doomed to lose two fingers in a mill mishap in the same town you went to grade school in. You should be on disability but you failed the drug test you knew was coming.

Death becomes less and less a cartoon character in robes with a gleaming scythe and more and more an appointment with personal annihilation. The failures of every past universal salvation fall upon your shoulders. They tried so hard. Marxism, libertarianism, flower power, charismatic revival, huffing glue and the moon landing. We're still here. Have you got any bright ideas?

No one writes poetry about people of thirty. Too old to fight in the infantry, too young to command battalions. Journeymen without master works.



**Water Meters I**  
Drew Bardana



**Water Meters II**  
Drew Bardana

If they would just let you run again. Once or twice. What if I had said something differently or sooner or softer? Would she be here today listening to me complain, instead of drinking cheap beer over some impassable stretch of road in the mountains? She's probably getting toilet paper off the high shelf for some half-speed elderly women at the twenty-four hour super store. Bagging up marzipan and pulp novels at the end of a check stand. Anyway, there are worse things than all of that.

For us up and comers there are conspiracy theories special tailored for each fanatic. Every parasite must die as zealots take the planks from each others eyes. Wake up! It's too late! "They" have taken over everything. We'll all die unloved and penniless. Islamist reptilians working in cahoots with the royal family have allowed the pink liberals to destroy the foundations of our society. Divide and binge and purge. It's a shame. It really is. If only we'd listened.

I suspect that mine is the last generation that will have to die. It's so tedious now. Our grandchildren should ride on laser beams and eat with their pores. Our epoch will be remembered as quaint and moderately charming but our taste in music will be considered to have been rather poor. I am jealous of everyone and embarrassed for you all. At least that's what it seems like, approaching thirty.



**Portrait in Autumn**  
Jessica Haeckel

## **A Basket of Fruits and Light**

Philos Molina

I have thought of Consuelito lately. Her face was as firm as a ripe Guatemalan apple. She was a fruit scarce in my country of long, sultry seasons. Her golden locks dropped and waved like a hanging raceme of bananas. Her eyes reminded us of green coconut husk and her lips of cacao flowers. When she smiled, we knew that happiness was possible even in our lethargic town of Suchitoto, because her teeth, as white as *Inga punctata*, reminded us of something we longed for yet ineffable: we could not even decipher the syntaxes of her mouth or the meaning of her dimples.

We all knew the sculpture of her body by heart; we could have carved a sculpture with our eyes closed; we even learned how to read and count the steps she walked on the cobblestone streets of the town; and we could find her by the redolence of lavender soap she left behind, after her afternoon baths.

When Pepe Melgar went mad, we understood. We were all mad: he was the only one who admitted it.

As for me, she was the only spark of light my eyes saw in the darkness. She left my heart filled with hopes and dreams. They were so many that, as the Portuguese poet Pessoa would say, my chest, overfilled with new things, could not be closed. "No Summer is going to wither our love," she promised one hot afternoon, as we drank passion fruit juice in the back porch of her house. Two weeks later she was engaged to Pepe, yes, the madman.

I left town soon after their wedding. "You are going North," she said the last time I saw her, as we were coming out of mass, and said no

more. I stood and watched her strolling down the street, one Sunday after mass at five, until the sun showed his face no more on the lot of blue and orange sky we called our universe. She did not turn around.

Many years passed before I went back to El Salvador. In between there was a war that proved we were fatuous—a lesson that cost us over seventy thousands souls, not counting the ones we missed because we were too exhausted to count. We learned what it would have cost us nothing. I asked my friends Calín and Papo whether they remembered Consuelito, but they didn't. They even joked that I had made it all up, though to appease my grave concern, Calín said: "Most people either died or left town."

"And they were lucky," added Papo.

But, I insisted: "what about Consuelito? We were all enchanted then." I reminded them how beautiful she was, "as beautiful as basket of fruits," I venture to say rather mawkishly. But we all were drunk by that time and we paid no attention to our drowned truths. Before we collapsed in Chicho's bar, someone babbled: "You were the one who left."

I still think of her and hold no regrets. Well, perhaps just one: that her spark was so fugacious and yet left my soul blind.



## To Church and For a Drink

Sarah Keartes

## **Freya**

Johannes Pedersen

My heart burns for you  
The rising star of anarchy

Liberty's progenitor,  
Nurse together  
Our ragged bunch

Let our love be the spark  
That lights Beltane's signal  
-A beacon to gather nature's watch



**Oh Drag**  
Lady Shay



## Birdsleep

Kathryn Stromme

I prevented myself from sleeping by accident. A third grader rife with neuroses, I would lay with my eyes wide open staring at my bedroom ceiling, then close them lightly til my lids barely kissed to see if I could tell the different between the night in the room and the night in my head. I experimented with positions: curled completely fetal under flannel sheets and comforter or stomach-flopped with limbs aligned parallel like a sun-bather or knees bent and only one butt cheek touching the mattress but with my back completely flat. I picked at the gunk under my fingernails, hummed to myself, counted numbers in my head until it got too boring and nineteen sounded like twenty five, which sounded like three. After some period I realized it was odd that I was still awake, that it was far past when I should have been sleeping but I couldn't seem to settle down. I did my best, but as mindless ticks from the clock on the wall crept by I would become more and more panicked. Why aren't I asleep? I wished for the time traveling sensation of slumber, wished that it could be morning. Thoughts of this nature always led inevitably to thoughts of sleep in general, which was the most troubling concept I wrestled with. I tangled the edges of my sheets around my ankles and tucked the cool outside surface beneath my legs as far as it would reach, body and thoughts shifting in unison: How could I just lie here for eight hours and not remember what happened? How can that much time pass without my being conscious of it? Will morning still come if I never go to sleep? Are all my friends asleep right now? Is my goldfish asleep? Can my goldfish sleep? These abstracts perplexed me to no end; it was usually mental exhaustion from contemplating my philosophies that sent me to sleep. Awake by accident, asleep by accident.

My mom had a few tricks at the ready when I confided in her. She began by presenting me with a mug of warm milk right before bedtime, which I found to be positively foul and unnatural and much more unpleasant than a restless night. Next she told me about a relaxation strategy: lying in bed straight like a board, I should make myself aware of my legs, my feet, my heels and my toes. Then, starting with my toes, I should focus on relaxing them completely, one at a time, in whatever order I liked. Then the whole foot, then move with this sort of wave of respite slowly up my legs and gradually into my entire body. "Make sure you end with the eyes," she explained to me, ever the would-be naturopath, "most of the time you don't even notice the muscles there." Naturally, as with my number strategy, boredom set in long before I got even to my bony hips and my mind would wander: If I stayed awake all night and slept during the day, would I be afraid of light? If my body is completely unwound, am I still getting rest?

Weekends with my dad were always a radically different environment; his home lacked structure and policy in my eyes. The apartment was on the bottom level of a gloomy brown house owned by a gloomy brown couple and had only one bedroom. When my brother and I stayed over we slept together in my dad's big queen-sized bed and he slept on the couch. I usually slept better in that bed, perhaps the diversion my brother provided played a role in that. One night in particular, however, I rolled back and forth for hours. I rubbed my hands against the polyester sheets until they tingled and listened closely through the ceiling to the landlords' restrained conversations. When the sleep thoughts began to appear, I wandered out into the living room to find my dad. All six feet of him were stretched out on his cheap sofa and he had a colorful blanket with pictures of fruit baskets woven into it draped over his legs. The tele-

vision was playing bright cartoons on mute so it was quiet enough that when I whispered "Dad? Dad?" he rolled over and asked what was wrong. I explained that I couldn't sleep, explained why as best I could: "...and I keep thinking about how weird sleep is and I get bored just lying there and I want to just close my eyes and wake up and it to be morning!" I was annoyed and frustrated with my faulty mind. He gestured come here and I did, finding a warm spot on the sofa where his body had been. He picked up the remote and turned the volume back up and began flipping channels.

"Have you ever seen *The Birds*?" He asked me, stopping on a channel where people in old-fashioned clothes were talking worriedly to each other.

"No, what is it?"

"Oh, you'll love it. Now shhhh..." he shifted to take up less room, lifted my feet and placed them on top of his knees. I stretched out my legs to assume the position he had been lying in when I walked in. The scratchy blanket pulled up to my chin and my dad next to me rubbing my feet I watched ten minutes into the film before all my muscles, toes to eyes, relaxed and I finally slipped into the night.

## The Green Man of the Aeons

Leo Rivers

Gentle are the deer, the doe that stand in circle round the buck  
pungent is the scent of spoor and bark  
chewed belts round each sapling's slender waist,  
sapling's slim stalks like ladies in waiting by the path  
that from this wild-flower wind blown clearing go  
on an elf road down to the thick green pond  
where fish sleepless keep  
without judgment the darkness of its deep.

This is the World as the World made the World  
this is the fir columned Natural Temple  
of the ghosts of the lords who pursued their dames  
through the valleys and the ways - rampant, rude, and unashamed  
before the World before our World  
and its dreary schoolbook list of wars and forgotten fame.

Here am I, soon a sigh,  
steeped in frost's shawled bushes like gossiping witches  
puddles glazed with ices and lichens in spider-web nations  
shivering in shadows and birdsong sung revelations  
and the owl's impassive stare where  
the day dies like an exhalation that asks  
"who goes there?"

and then forgets the question.



**Dragon Carving**  
Kirk Daniel Wilson



## **Birth on Death**

Larissa Paige McGlade

Why is he still lying there?

When does he ascend to heaven with the angels?

His body, disintegrating into the ravenous soil

A decayed iron smell emerges from the remaining skeletal figure

Dense bone cracked by unrelenting predators

Shredded chunks of corpse brought to feed vultures' young

Flies hovering over carcasses, flies sneaking through doors ajar, flies  
perched on plush carpet

Rimming the toilet seat, idealizing themselves in the mirror, one now  
swatted by my tissue covered hand

Legs quivering, others amputated by force

Its fragile winged body joined the hair in my trash

Discarded, like the body outside

Flies feeding off morsels of flesh that were

Preserved by a salty puddle

They diligently lay minute eggs, which instantly hatch

Birth on death, maggots clustering on the dead body

Why is he still lying there?

## For Valerie

Melissa Hicks

Ophelia, we knew thee—

We watched in wonder beneath the  
breezy tendrils of the weeping willow,  
as for one moment you floated, serene,  
bouyed by the waves of your own making;  
Watched the tiny waves that rippled and lapped;  
watched the tiny splashes of madness that held you up  
impossibly,  
before pulling you down.

Ophelia, we knew thee—

We whispered in the halls and courts  
of him, but never to you.  
Whispered warnings to each other but  
never found that most vulnerable ear.  
You were too pure to see the darkness  
too kind to let it make a difference.  
Until his madness touched your own  
and there was nothing left to be said.

Ophelia, we watched and waited—

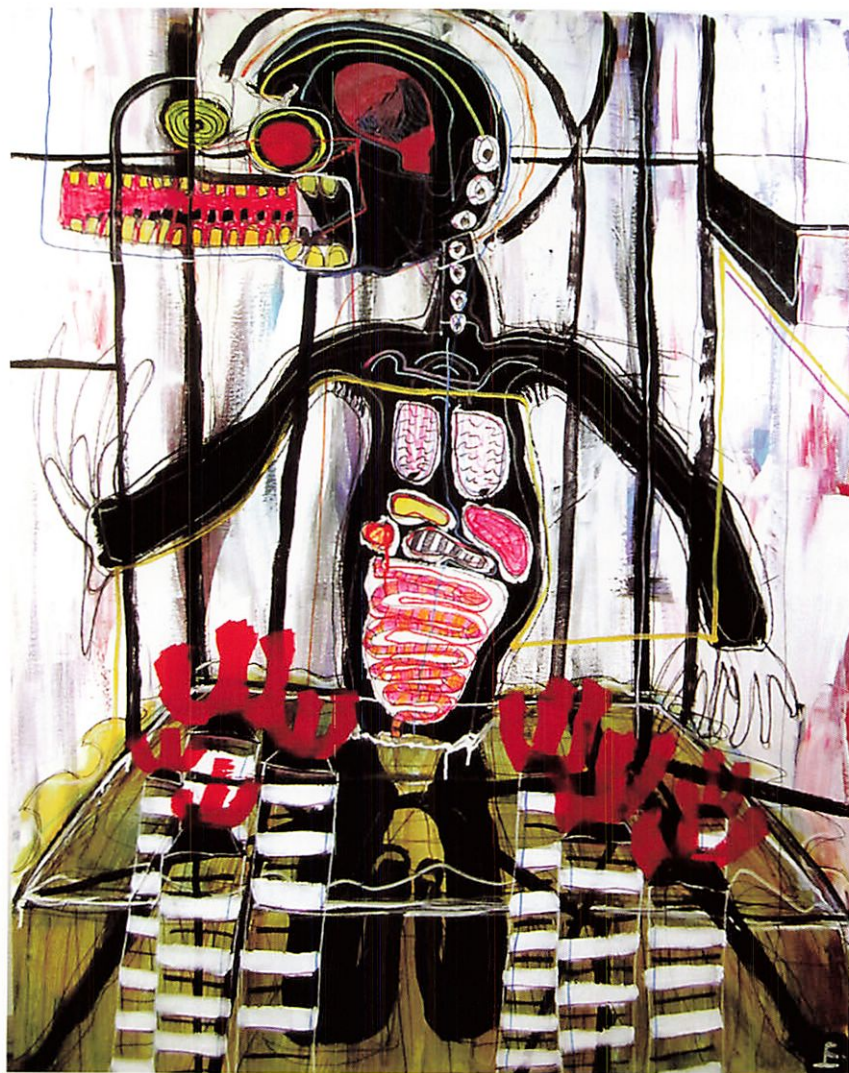
We saw your love as stronger than his ailment.  
We did not know how deeply, how quickly  
that poison could travel and taint.

Ophelia, we saw your love and hope  
beneath the willow boughs that day—  
We watched it float for an impossible eternity,  
We watched as it sank with you.  
We watched a woman too strong, too sane  
to love a madman, turn mad  
so to save the only love she had.  
Too sane to be sacrificed, you shared his delusion  
to keep your heart whole.

Oh sweet Ophelia, we watched—  
Your pretty death from beginning  
To end and only when it was over  
could we speak of jumping in, too afraid  
to drown ourselves beside you.  
We saved our tears in disbelief until  
the water's surface regained its glassy calm.  
A silver mirror without a reflection;  
We look to see an image no longer entirely our own.  
No sign of what was lost for passersby;  
A memorial of peaceful nothing,  
to a violent end.

Ophelia we stared and paused—  
As you hovered at the water's top,  
your blossom burdened bridal-bower-funeral-train bobbing,  
oh so lightly, as your singing silence took you.  
Wet lips that wavered,

sustaining your song 'til the last.



## Just a Normal Kid

Tyler McCarty

As a child, we're taught in absolutes. As our mind grows, we see the intricacies of the world. We're taught rules and beliefs and concepts and theories and faiths. We're taught to love our family and honor our friends.

My upbringing was different. One of my first memories is of riding in my father's lap while he was driving. I remember holding his drink. He told me to try it. It made me feel funny but it tasted good. I remember the flashing lights when we were pulled over. After that, I remember the police officers playing with me. I remember showing them how I was a good walker. I remember my mom picking me up and crying. I didn't see my dad for a while.

Later, when I asked my mother, she told me that my dad had cocaine on him. He was also driving drunk. I had been doing some of the driving too. I was four years old.

As I grew from a toddler into a child, I watched my parents fight. I saw my mother pull a gun on my father. I watched them scream and destroy the house. That's when we had a house to fight in. Sometimes it was a car. Or a warehouse. Or a friend's garage. Sometimes I wouldn't see them at all because I'd be "visiting Aunt Vicki."

They weren't fighting just to fight; they had a reason. It was always the same reason. It was their *raison d'être*. Drugs. It was always drugs. Methamphetamine. Cocaine. Crack. Angel dust. Speedballs. My parents needed it and they got it. They always got it. It was always the priority. It trumped everything and everyone. Even me.

School taught me that what they were doing was wrong. It wasn't just

wrong; it was a crime. "D.A.R.E. to stand up to drugs!" That's what I was bombarded with in elementary school. I understood that my parents were the "bad guys". I kept their secret. I had to. I knew that if I told my teachers that my parents were using and selling drugs, I would get taken away. Or my dad would. Or my mom. No matter what happened, it was the end of my world. My world was unpleasant but it was the only one I had.

Calling it unpleasant was downplaying it quite a bit. My dad was doing odd jobs for a friend, so the friend let us stay at the warehouse at his shop. We could only be there after business hours. We had a tiny mattress that my mother, my father, my sister, and I shared. We had a social worker come in to interview us there. I remember crawling on her lap and telling her that when it got really, really, really cold, that we'd all snuggle under the blanket to get warm. My dad was happy because that got us more welfare. My mom gave me a candy bar for dinner. I remember one Christmas where my dad went out to get us dinner and didn't show up until after New Year's. I didn't get any presents that year.

When I made friends and saw what they had, I was jealous. I was never mean because of it. All I felt was longing. I wanted to be like them. I wanted to be like everyone else. I cried a lot.

I was always cautious about bringing my friends home. That's when I had a home, of course. I knew that if they ever found out my secret, they would tell on me. I knew that I couldn't have a sleepover. My parents offered to have them, but I'd say no. They didn't get it. They didn't understand what it was like living with them. I knew I had to keep my friends away from them. I had to protect my parents from themselves.

I resented my parents for that. I wanted to have secrets with my friends; I wanted to tell them everything. It was a poison inside me. I hated my parents for that. I hated that they got to have so much and I had

nothing. I hated that they got to be “bad guys” and “criminals”. I hated that they weren’t the “good guys”. I hated that I had to keep their secret. I hated their drugs.

I had to be someone else. I had to pretend a lot. I had a friend named Mike whose mother was a school counselor. She called me into her office one morning and asked me questions about my family. Uncomfortable questions. She asked me about my dad’s drinking and drug habits. I really liked hanging out with Mike, so I lied to her. I told her that my parents were in recovery and that things were getting better. I did some coloring worksheets. I charted my dad’s recovery and how my life was good now. I knew that I had to be better about hiding my parents. I was eight years old.

I had a few friends. There was David, who was Catholic. Jimbo was the funny one. Mickey and Andrew were the brothers next door. they were all in my neighborhood.

Then there was Ian. Ian was the best of us. He was the Boy Scout. If I’ve ever known anyone who fit the definition of “chivalrous” it would be Ian. He was a man born in a child’s body. He always did the right thing, he was always ready to play, and he was always there for me.

Ian moved into my neighborhood when I was ten. He had two little brothers but they were annoying. One always followed us because we were, obviously, much cooler than him. He was Isaac. Jacob was the baby. Jacob could walk but he didn’t have words yet. There was Melanie, the mother. She was kind. She had short dark hair. Her glasses were large and round. She was an egg with legs and lots of sweaters. Dan was the patriarch. He was a tall man with a small belly and a thin mustache. His hair was always slicked back, hiding his ever-growing baldness.

Ian and I liked to play Mario Kart. I would come down to his house



to play his Nintendo 64 because I didn't have any video games. He was always Yoshi and I was always Bowser. After hours of racing down Rainbow Road and shooting each other with red turtle shells, Ian would get us blue Kool Aid. Blue Kool Aid was the best. We liked having blue tongues.

One day, Ian and I were playing versus mode on Mario Kart and his dad came home. His hair was mussed up and his eyes were focused. He went to the kitchen where Melanie was. The TV and the kitchen shared a wall. I could hear them talking. Dan was angry. I had seen this happen before at my house. Dan took Melanie into their bedroom, which was adjacent to the living room. He pulled her in by the arm. I watched him slam the door. Ian was still playing the game. I heard Dan screaming at Melanie. He called her names and asked her questions. Why hadn't she put any fucking gas in the car? Why did he have to walk home to get the other car because she had been so fucking stupid? Now he was late for work and it was all her fault. I grabbed the controller and went back to playing, but Ian had stopped; he was watching the door. I tried handing him the controller but he wouldn't take it. I told him I was going to kill his guy if he didn't play with me soon. He didn't care; his eyes were fixed on the door. I went back to the game. I could hear things in the bedroom winding down. I kept my eyes on the game. Dan left the room and walked out the front door, slamming it behind him. These things happened regularly at Ian's house.

One day I came home from school and saw Dan in my living room. He was talking to my dad. If Dan met my dad, he must know what my dad does. What he *does*. They said hello to me and went down to our basement. I imagined Dan threatening my dad. Dan was telling my dad that if he or I ever came near his family again that he'd call the cops. He'd kill us. It was over. My life was over. I had to play it cool. I wanted to scream. I

wanted to run away. I could hide in the public library. It was close by and it was huge. No one would find me. I could do it. I turned on the TV. I didn't pay attention, but I knew it would make everyone think I was okay. I couldn't afford to freak out.

Dan and my father came back up. They were laughing again. Dan came over to me. He asked me if he could buy some Texas Gold. My heart sank. I knew what had happened.

Texas Gold is what I called my pee. My parents had been selling meth for a while so we got to know a lot of people who didn't have clean urine. I was just a little kid. My parents made me urinate into a cup. They would charge people for my urine and give me a few dollars. These people would use my pee to scam job interviews. If they took the urine and put it into a bottle liner and taped it to their leg, the body heat would keep the urine in the right temperature range. It wouldn't show up on the urine analysis as too hot or too cold. That's how I earned my allowance. Texas Gold was my way of making it funny. My parents and their friends loved it.

My father had infected Dan. That's how I saw it. An infection. It was a plague; it was a poison. Ian would be infected like me. I took Dan's money and he took my pee. Later that day, I bought Ian and me a cheeseburger from Dairy Queen.

The thing about addiction is that addicts have to be good at it to survive. In real recovery programs, they say that people have to work the program. My parents were Olympians at working addiction. After a while, the arrests stopped, but the using and selling didn't. They managed to hold onto jobs longer than other addicts. They were pros.

Dan was not a pro. Dan wanted too much. He got as much as he could from my parents. He was a fixture in our basement after a while. Ian looked more ragged every day. Dan lost his job. Dan was self-destruct

ing. After almost eight months, Melanie got Dan out of the house. She divorced him. He didn't come around anymore.

Ian was a lot happier after that. He had been happy before but this was different. He wasn't as tense. He was free. I liked seeing him that way.

After Dan was gone, Melanie took Ian and his brothers to Disneyland. They came back with Mickey hats. They had foam hands, posters, plates, toys, pictures, and clothes. Ian told me about it. He told me every detail. He told me what it was like on Space Mountain. He told me about the tea cups. He showed me a picture of him and Donald Duck. Donald was always his favorite. He let me keep the picture.

I had always wanted to go to Disneyland. My mom and dad had an empty water jug. My mom called it our Disneyland fund. We had this jug for as long as I can remember. My mom and dad would put their spare change in it. If I found some change, I would put it in the jug too. Sometimes we would run out of things that my dad would need. He might need cigarettes or beer or something else. He always told me that we'd fill it up again and then we'd go to Disneyland. He promised. I would always cry when he emptied the jug. I never let him see me, but I did. Every time. Then I didn't cry anymore.

## Life

Bonk Hyta

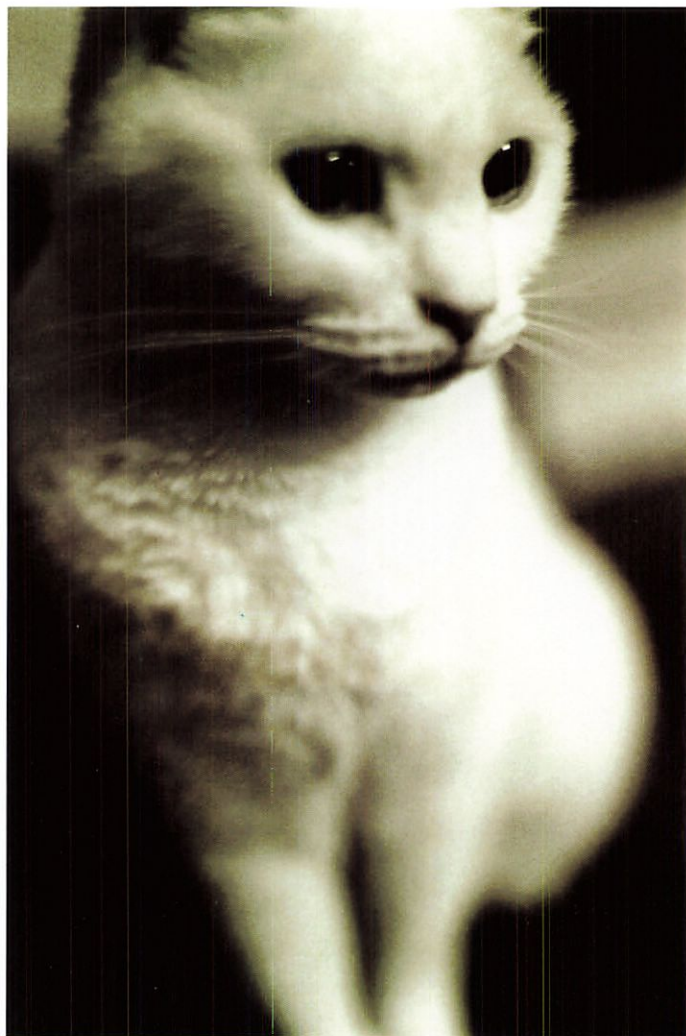
Life can be the  
Before time  
Your time and Mine  
Maybe just time to go  
It's one big lesson  
Lessons are blessings to  
Teach us right  
You don't learn them  
Overnight  
Battle the thoughts  
Battle the pain  
Sometimes we all struggle  
It's hard to explain  
No words , no ways  
Can change  
How some people  
Act and react  
It's all the same  
Way to much pain

Stay positive  
We all know they're  
In a better place  
Up in heaven  
A better space  
Close your eyes  
Picture them  
looking down  
watching over you  
He is floating around  
Like a cloud  
Glowing , shining down  
The spirit  
Will always be around  
Smiling down  
Guiding you through  
The rest of your  
Life



## **Cadena de Curpo Uno**

Mary-Alice Santos



**Waxing of the Moon**  
Caleb Epstein

## Why My Boss Will Reincarnate as a Mouse

Tahni J. Nikitins

You are really quite lucky. I mean - think about it. You were born into a position of enough privilege that you were able to gain access to the resources necessary to learn how to read, let alone get your hands on this (quite fine, might I say) piece of reading material. You could very well have been born into a quote-end-quote third-world-country where only five percent of the population has any access to education and, in turn, the knowledge of how to decipher the written word. It's all luck-of-the-draw, really. So you're actually quite lucky - or perhaps you *were* born into a third-world country where only five percent of the population has access to education and maybe you *weren't* part of that five percent, in which case, you're quite impressive. But of course most people don't think that way - and that's only natural. We all experience a certain amount of suffering in our lives - it's just the way of things. The human condition, I suppose you could say - and it certainly shapes the way we think.

But consider this: the difference between the DNA of a human and the DNA of a mouse is two-point-five percent. That's right - a whopping two-point-five percent. We're not so far separated as we like to imagine - so, with this in mind, might it be possible to say that you are, in fact, lucky to have been born human at all?

It's another luck of the draw thing - you or I could have just as easily been born a mouse. Had we been born mice one of us might have been lucky enough to be born to be a pet for a doting six-year-old who would feed us a few too many pellets every day and take us out and play with us and let us crawl in their hair. Chances are, though, we would have born to be one of the mice people feed to their snakes or set traps for or try to

step on when they see us. Certainly that's the fate of most mice.

That was the life that the mouse in my workplace was fated to live. She or he was fated to live in the holes in the walls, coming out when no one was looking to steal crumbs off of a piece of bread that was left unsupervised, and now he or she has to navigate the series of traps set for him or her.

My boss is the one that chose the traps. They're those horrible little black squares with a few centimeters of sticky goop that a mouse is expected to run across and stick to. I asked him what I was supposed to do if one of the traps caught a mouse.

"Sweep it up and put in the garbage of course," he said. "Easy as that."

You see, he's one of those people who hasn't stopped to think just how lucky he is to have been born a human rather than a mouse. I'm sure if he had been born a mouse he would be singing a whole different tune.

Personally, I'm not willing to let my karma points take the kind of hit that letting another living being starve to death or die of dehydration would deal. A quick death is better - less tortured. Can you imagine sitting in a bag of garbage stuck to a piece of black foam, unable to reach the perfectly good bagel that someone threw out? That would blow hardcore. So my boss can take that hit in karma points - I'll decapitate the poor little guy if I find him stuck to one of those things, because once you're on it, you're not coming off. And if he could come off, his presence is something of health code violation.

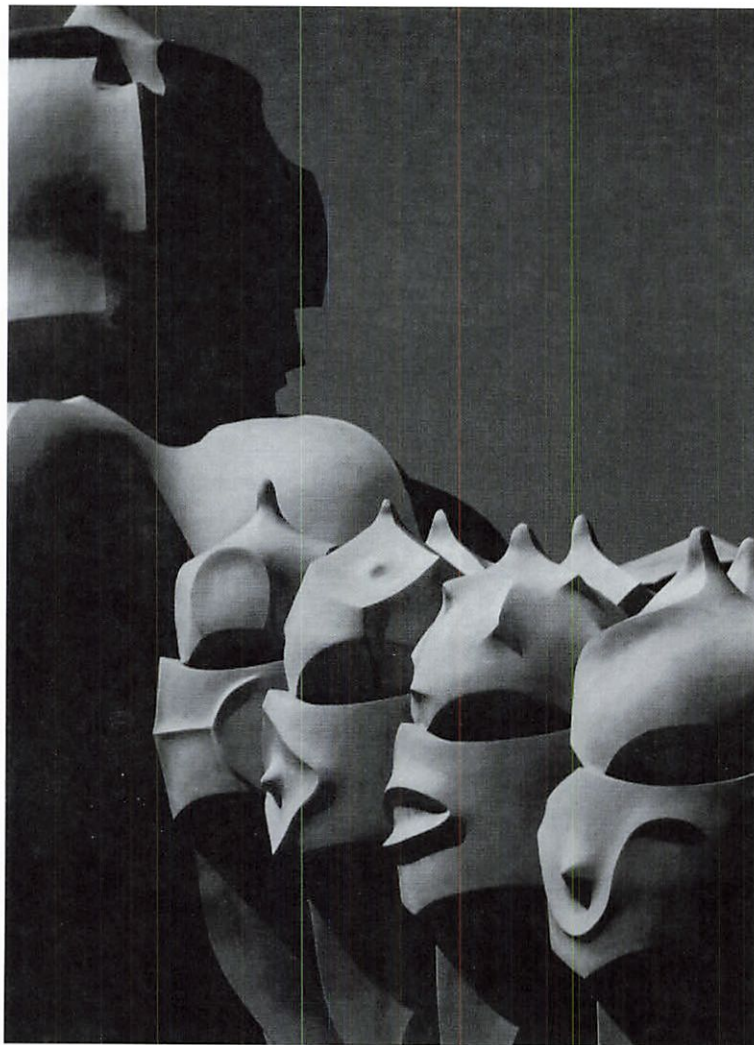
But my boss has never thought about the fact that a mouse's DNA only has a two-point-five percent difference to his own, or that he could very well have been born a mouse instead. I wish he had been born a mouse - maybe I would have a decent boss if he had.

In any case, he wasn't born a mouse this time around. But I bet you that he'll be born a mouse next time. The Universe is funny that way. Surely you've noticed that the Universe has a strange sense of humor?

He seems very proud of himself when he talks about how he's used these sticky traps to catch seven other mice, and that all he had to do was throw them in the garbage, "Easy as that." Besides his particular fashion of disposing of pests (I have to wonder about the person that designed the trap, as well), his karma points can't be in great standing anyway, considering the fact that he's generally not a super guy. In fact, he's kind of a douche.

So I anticipate for him reincarnation as a mouse, and not the kind of mouse that gets to be doted on by a six-year-old, or even the kind of mouse that gets fed to snakes (have you ever seen a mouse get eaten by a snake? It's a Hell of a lot faster than starving to death on a sticky piece of foam). No, he'll be the kind of mouse that people set traps for and try to step on. There's no doubt about it in my mind. It's an educational process, life. I subscribe to the belief that every life is a handful of lessons learned - and if you live a good life, a couple of handfuls.

I don't think my boss has learned much of anything in this life. He's lazy and rude, unmotivated and kind of a bully. It doesn't help that he uses work as a cover to cheat on his wife. That dude has a lot left to learn. One of those lessons is that he could just as easily have been born a mouse.





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