

# Neon

A Journal of Brilliant Things

[www.neonmagazine.co.uk](http://www.neonmagazine.co.uk)

[neonmagazine@ymail.com](mailto:neonmagazine@ymail.com)

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Editor: Krishan Coupland

Design: Jagjeet Tathgar

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# Eulogies

Jared Ward

For kb (who isn't nearly dead):

"Take what's useful, throw the rest away," he'd say, two-thirds into our fifth bottle of wine. Morning sunlight filtering through the thin curtain, tigerstriping the couch.

We were like two phoenix (is there a plural for that? phoenixes? phoenixes? kb wouldn't care, but he'd laugh at the question), two phoenix drowning ourselves in cheap wine every Tuesday, only to rise from our own ashes on Wednesday to create again.

I hear you, kb. I know. How can an unknown plurality of phoenix (ces?) rise in ashes from a pool? And wasn't it Thursday before we could even think of creating?

He was the phoenix, really, no need for -ixes or -ices. Young kb burned in a fire not of his making. He couldn't survive. Impossible. Flames of ambition left charred memories of white trash childhood, memories for years after the rising he kept under his shirt, pressed to his chest in a misplaced belief that somehow they were still him. Their cool, silky remains left sootmarks on his skin, trying to stain his surface and bleed back inside. In his mistaken insistence, he would sometimes try showing, reaching into his shirt and pulling out a disfigured relic that crumbled at the touch and drifted away, no more substance than shadow.

I won't stretch the metaphor further. He never liked device running the show. He was a boy in a man, a man through and through, blessed by shadows and demons and Hong Kong karma.

My friend, I'll write us a heaven. We'll drink mai-tai's on the beach, white sand and blue water as far as the eye can see. God closes one door, he opens a window to fly out of.

For my son (who hasn't been born):

He could have been president.

Could have been Faulkner.

Could have played for the Broncos. Well, maybe a kicker.

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It's the most I knew of him. Little flutters on the taut skin of my wife's belly. Lying there when she'd reach for my hand, place it just beneath her belly button. We'd sleep that way through the night, the three of us.

I don't know what color his eyes were. Or hair. Was he fair like my wife, or dark like me in summer? But I could picture his face. Lip split where the skin never fused. Hole in the roof of his mouth where the amniotic fluid drained in and out. In and out. Cutest kid I'd never seen.

He knew his mother in a way I can only imagine, closer than two, they were one. We, she and I, share hopes and dreams. They, she and he, shared a body with twin heartbeats just inches apart.

I wonder if he knew his brother, pedro. Perhaps there was a residue of life left deep inside her. The boy who never made it. Maybe he felt the presence of the older boy, and together they loved their mother as much as she deserves.

For rex (who we've missed since '94):

I remember thinking this should be you bent in pain. You, motherfucker, holding onto your mom while her shoulders shake beneath her coarse black dress, whispering, it's alright, it's not your fault. I wanted to punch through the polished oak.

I'm a little confused. Even now, running my fingers over your years chiselled in rock.

This should be you because you did not suffer. No disbelief, no guilt, no questions. Nothing in a sawed-off barrel. No spacing off in class, thinking what you want to tell your friend before you remember he's fucking dead and you have to leave the room before you get sick. Just bang you're dead and let Kyle find you when he gets there.

Sorry, brother, gotta go. Sun's coming up tomorrow, and I've got a lot to do.

Besides, I know where to find you.

For my wife (who's stuck with me):

She was funny and smart and cried to commercials. She graduated college in four years easy, but somehow never learned

how to flip a light switch. How to close a door or turn off the damn TV.

We'd have owned every stray kitten in a four state radius.  
If I let her.  
She deserved better.

For matt (who still has some hair left):

How often are pk's believers? They're the ones drinking in junior high, handing out joints. Running far from the father, the son, and the holy ghost.

Everyone's scared of ghosts.

And so matt, who ran farther than most, became cliché.

And then he found a wife, who gave him kids, gave him a reason (which is all he ever asked for). So this story, one he would cringe to have told to his children, it's about a man of faith and rebellion, a preacher's kid who made his way the way he could.

One time we were driving home from the bar at three in the morning. Taking the long way through town after dropping off the largest gay Mexican we knew. Matt wanted to drive. I didn't pull over, but I gave him the wheel.

I worked the pedals as we wound our way through the back streets of town, gas to the floor as we approached Main Street. We caught air at the intersection, sped a half block to our house, and I stomped the brakes while he cut the wheel into the driveway.

We stopped two feet from the neighbor's front steps. I backed out and parked along the curb. His door slammed before the engine quit, and I sprinted after.

Standing in the safety of our carpeted living room, we laughed. Tears warped my vision and I almost didn't see his right hand uppercutting towards me. I leaned back in time, and rocked him in the temple with a hook of my own.

From the floor he shook his head and looked up. "What just happened?"

"Not sure," I said, and I could have been talking about being alive or breaking my hand, which we learned in the morning.

"Want a beer?" he asked.

We sat on the back porch, swelling until sunrise.

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For pedro (who never made it out):

Pride.

Three months was all it took.

That morning when the doctor came, sat in the empty chair, I saw in my mind the only picture we took of you. You were sitting in the womb of your mother, with a hand held up and what looked like a finger. Your only fuck you. I think you were smiling.

For me (whose pretension is boundless):

He was a good friend. He was the worst.

He tried often. And sometimes not at all.

He chose which rules to break based on convenience, but not always his own. He loved with his whole heart, except the part that mattered. You could trust him completely, to sound convincing.

He admitted he was wrong. When it didn't matter.

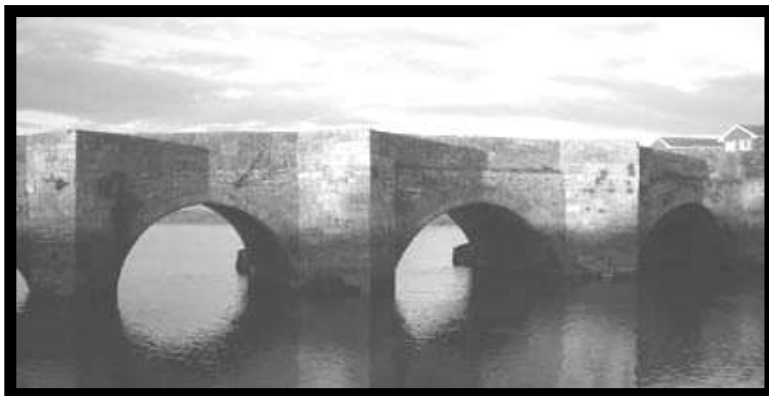
He read much and retained little. He was smarter than you might think. He lacked common sense disguised as prudence and self-control.

Especially when drinking.

He loved a good drink.

He loved a bad drink.

He loved a drink.



# Two Stories

Fred Skolnik

## A Shallow Grave

Mildred decided that she wanted to be buried alive. The grave was shaped to her body, but just before getting in she had second thoughts and for one awful moment considered the possibility that she was making a big mistake. Nonetheless she lay down with her arms folded on her breast and closed her eyes, thinking she would hold her breath. Some dirt fell on her face, which she found annoying, so she brushed it away, though realizing that the earth would soon be coming down on her in great heaps. Stanley and Edgar stood above her, leaning on their shovels. "Are you ready?" Stanley said. "Go ahead," Mildred replied. She was as ready as she was ever going to be.

Stanley threw in the first shovelful and it fell over her body quite lightly so she barely felt it. Then Edgar threw in a shovelful that landed on her leg with a kind of thud. Clearly they were staying away from her face and head, being somewhat squeamish, she imagined. They picked up the pace a little and soon the lower part of her body was covered. This wasn't the effect she had wanted. She had imagined the earth in her mouth and her nostrils. As it was she didn't even have to hold her breath.

"Are you sure about this?" Stanley said.

It was now or never. If she hesitated she wouldn't be able to go through with it. She tried to spread the earth around a little so that it would come up at least to her neck and she would feel it burying her. "Go ahead," she said again, and now she felt it flying into her face and it was the way she had imagined it, less and less of her face being exposed and then the point of her nose sticking out and then the total darkness as she held her breath and another shovelful coming down with another thud and she was under now, buried alive.

"Let's get her out," Edgar said.

"This is what she wants," Stanley said.

"It's crazy," Edgar said.

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They stood there staring down at the grave as though they had all the time in the world. Edgar thought he saw the earth move. "She's trying to get out," he said.

"How do you know?"

"The ground's moving."

"No it isn't."

Then Edgar had an idea. He stuck the handle of the shovel down into the burial mound, right about where her hands would be. "Let's see what happens," he said. But nothing happened. "You see," Stanley said. "She knows what she's doing."

"We could get in trouble for this," Edgar said.

"How?"

"We killed her. That's murder."

"Not if she wanted it."

"Are you sure?"

"That's the law," Stanley said.

"Do you think she's dead already?"

"I don't know."

They stared at the grave for a while longer and still nothing moved. She was probably less than a foot down because they'd gotten tired of digging soon enough as when they buried a cat or dog and left the grave as shallow as they reasonably could, so Stanley thought there might be some air getting through, maybe into a little pocket above her head, and in that case she might stay alive for days, which he kind of hoped would be the case.

"Let's check," Edgar said.

"How?"

"Let's uncover her face a little."

They knelt down and started scooping out the earth in small, unhurried handfuls. Then they saw her as though she was sleeping peacefully, without a sign of life.

Edgar said, "Mildred! Mildred! Do you hear me?"

She did not reply. Edgar touched her face. It was neither warm nor cold. They scooped out some more earth and then Edgar put his ear to her chest and Stanley looked for her pulse. "I think she's breathing," Edgar said. He shook her once or twice but she didn't move.

"She doesn't have a pulse," Stanley said.

"What are we supposed to do?" Edgar said.

"Let's cover her up again."

"Are you crazy?"

"We can't just leave her like this."

"What if she's alive?"

"She isn't."

"We better tell someone."

"Then we'll really be in trouble."

After they buried her again they went away. An hour passed, and then another. Mildred lay very still, not breathing, just waiting. She saw some pictures in her head and watched them for a while. Being dead wasn't really what she'd thought it would be. She just had to lie there and wait as long as it took. Soon, she was sure, they'd come down to take her away.



## The Banquet

I arrived at the banquet hall early. There must have been room for a thousand people there but only a few hundred had arrived, most of them standing around in little groups and talking. I decided I would sit at the center of a long table against the wall in the rear of the hall. No one was at the table yet so I circulated through the room and saw people I knew. Three women were standing together and one of them indicated her blouse and said it wasn't right for her and I

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understood that it had been given to her or sold to her by one of the other women and I was surprised when she took it off and handed it back to her, remaining for a moment in just her brassiere. I averted my eyes as she put on another blouse that she apparently had with her. Someone mentioned that a couple I knew were staying nearby and would arrive with their children in another half hour. I walked to the rear of the hall and sat down at a piano in the corner of the room and played a song I knew with considerable verve. Then someone else sat down and played a medley of songs and I wanted to sit down again after he had finished to play my song again but realized that I had no idea how to play it and wondered how I had succeeded the first time. The room was filling up and people were starting to sit down and eat. I kept walking around, seeing people I knew and overhearing their conversations but saying nothing myself. The tables were filling up and I was concerned now that I would not find a place to sit. I saw that the place I had picked out for myself was already taken so I walked back toward the entrance with the intention of making a circuit of the hall and finding an empty place. I walked between two tables and thought I saw a place but found myself in a little room adjacent to the kitchen where the waiters apparently arranged their trays and there were shelves with bread and rolls so I understood that I wouldn't be able to sit there and went back out. A few tables that had remained empty had had their settings removed but two young men were eating at one of them so I sat down too hoping a waiter would come along and reset my place but when one of them came over he told me that a woman he knew was just leaving and I could sit in her place. He pointed her out at the rear of the room, at the end of the long table I had originally chosen, and I saw her standing as though she was about to leave and a few other people got up too but I wondered if the waiter would clean up there and was reluctant to sit down though he had already asked me what I wished to have as my entree so I walked toward the rear of the hall and looked around. I had expected a woman I knew to appear. Her husband had died and she had remarried but I thought she had divorced her new husband and I would have a chance but it was someone who looked like her dead husband who arrived and he had a different wife who I didn't know and they sat down near the other end of the long table to the left of

the place I had originally chosen for myself. Four women who I knew were now sitting at the center of the table but I didn't think to speak to them. It was very crowded in the room and everyone was busy talking or eating and I didn't know what to do with myself. The empty tables where I had sat down for a moment had all filled up and there wasn't really anywhere for me to sit and I felt cheated in a way and I was hungry now but all the places were taken in the enormous hall and I stood at the edge of it looking out at the tables and hoping I might spot an empty place but couldn't find any. None of the waiters paid any attention to me and I couldn't find anyone I knew, not even the women I had seen before, and I felt out of place, a stranger and alone and I couldn't even say how I had gotten there or why I had come. I stood there waiting for something to happen but I knew already that the banquet would end and I would be left standing there with nowhere to go.

## Two Poems

P.A. Levy

### Performing in the Circus of Breathing

The secret of living is breathing;  
so there you are crawling around  
gulping air like a pacman  
hunting magic numbers until  
... drum roll ... you disappear.  
Welcome to the circus.  
We have the strongest, tallest,  
fattest, smallest, we have  
bearded women, conjoined twins,  
hermaphrodites and mermaids,  
we even have our own elephant man,  
but that's strictly x-rated.  
Roll up. Roll up.  
We are the greatest show on earth,  
standing on just one leg  
on the bare back of a galloping horse  
we go around and around in circles  
- hey! that's worth a round of applause.  
For our pleasure and amusement  
we can throw flames in any direction,  
with a whip and a chair we tame roaring lions,  
disco with bears, teach dogs mathematics,  
dress a chimpanzee in a white coat and he'll  
explain the theory of quantum physics,  
and bomb juggling, ha! we do that blindfolded;  
better watch out for those butter-finger clowns  
- nah only joking!  
So step onto the high wire  
and stretch out your arms; spotlight centre stage  
this is your big top debut,  
but remember a little caution please

as a safety net is no longer provided,  
well let's face it, you should know by now  
that from the cradle (performance ready)  
to the grave realization that breathing  
isn't a secret;  
all you have to do is learn to exhale  
without screaming.

## **Reflections In An Undertaker's Window**

Sat on the top deck of a number 25 bus  
to Green Street I watched myself casually  
stroll against the Lowry-ish commuters  
all to and fro with their antsy occupations.  
I noted I was nonchalantly  
looking in the window  
of the undertaker's parlour opposite  
the 'Live and Let Live' pub  
on the Romford Road, peering down  
into a party I had once been to in the basement.  
A distant youth. Far away music ...

I and Justine (soft collide).  
An unknowing PreRaphaelite,  
eyes devoted to succumb  
to the passions of her edacious  
teenage cunt. 'Electric Ladyland'  
distilled the damp  
underground air; carnal deep  
breathless to frantic.  
La petite morte victorious,  
unshrouded, we lay on top  
of a polished oak coffin. I'm buried  
in the garden of her long  
dark hair. She sensuously languid.

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The scent of Justine  
had already begun to evaporate  
when street lamps were snuffed  
like yellow candles  
into the morning's coughs.  
As my spluttering steps tracked  
their way home I saw myself  
on the top deck of a number 25 bus.  
I was gazing out of the dirty window  
on my way to work, vacant in blue grey  
cigarette haze. It was raining,  
and I was soaked to the skin  
with the tyranny of humdrum.



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# Two Stories

Sarah Anne Lloyd

## Melting

The house is burning down around me and I never wanted to be the mom that tears through my son's things, covering my tracks as carefully and pathetically as he does after going through my liquor cabinet, but here I am with my hand in his top-right desk drawer being poked by an army of pushpins. Instead of liquor I need to find some Oxy before it's all glued together by the melting pharmaceutical bottle, and my son doesn't think I know he has it but I'm desperate, not stupid.

It's a quick search, even with the house on fire – his room is so clean, probably on purpose to throw me off after he started selling pills, but I'm not fooled, I know they're here. There's a picture of his girlfriend above the desk, she has that perfect straight long blond hair they all have and I wish I could but instead I just have this crunchy perm, it's all I can do that looks composed anymore. I'd better get out of here before it catches fire, I bet it'd light up like a tumbleweed with all that hairspray.

There's a poster of Beethoven in the den which I bet has already caught fire, but I mean, Beethoven already died, in every picture I see of him it looks like he's already braced himself, he'll look stern right until that last cheekbone pixel shrivels over charred drywall. I wonder when I had my last rock poster – did I phase them out one by one or did I get rid of them all at once at some point when this boring stage in my life became concrete? There's a rap star glaring at me from my son's wall, as if he's saying, why do I have to die in suburbia, like he always resented being hung here.

I love this feeling of espionage and I know I always wanted to be this mom, but too bad I have to worry about getting out of the house so I can't savor this danger-danger feeling. My hand is feeling between the mattress and box spring of the twin bed with my old white comforter my son started using after he made us get rid of his train blanket three years ago and I think, two can play this game, as my fingers close around the target. The pills clamor around on the floor of their bottle in my shaking hand.

### Etching

She called my name on the first day of school and I just sat there watching my fingers underneath my desk, pretending they were people. I couldn't know what their names were and I couldn't be positive what my name was. I got marked absent for the first week of class which is exactly how long it takes for the school to call your parents, instead of informing them right when I might be missing.

There's still scratches on the counter because when they called my mom she was chopping an onion so I guess she doesn't know if she cried when they called to tell her they hadn't seen me in a week but she did keep chopping past the cutting board. So there's this patch of scratches that doesn't look like individual scratches as much as it's just rough like the sandpaper my dad had me rub on the new chairs. He showed me how leaning down close to my face so I could feel the scratches of his almost beard.

His beard was longer when he came to the school which made him look like a mountain man, so I giggled when he walked into the classroom, but I stopped because I had never seen my dad look scared before, and I don't know what that means if my dad can get scared. But he saw me after I giggled and then he just stared at the teacher for a second and I had never seen him make that face either but I'm not sure what it was, and he grabbed my hand and led me out of the room so the only parts of me left there were the scratches I had started making on my desk so they would know I had been there.

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# I Am John Titor

Paul Hanninen



I say, "Eat your corned beef." and she just looks at me the same as usual, and I say, "Eat your turnips." and she just kinda shakes her head and pushes the plate aside and jumps down and runs off into the yard and I slide it all onto my plate and watch her out the front window. I always get upset with her when she acts unruly like this. She'd back herself into a cave and let the walls fall around her before she'd admit she'd gotten herself into a situation. I like to think her mother was like this. But I can't remember.

"Now, come on," I say. She follows me up the hill, using her little stick for a cane like she's old and worn down.

"How much farther, Papa?" she asks.

"It's this valley. Then that rise again. Then some more past that, then we're there." I look back to see her sweaty face. "When we get to the top we'll share the last Coke. All right?"

She smiles, and we march on up the hill.

Jane's never had much fun out on the lake. She always cringes when she jumps in the water saying it's too cold or there's gotta be snakes in it.

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"There's no snakes in here," I say. I wade in up to my chest and dip my head in. "See? They woulda latched right onto my nose."

"But you're stinky. They don't want to eat you." She's still sitting there on our packs, eating a Pop-Tart. "Can't I just watch?" She kicks her little legs and looks past me.

I turn. There's an old couple in a rowboat watching us. I didn't think there were any houses here. I dive in and swim to the shore and walk quickly over to our stuff.

Dripping and cold I pull out our binoculars and fix them on the couple.

They look harmless. I hand Jane the binoculars.

"Here, don't look at the sun."

Then I go back into the water, letting the lakebottom get in between all my toes.

"So, any particular reason?" my boss asks from behind his desk.

"I just need some time off, I think. Spend some more time with Jane. She's getting tired of all the baby-sitters."

He taps a pen on his desk and shakes his head.

"Mike, you know this comes as a big blow to the company? We're just hitting the initial roll-out phase and you're a key member of the promotional team."

"I know, sir. Just, priorities change."

"But you're not coming back?"

"No, sir. At least I don't plan to."

He looks out the high-rise window at the rows of glass out beyond forming beautiful walls of ice and canyons that glow in the sun.

"So who is it? Who bought you out?"

"Excuse me?"

"You heard me? Who the hell bought you out? Don't worry, you're out of here, but I want to know who bought you out? Was it Sun?"

"No one bought me out, I--"

"So the feds got you? I swear to God, those motherfuckers get every last ounce of talent that comes through this building."

"No, sir. None of that. I just need some time away from all this."

He stares me down, waiting for me to look away or to flinch. Then he tosses the pen aside and lets out his breath.

"I can't blame you. It's been a long time since I've been to the mountains."

The stars are out.

Out beyond we can hear the great rushing and whooshing like a mad river coming and going.

"Can't we go down and watch?" Jane asks.

I hate to leave the tent like this. All our provisions are unsecure.

"Yeah. We can go." I walk back to the tent and pull the pistol out from my boot. "Now, you hold onto my hand, okay?"

Hand in hand we trundle down the hill, passing between the trees until we reach the bluff. Then, carefully, we push through the last screen of undergrowth and sit down on an old stump.

"Isn't it pretty?"

Down below the trucks and cars all rumble by, flowing like a river of lights.

Jane and I fell asleep out by the highway. It was stupid. Really stupid. Anyone could have seen us. We could have been dead before morning.

She doesn't understand. I'm not gonna try to make her.

"Does that hurt?" she asks.

I run the razor back down my cheek, using Sarah's old compact mirror to see.

"No. Not really. It kinda burns, that's all."

"Why do you have to do that?"

I wash the blade off in the mug of water.

"Cause if I don't I scare people. And I don't need to scare anyone."

"Are you gonna get some more Cokes?"

"Maybe. We'll see what they have."

"The doctors want me to stay in the hospital," Sarah says.

"They say there's no point in Janey having to watch me go through all this."

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She's tired. Withered. Her eyes look barely open.

"What does that mean?"

She puts a hand on mine.

"What do you think it means? They said there are grief support groups, and that--"

We hear little footsteps.

"Mama! Mama!"

There's Jane tottering in the doorway.

"It's a frog!"

"Put that thing down," Sarah says. She's smiling, but still she says it. "You'll get warts."

I stand up and pick Jane up and carry her out the backdoor where she drops the frog in the mud. Then we go back in out of the rain, and I let her down in front of the TV with her graham crackers and milk. I walk back to the kitchen where Sarah is tracing patterns in the woodgrain. How can she be so strong? How has she not yet folded in on herself?

This is my least favorite thing. We find a real good ditch or gully where the grass is grown up high, and I tuck Jane down like a rabbit with the stuff. I tell her, "Don't move. If anyone comes, don't move." I thought about giving her the pistol, showing her how to use it, but I wouldn't want to come back and find out I'd made a mistake. Then I walk out of there, with all my fresh clothes on--the plaid button-down and khakis I save for the town trips--and walk down to the back lot of the supermarket and walk around front, trying to act normal as can be. I make sure to keep my face away from the security cameras.

I buy what I can carry and pay in cash.

Once, Jane and I decided to come down and eat a real meal at a Cracker Barrel. We walked in with our packs on and everyone's eyes were on us. We hadn't bathed in days. Jane was crusted with dirt, and the staff didn't know where to seat us so our stuff wouldn't crowd the walkways. We didn't do that again. I know better, now.

Inside the Wal-Mart, I walk to the television section and tune in to the Weather Channel. We look good for the next few days. Then I go to the beverage aisle and pick out a six-pack of Coca-Cola.

They said, "If you want, there are places you can go, you can talk to other people, other men who've been through what you're going through. You can tell them what you want, or nothing at all, and they'll sit and listen." But then they said there's lots of crying at these places. A bunch of men gathered together crying about what's gone and won't come back. I couldn't see the use in it, so I took the brochures and threw them in the trashcan outside the hospital. I went home, after all the family had left and it was just me and Jane. I lay in bed now and cry by myself. Sometimes, then, I slip onto my computer and look up the message boards and chat rooms where I could talk to others about the whole thing without them having to see me or me having to see them. But no one wants to stay on topic. You read one story, you've read them all. Unless it's your own, it's all just sadness black and blue, and the conversation runs everywhere but back to the point. You can find some crazy shit out there.

All the different guns look the same to me. The pump-action shotguns, the long-necked rifles. The stubby pistols. They all could take my head off.

"What you looking for?" the man with the sunglasses on asks me.

"Something portable. Something I can keep in my pocket."

He goes to the back. When I was little I would have died to be here, buying a revolver. You can call me Doc Holiday I would say, and line up cans like Indians on the fence and spend all day learning how to shoot the eye out of a raven. But Jane won't know this until she needs to. She'll think of dolls and houses. All the things we'll leave behind once we set out for the far territory where there aren't yet fences or big, fat roadways clogged full of guzzling beasts. Someday, when she's older--once we've put the last touch on our cabin and she's starting to wonder what boys live in the other cabins hidden in the pines--I'll explain to her the things she's already forgotten and I'll explain to her how we had to leave the world of small things behind. And I'll be sure to show her how to use the gun before then because if the whole mess hasn't come boiling onto our doorstep yet, it sure as hell will soon.

"How's this one?"

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He lays a silver revolver with a black handle on the countertop.

Then these came up out of nowhere. I've been compiling them all in one spot as time-travel\_0(aka John Titor) posts them:

"On my world line, it is known that the 5100 series is capable of reading all the IBM code written before the widespread use of APL and Basic. Unfortunately, there are none left that anyone can find on my world line."

Jane keeps her feet wet in the creekbed. I didn't want her to take her shoes off, but she did anyway.

"When are we gonna be there, Daddy?"

"It's gonna be a while."

I haven't the heart to tell her just how far we have to go. If she could see it on a map she'd understand it was almost the size of her and maybe she'd cry over it, but she can't know the months ahead of us. I've toyed with the idea of using the rails once it gets cold, but I'm not sure. John never said how those would factor in.

"When we get there I'm gonna call Grandma and tell her she should come visit and see how neat our new place is, out in the woods."

The whole group of deer are running through the early morning high grass. We both munch on apples.

"Did Mama ever like going camping like this?"

"She did. We went out a few times before you were born.

Went to the beach and fished out in the ocean."

"Did it take this long to get there?"

"No. It's never taken this long to get anywhere."

The deer bound away into the woods.

"Well," Jane says, "I miss Chrissy. But I like the deer. We'll see them again, right?"

"I'm sure they'll be waiting for us."

She leans over my shoulder and looks at the map with me. I had hoped against it, but it seems the city is unavoidable.

"My world line is not unified under a single government but I would say it is closer to a unified purpose. Isn't that what you want anyway?"

John never said any of this, but here's what I've figured out from a little bit of research. The



Majestic 12 are running a secret shadow government parallel to our actual one that works more as a puppet than anything else. Sure, they sell themselves as just being involved with aliens and UFOs, but really they are key to the whole scheme of holding and distributing and warping information. They use FEMA as their ploy to keep the public's eyes off them, and under Executive Order REX 84, they have already set up Concentration camps all throughout the United States that--when the civil war that John predicted breaks out--they will herd all of those who fight against the new martial law into. We will starve to death in these camps as the city and the country fight against one another. They will take Jane away and send her to one of their communities to form a new society "improved" by the cleansing of those who do not agree with the imperialistic ideals of those in charge. The only thing is to stay off the grid. Then they can't track us. Then they can't take us away. We're setting out tomorrow, first thing. Lighting out for British Columbia where we can start over, safe from all the death and disease.

We've been camped out on the ridge overlooking the interstate for four days now. Our supplies are running low. I'm going to have to go into the city for some more food.

"Are you going to shave?" Jane asks. "I like watching you shave."

## Neon

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"Sure thing." I lay out my town clothes. "You wanna see a mustache this time, or smooth as a baby's bottom?"

She laughs at that.

"Baby's butt."

"I have tried to tell people about CJD disease and it seems to be "catching on" in Europe."

Again, same as always, she tucks herself away with our packs in a hollow, right where you'd have to know she was there to stumble over her. I tell her this time it will be a while, but I will be back before dark. It's a few miles from where we are to the stores. But I will be back before dark. It's a promise.

"What are we doing with the car?" she asks as I close the trunk.

"We're leaving it here for someone else," I tell her. "We'll be able to get a new one when we get to our new place."

"I already plied off the VIN number and unscrewed the license plate. I withdrew all my money over the past two months and closed my bank account. I've never carried this much cash on me. Then again, I've never carried a gun." "Come on, Janey," I call her like Sarah always did when she got lost in her own head or wondered out beyond the yard where the neighbor's dogs started barking at her from their chains. Together, her little hand in mine, we march out of the parking lot into the trees, the ground still wet with dew.

"Technologies themselves are not lost but some of the older tools and techniques have been lost. I think there is more detailed information about the war posted earlier."

The door chimes as it opens on the gas station. The attendant doesn't even look up as I walk in.

I get a loaf of bread and some peanut butter and some more Coca-Cola.

"Some weather we got," the attendant says. "Kind of out of season."

I nod.

"It is pretty hot I guess."

"It's like there's something about to happen. Something big. Something incredibly important."

Ergh! Screech! Crash!

We both look outside. A jet black BMW slammed into the lightpole outside, the engine on fire.

"Jesus." I sprint out the door to the car. The heat is nearly unbearable. I wrap my shirt sleeve around my hand and open the back door.

There's a man in a dark suit, a briefcase against his lap, his pupils rolling in and out of his eyes. He's old. And on his lapel is a small red crucifix. Then, amidst all the smoke and fumes, his eyes fix on me.

He pulls something out from his jacket and holds it out to me. An envelope. I take it from him. I back out of the car.

"Call 911! An ambulance!" I yell at the attendant as I walk away from the burning car.

BOOM!

The car explodes, and I'm thrown forward across the pavement, tearing up my arms and legs. The attendant jumps over the counter and runs out to me, the metal bonfire behind me.

"Jesus, man, are you okay?"

"I'm fine. Call an ambulance." The world spins and goes black.

"When I leave, I will return to 2036. The computer I have is expected there. I am unaware of any true interdimensional device available on this world line now. I would imagine the effects of such a device would be hard to hide."

"Let me show you something," Sarah says. She walks across the room and pulls a curtain off a large painting. "It's a flock of birds."

All the lines swoop in and out of each other, making waves and patterns, cross-hatches that spoil the sky behind them powder blue.

"It's very pretty," I say. "You could sell that."

"Could I? I don't think so."

We sit down beneath it and look up at it.

## Neon

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"I feel like we're on the beach."

"Maybe we are and we just can't tell."

"Then why don't the birds move? What's wrong with the birds?"

"Maybe they know something we don't."

And the one's eye looks through the canvas at me, thinking "You're a bastard. Just coming up here to get some." Is that what she's thinking? Did she paint this before she knew me or was it all meant for this moment?

"Why'd you make this?"

"What's your name? What's your name?"

The paramedic is leaning over me, shining a light in my eyes. I bring a hand up to shield them.

"I'm all right," I say. "I'm all right."

I back away from the paramedic.

"Sir. We need to take a look at you."

I stand up.

"No," I say. "I'm off the grid."

The paramedic looks around. Behind him, the firetrucks are putting out the blaze and getting ready to rip apart the remaining wreckage.

"I'm off the grid!"

I turn and run through to the opposite side of the gas station and away, down a hill into the woods beyond.

1. Do not eat or use products from any animal that is fed and eats parts of its own dead.
2. Do not kiss or have intimate relations with anyone you do not know.
3. Learn basic sanitation and water purification.
4. Be comfortable around firearms. Learn to shoot and clean a gun.
5. Get a good first aid kit and learn to use it.
6. Find 5 people within 100 miles that you trust with your life and stay in contact with them.
7. Get a copy of the US Constitution and read it.
8. Eat less.
9. Get a bicycle and two sets of spare tires. Ride it 10 miles a week.

10. Consider what you would bring with you if you had to leave your home in 10 min. and never return."

I run through the underbrush. My bleeding arms and legs catch on all the undergrowth and branches and weeds. Their dogs will be able to track me unless I reach a stream of some sort.

The sun is sinking. I need to get back to Jane. She's probably quivering, making a mess of herself.

And what if they find her? What then? The thought's too much. A tornado. Or a long night spent chasing away wolves who never come.

John says the Chinese will start the World War. Then Russia and the US will get involved and there will be no hope. He says after the Civil War we won't have much of a chance. A lot of us will die. The cities will be targeted. He says we need to get out of the cities. He talks a lot about the technical stuff about time travel that I don't know much about. I threw one question at him about why he was coming back for an old computer when they have enough technology to build a time machine in the first place.

"On my worldline, it is known that the 5100 series is capable of reading all the IBM code written before the widespread use of APL and Basic. In 2036, it was discovered (or at least known after testing) that the 5100 computer was capable of reading and changing all of the legacy code written by IBM before the release of that



system and still be able to create new code in APL and Basic. That is the reason we need it in 2036. However, IBM never published that information because it would have probably destroyed a large part of their business infrastructure in the early 70s. In fact, I would bet the

## Neon

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engineers were probably told to keep their mouths shut. The 5100 has the ability to easily translate between the old IBM code, APL, BASIC and (with a few tweaks in 1975) UNIX. This may seem insignificant but the fact that the 5100 is portable means I can easily take it back to 2036. I do expect they will create some sort of emulation system to use in multiple locations."

I want to say I'm still skeptical, but it makes so much sense.

When we get there, I'm gonna teach Jane how to fish. Then we'll spend our mornings going down to the river and catching salmon, as many as we can eat, and we'll plant flowers out front before the snow comes, and I'll build a monument to Sarah out of wood I chop down in the afternoons. In the winter, every day I'll go out there and scrape off all the frost and we'll live on the salmon we smoked and the fruit we stored up on shelves in jars we buy down at the village where they'll never know our names.

The sun's almost down completely. I don't hear anyone behind me.

Back at the ditch.

"Jane. Jane." I say.

I walk down to where I left her with everything. I can see the top of my pack sticking out of the grass. Everything is torn apart, scattered across the ground.

But there's no Janey.

She wants me to hold her hand again. Always, she used to run ahead of me to school just fine, but now she lingers back where I dawdle and wants to hold my hand. Even when Sarah was laid up all day at the house, she wasn't ever down. But now its everything she can do to keep with me and keep me hanging onto her.

"Are you ever afraid, Dad?"

"Of course. When I was your age I was afraid of the dark."

"Why?"

"I don't know. The same reason anyone's afraid of anything. I had no idea what was out there."

"Did you think there were monsters? Or aliens?"

"Where'd you hear about aliens?" I ask.

"At school, Michael Montgomery said that he saw a movie where there was this man who got sucked up by aliens and they flew around doing experiments on him and hurting him and then they landed him back on earth and put a chip in his neck and he never remembered but he had nightmares. He said they have big gray heads and big bug black eyes."

"I don't think Michael Montgomery's parents should've been letting him watch that. None of that's real."

"I know."

We don't walk fast either. She's been late the past two weeks. But she doesn't care. Neither do I.

"The war is a result of faulty politics and desperation from Western leadership during the US civil war. Yes, I suppose you could stop it."

Jane and I fight more than I'd like. On the forum, bezerker32 said it was just a natural form that grief took in some children. Behavioral problems. Aggression. Agitation. He said just to be patient and it would pass. He tried to say it was puberty, but I told him that wasn't possible yet. Last night she wouldn't do her homework. She kicked and screamed and broke her pencil in two. Then she stormed off up the stairs to her room where I heard her crying. I tried to make myself send her to bed hungry, but I couldn't do it so when she came down red-eyed I told her we could put the books away for the night and I served her up a bowl of Lucky Charms. She doesn't bring up Sarah much, but I've seen her nights bent on her knees praying--I guess talking to her. I haven't figured that part out yet. I just deal and move on, pushing through the night.

I run wildly through the trees with the flashlight, following the bent saplings and broken leaves as best I can. The gun is tucked in my pants.

"Jane! Jane!"

This wasn't the plan. There was no room in the plan for this. How could they do this? How could they take her and leave this journey for me alone? How did they know? John said this would happen. Not this specific thing, but he might as well. It was all wrapped up together. Every last thing that could ever be was there.

## Neon

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You just had to dig, but it was there. I should've listened. I should've known.

Then I burst out into a clearing, the stars are all dazzling up above just out beyond the glow of the city. I'd swear you could see the whole universe out there floating in the past. And it's all looking down here, laughing, saying "We already know where you are. One day you will be like us. Dust spread far and wide. Pretty sparkles lost in the ever-present past."

"Dad." I hear. "Dad."

"Jane? Come out, Jane. It's me."

Then I hear a rustle and Jane crawls out from a hollowed out log, covered in mud. She totters over to me and starts to cry.

"What'd they do? Who was it? What'd they want?" I ask.

"A bear. A big brown bear came up and sniffed me while I was asleep. He woke me up and I was scared. I ran until I couldn't see him."

"So there wasn't anybody? It was just a bear?"

She nods and I sit down. She puts her head against my chest, and we don't say a word.

The bandages on my legs get sweaty easily so we have to stop more often for me to let them dry out. Jane doesn't mind. She likes sitting down. "My dogs are barking," she says as we look again at the map. Then I pull out my pen and make another insignificant mark showing the miles we've covered and the miles we have yet to go.

"Take a close look at the county by county voting map from the last elections. That's how you'll know who is safe."

Sarah always thought I was crazy. I'm glad she can't see me, now, losing sleep over some internet hoax. Of course he isn't really a time traveler.

But what if he's right?

I come in the front door, and I know she has bad news. She's sitting at the table like she's been there all afternoon just watching her glass of water gather up beads of sweat.

"How was your day?" she asks.

"Good. Like any other. Yours?"

"Fine. I planted some bulbs out in the yard and I worked on my dissertation."

"How's that going?"

"Long. Tedious. I wish they'd just let me paint and not have to wrestle with all this hoodoo voodoo."

She looks at me like I know what she means. She's always looked at me like that, and I always play along. I get a beer from the fridge and sit down across from her. We sit and let the air conditioner do all the talking. She watches me drink my beer, and I watch her watching me.

"Well, what is it? I can't stand this. I know you've got something to say."

"I went to the doctor last week." She pauses. "I know, I should've told you. But you were busy and I didn't want to worry you."

"And?" The whole world of possibilities is rushing through my head.

"I'm pregnant."

Good thing I didn't offer her a beer.

My last post before we left:

"I'm going off the grid. I'm finally doing it. I wish the best for every last one of you. Listen to John. He speaks the truth."

Jane's already asleep. My legs were feeling better, so we made it a long hike. The sun's still out even.

I dig in the front pocket of my pack and pull out the envelope I shoved in there all wrinkled. I smooth it out on my lap and tear it open. A note falls out, handwritten:

"You are right. Stay off the grid. Don't trust anyone. They will kill me if they find out. But you must know that it is all worth it. Survive."--Lord Kilroy, The Majestic 12

Tomorrow morning we're gonna go fishing for the first time. Janey's very excited. She remembers the National Geographics full of the Grizzly Bears swatting at the salmon hurtling themselves upstream, and she wants to see it in person, "For real." I told her it isn't spawning season yet, but it will be fun anyway. I let my beard grow

## Neon

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out all the way like a lumberjack. Sarah always liked when I grew my beard out. She liked tugging on it and calling me Grizzly Adams.

"How are we gonna know when we get there?" Jane asks.

"It'll be marked for us. We'll know."

"Are they gonna throw us a party and say, 'Surprise!'"

"No, I doubt it. I don't think a lot of people are gonna show up. It might just be us two."

"Why?"

"Well, they got things to do. They gotta go to work, and go to school, and run errands like anyone else."

"But we won't have to?"

"No. Not for a long time."

"How long?"

"I don't know. I couldn't say."

"What if I miss school?"

"I'll read to you. We'll buy some books and read together. I'll teach you how to do math and geometry and science."

"But what about Chrissy and all my friends? Who am I gonna play with?"

"You'll find someone. It'll be all right. You'll be too busy exploring I'm sure."

"Will you go exploring with me?"

"Every day. Whenever you want."

"Let's go to the ocean and watch the birds and play in the water."

"I thought you didn't like water."

"Lakes! There's no snakes in the ocean. Everyone knows that. It's just big and blue."

"Oh."

"Too bad Mom can't come. She'd like exploring with us. I know it."

I cut through the brush as we march, making sure to get the stuff down low so Jane won't have to struggle as much as me.

The night's rolling in. Out here it stays darker, quieter than I could have guessed. You'd never know the whole kingdom of electric lights and hungry cars that steams away south of here. There's so

many stars here, too, like a bucket of sand spilled out. And some nights, even when the snow's three feet deep, I go outside after Jane's asleep, and I watch for a few minutes, thinking that maybe by some chance I'll catch the mushroom clouds burning into space thousands of miles from here just like John said. I haven't seen any just yet, but the day's coming. Just you wait.

## Interview: Paul Hanninen

***I am John Titor* deals with some very modern themes and technologies. Is it set in our past, our present or our near future?**

I'd have to say it's set in the present, but it's all dependent upon where you start in the story.

**Did anything in particular inspire you to write this story?**

I first read about John Titor a couple years back and thought he and his alleged time-travelling were fascinating. I rediscovered him while browsing some websites about various mysteries. At the time I was looking for information regarding cryptids such as Sasquatch, Nessie, etc when I stumbled across an in-depth discussion of John Titor. I became obsessed with the whole thing and realized it would be fascinating to meet someone who whole-heartedly believed the whole time-traveling story. I didn't know anyone like that, so I made him up.

**Someway in, a set of ten guidelines for going "off the grid" appear. Did you compose these yourself or did they come from some other source? Would you recommend following them should it become necessary to disappear?**

Actually, these and all the other message board posts come from John Titor's authentic archived posts. I wanted to weave them in to further question how we define what is real and what isn't. In one sense, it would be easy to say they are fake, but in another sense, they are more real than anything else in the story as they were not fabricated by the author but taken from some other identifiable source. Back to the guidelines . . . I think a few of them would be useful such as water purification, knowing how to use a gun, and eating less. Others though, I'm not so sure about. What use would the U.S. Constitution be if the countryside is being overrun by a

group of rebels who don't care one way or the other what the Constitution says?

**Are there any conspiracy / end-of-the-world theories that you find credible? Do any in particular catch your imagination?**

I touch on a few of the ones that seem more a bit more grounded in reality. The idea that the Federal Emergency Management Agency is just a puppet for some larger government plan to control everyone in the United States in a police state is interesting. If you snoop around the internet, you'll find some oddly intriguing evidence. People post these lengthy, detailed stories accompanied by multiple pictures of what they purport are FEMA-run prison camps out in the middle of nowhere. And the John Titor story is, of course, fascinating. The fact that the original posts were accompanied by pictures of his time machine is even more amazing.

There aren't any conspiracy theories that I particularly find credible, but anything that has to do with time-traveling, a la John Titor, falls into the realm of things you can't fully disprove--especially if they use the claim of the existence of multiple time-lines or realities as an excuse for why their predictions might not come to pass. And I don't know what to think about the UFO stuff. At some point the UFO believers seem to cross a line into a religious kind of fanaticism making it nearly impossible to find any rational, legitimate information about it.

**The story moves back and forth a lot in time, and constantly changes what might be real and what is a hoax or a conspiracy. Was this a conscious decision, or something that emerged in the writing?**

This was definitely a conscious decision. I've always been fascinated with the idea of a story that's constructed like a box of old photographs. When you go looking through them and pull them out, they probably won't be in the right chronological order, but if you look through enough of them, a story emerges, almost seemingly on its own. I like the idea that a story is larger than any kind of chronological cause and effect construction, that you can't really tell what happened first or second or third but that it doesn't really

## Neon

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matter for the sense of the story as a whole. I know I didn't completely leave the chronological sequence behind in this story, but I gave it a go.

Also, one of the main goals of this story was to try to align myself and hopefully whoever reads this story with someone who has such a bizarre worldview. In that regard, it didn't seem fair to outright say what was real and what was not. Because who really knows? As much as any of us might like to say, "Oh, time-traveling, UFOs, Big Foot--that's all rubbish" what evidence do we have to support such claims? I think this is especially rich territory in a modern world so concerned with information and knowledge--sometimes it's scary to consider how much we don't know and can't prove.

**Is much that happens a product of the narrator's imagination? Or do you prefer to leave that ambiguous?**

I think it has to remain ambiguous. At some point the reader has to decide whether or not he or she can trust the narrator. Here, I don't know when that point is, but I think there's that issue of trust at play here which is always present in first-person narratives. Is the narrator lying to us? Why would he do that? I guess it comes down partially to how much you care for the narrator and want what he's saying to be true. To take this idea even further, if we are going to deal with issues of truth and reality, then we have to look beyond just the contents of the text but also to the author behind it. Why would he lie to us? Why do we agree to this format where we know we are being lied to? Sometimes, the idea of writing and reading is very strange to me.

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# An Ever Widening Distance

GC Perry

Nicola squeals when Dean enters her. He takes this as his cue to really go for it. And he does: ramming hard, enjoying the smacking sounds his flesh makes against hers, the feel of his balls swinging under him. He hooks his fingers around her hipbones to get a better purchase and repositions himself on the bed so that his thrusts are more upward and strong. Each new thrust elicits another squeal from Nicola until she pulls over a pillow and buries her face into it, knuckles whitening.

Dean ejaculates and slides out of her, slumping back, breathing hard. His cock is sticky against his thigh and he reaches down to pull it up to rest against his stomach. He removes a crinkly hair from under his foreskin, studies it for a moment, then drops the hair over the edge of the bed, wiping his fingers on the sheet.

Nicola's lying foetal with her back to him, streaks of sweat on her pale skin, buttocks pinked.

The Mickey Mouse alarm clock on the bedside table--a functional vestige of Nicola's youth, from a time when her entire bedroom was Disneyfied--counts off seconds with an audible tick. Mickey beams down at the two naked bodies and points out of the window with a gloved finger to where the black outline of a plane crawls across the no-coloured sky, disappearing from sight behind floral printed curtains.

Dean feels the springs in the mattress vibrate under him and looks over at Nicola's shoulders in tentative spasm. He hears the wetness in her breathing and realizes she crying. He has no idea what for.



## 2

Weihui Lu

There is a girl hopping on one black and white Puma-ed foot. Let's call her X. Girl X rubs her palms against her jacket sleeves, the general vicinity of her upper arms. She huffs out loudly and glances at her friend, rubs a little faster. The other girl is focused on something in her lap. A sketch? The corners of her paper crinkle and flap up with each gust. It takes a while before she looks up, lips attached to the eraser of her pencil.

"the fuck are you doing?"

Girl X shrugs and snap-shakes her head suddenly. The invisible drops of water spray everywhere. She rubs her arms some more and lunges forward to see over her friend's shoulder, haphazardly avoiding contact. She pants a little, ignoring the white bursts of breath.

"get off! you're in my fucking light"

Girl X is mildly depressed and rather impressed by the turquoise go-go boots and smoldering eyes and angsty poetry of her friend. It all makes her think here's Somebody. She's grateful to be among the handbags, bohemian bracelets, and lucky charms dangling off the arm of a Somebody.

"Okay"

She jumps out of the sun. Pausing on the sidewalk, she starts flapping her arms until her thin shoulders are rocking too. The sun's so beautiful but it goes down every day. It's beautiful at least for a while though, doesn't that count? And it doesn't matter if you can't ever reach Tomorrow, cause it's thinking about Tomorrow that makes you feel good now. She puffs into her cupped hands, head tilted, damp echoing between her palms.

Girl X's friend rips out the sheet and tears it up, walks deliberately over to the public garbage can. Tosses everything in, piece by piece. Looks at Girl X through the veil of unclumped mascara and opaque contact lens and perfectly mussed green bangs. For a moment that is all she is staring into.

"why the fuck are you so fucking jumpy?"

## Neon

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I'll never be a real Somebody, I guess. Girl X leans her weight onto only her left leg with the hipbone jutting out and tugs at her slipping bagstrap. She shakes her head and then rolls her ankles, one by one, black and white.

"I'm so fucking cold,"

Her friend snaps out a compact mirror and adds a few thumbprints to the silver, a few layers to her eyeliner. She walks emphatically. Each violet-heeled step is a statement. Her body is Art.

"that's all."



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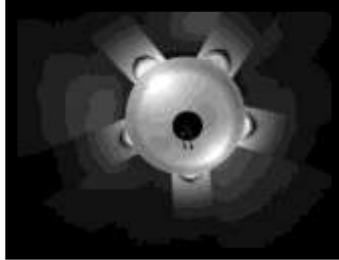
# Three Poems

Nicole Kuwik

## The Light is Dim

And the carpet is spotted  
from the vomit of another time  
and two separate stomachs.

Alone with this lightbulb  
and cloudy shot glass  
I stare at the melon peel  
and feel guilty  
for being alive.



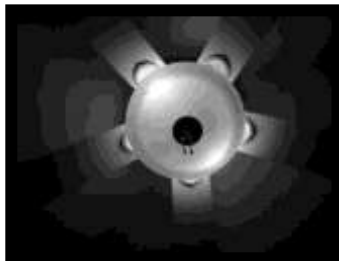
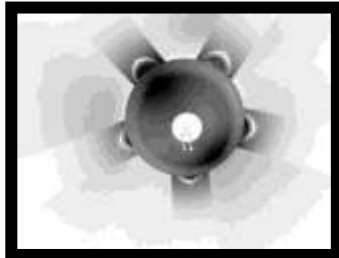
## The Circles

I can feel the  
The purple circles  
pooling underneath my eyes  
and my heart palpitates into walls  
Godamnit! In some  
pathetic effort to stab some  
sense into my deficient brain,  
I look up articles  
on dead models,  
collapsed in Uruguay,  
in Brazil

11 grapes  
600 calories,  
cardiac arrest,

Anorexia Nervosa,

The words sound like



## **Neon**

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like the first time I overheard  
my dad say them out loud  
hiding in a hallway,  
whispering stiff with concern,  
it sounded like a term he had read about  
once  
in a book which was  
not about the engineering of flight

## **Vomit At 7:30PM**

The potential devastation is like  
strappy sandals in the shadows  
as I lay nauseous  
in the same dark room

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# Carrie

Bruce Brightly

Carrie spells her name with a C. A heart dots the i. She sits alone; in a cold car older than her. She also writes her name with two frowns that form the arches of the lowercase r's. It's cold because the car is still off. Sometimes the c is lowercase too. It has been off for ten minutes. She makes sure the arches are detached from the spines. The car is off because if she turns it on she will have made a decision. Otherwise they would be just r's and not frowns. She hasn't decided whether to go back inside or not; back to bed. As long as the car is cold she is safe. No one knows her r's are sad, and no one knows that combined with the dotted heart there's a whole other sentence in her lowercase name.

There is frost on the window. She thinks if she freezes to death, no one will think it was on purpose; that's one way. If she does start the car, it will take ten minutes to melt the frost with the inside air. She'll be late. Carrie doesn't want to get out and scrape. She doesn't realize no one would want to scrape off the car in such cold weather. She thinks it's just her.

Carrie looks down. There are petrified French fries stuck between the crevice of the seat and the middle console. She's always late for school. Carrie breathes in. If she's early she'll have to hang



## Neon

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around. She smells fried food wrappers and aged cola.

Last week she heard in health class that exercise is as effective as medication for treating depression. The passenger seat is usually empty too. Being alone alone is ok; like in her car. Sometimes the passenger seat has one or two bulging grease soaked paper bags on it. It makes her feel good until they're gone; like people. If someone is alone with peers nearby it means something different. Their isolation of her aches more than loneliness. Anytime she hears the word exercise she turns red and thinks everyone is thinking about her. Some look at her because she turns red. Most of them are thinking about themselves. That was yesterday. There are times she still tries to reach the French fries. She doesn't realize everyone has thought about it at least once.

Tomorrow she will spell her name with one r. In a month she'll connect the arch. In a year she'll have so many hearts to write she'll have to write her name over and over; along with someone else's. His name will have a lot of dots and crosses. There will be other letters that she'll make into smiles. In the years to come she will be healthy. She will name her children with long names that have lots of smiles and items to dot and cross.

Today Carrie doesn't know that. Today she just has to get to tomorrow. Right now she just has to turn the key.

# Components Involved In Maintaining A Life

Joseph Goosey

When Lizzy stabbed my grandfather I was not fazed enough to leave her. In fact, I somehow did the math to work out so that my willingness to dismiss her actions would force us closer together. Of course, this was not the case, but what else could one do?

Perhaps if he had died I would have felt differently about the situation, but it just so happened that the blade missed out on all the necessary components involved in maintaining a life. Besides, she hadn't really set out to kill him. However, her intentions never became exactly clear.

On several occasions I had inquired about her intent, but to no avail.

"Remember," I'd say to her, "When you stabbed Grandpa Don in the Kitchen?"

"Uh huh." She always sounded as though she could not believe my audacity in bringing the incident up again.

"Well, what were you really trying to do there?"

"I dunno," She'd always respond, "It just sorta...Happened." And in a sense, her description was entirely accurate.

It was the night before Thanksgiving or Christmas or one of those silly dates that result in GATHERING. We, meaning myself, Lizzy, my mother, my Venezuelan neighbor, and of course, my grandfather were aimlessly hovering about the kitchen stalling until a socially acceptable time to eat arrived. There was an inherent tension due to the fact that my mother was loony and Lizzy was loony but in a polar fashion to my mother.

For the second time in the day I had knocked over a cup of ice water onto the wooden cabinets. Apparently, ice water destroys and warps wooden cabinets, or so I was informed by my mother.

"GODAMNIT," She screamed, "I've told you once already today and a hundred times in the past...water DESTROYS AND WARPS wooden cabinets!"

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I began to wipe up the water. My mother grabbed a rag. I was under the impression that she was going to help. Instead, she shoved the rag into Lizzy's chest and simply paddled on about exercise.

"DO something." She told Lizzy.

It did not appear as though Lizzy had time to consider the rag, the water, the cabinets, or the knife that was on the table to her left. She allowed the rag to fall to the floor. The next item to hit the floor would be a drop of my grandfather's blood. He was standing to Lizzy's immediate right, opposite the knife. She had stuck my grandfather and he did not see this coming.

My mother said something that no one heard.

After some deliberation it was decided that Lizzy and I would drive him to the hospital. We told my mother and my neighbor to please enjoy their holiday meal and proceeded to haul my grandfather into the backseat of my Toyota. During the ride Lizzy apologized incessantly and somehow I felt this to be unnecessary. Strangely, my grandfather did not make a sound. Yet he had not passed out from shock, nor had he bled out. I suppose he was only a man of very few words.

The doctors patched him up as doctors will do and confirmed that he remained kicking and however fortunate or unfortunate, he would be for quite some time. No charges were filed because my grandfather has no recollection of the occurrence. In fact, even since Lizzy has left in search of finer things/people, when I see my grandfather he often mentions her in an admiring fashion.

"Where did that one go?" He asks. "You know, that one with the black curls?"

I tell him the truth, which is that I do not know.

"Oh," He says, "Well she had a fine spirit to her."

I nod in agreement and glance at where his scar should be. I change the subject to one that I know more about.

# Review: Tatterdemalion

Review by Christopher Frost

*"I worried I would have to inform them that I was, as if following a painful and statutory program, quietly losing my mind, and that it was all going to be a wonderful, brilliant party."*

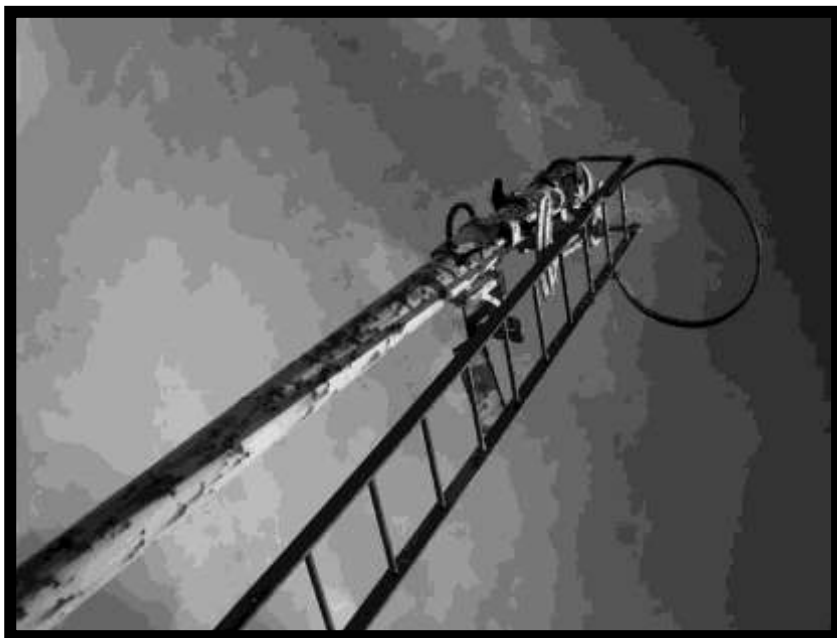
So says the narrator of Ray Succre's first novel *Tatterdemalion*. And indeed, it would appear that the protagonist is slowly going more than a little insane: a dragon has taken up residence inside his oven (ostensibly to coach him in the art of poetry); he suffers from crippling bouts of stating the obvious, and his frequent visits to the employment office are tinged with the terrible fear that he might secretly be a racist.

*Tatterdemalion* is the story of his quest for a mysterious jar and, also, gainful employment. The story takes place in an odd, off-the-wall world, alternately comic, menacing and surreal. Here the narrator's imagination and the quirkiness of the real world meet in spectacular fashion.

At first, the boundaries of fantasy and reality seem clearly drawn; the dragon that haunts his oven is fantasy, the employment office real--but as the story progresses this reality is undermined on all fronts. A dream-like strangeness creeps in, destabilising the world to the point where even the reader is genuinely unsure whether or not any given happenings are real, or part of the narrator's imagination. This places you squarely in the same boat as the protagonist, searching for meaning and safety in an insane world.

As the quest for the mysterious jar continues, events become gradually more and more extreme, but the climax delivers brilliantly on what has gone before. Ray Succre writes vividly and in a tone perfectly in keeping with the wildness of the narrative.

*Tatterdemalion* is available from Cauliay Publishing.



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# Biographical Notes

**Jared Ward** has had work accepted at *Evansville Review*, *New Delta Review*, *West Wind Review*, *The Dos Passos Review*, *Zone 3*, *Underground Voices*, *Hobart*, and others.

**Fred Skolnik**: "I am the editor in chief of the recently published 22-volume second edition of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, winner of the 2007 Dartmouth Medal. I was born in New York and have lived in Israel since 1963, working mostly as an editor and translator. "

**P.A. Levy**: "Being semi-housebound in the heart of rural Suffolk isn't as bad as it sounds, after all I'm surrounded by fields and woods, although I wouldn't mind being able to do a bit of ditch vaulting or hedge hurdling. I am also the clueless collective, and my playground is at: [www.cluelesscollective.co.uk](http://www.cluelesscollective.co.uk)"

**Sarah Anne Lloyd** was the 2008 editor of *Labyrinth*. She lives in Bellingham, Washington, USA.

**Paul Hanninen** currently lives and writes in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

**GC Perry's** fiction has been published or is upcoming in anthologies from *Thieves Jargon Press*, *Edit Red*, *So New Media* and *Better Non Sequitur*, as well as numerous places on the internet including *FRiGG*, *Pindeldyboz* and *Noo*. Extracts of his never-to-be completed novel were featured in issues of *The Orphan Leaf Review*. He lives in South London.

**Weihui Lu** has work published or forthcoming in *Wanderings*, *Soundzine*, *The Kenyon Review*, etc. She is the art editor of the poetry journal *Mimesis* ([www.mimesispoetry.com](http://www.mimesispoetry.com)).

**Nicole Kuwik** likes Chamomile even though the whiskery cat can't spell it. She spends a lot of time with a fish named Mortimer, and believes flowers on the sides of highways should be given more

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consideration. She thanks you for reading her work and hopes you like it; at least a little bit.

**Bruce Brightly:** "As a writer from Plainville, CT USA I have co-written *Bulletproof Salesman*, a nonfiction book published by Toronto's Productive Publications. My work has been featured in *Lucid*, and is forthcoming in editions of *HeavyGlow* and *Pearl*. In addition to trade-print and contributing to Black20.com I have made numerous appearances on my mother's refrigerator.

**Joseph Goosey** subsides off of printer paper and the champagne of beers. His work is littered here and there. Barring disaster, he will have a chapbook out in the fall via Poptritus Press.

**Christopher Frost** is a Writer from the north of England.