

Clearance on an Urban Legend

1 of 2

Thomas Bisbee

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TO ALL WHO SMOKE CIGARS & DRINK COFFEE WHILE
READING

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Forever alone.

:(

1. SUEÑO DE BRUJA PRINCIPIANTA

Audrey walked into the English room before the warning bell rang and took out clean paper and a heavy book. The bell rang again and someone walked in and sat down late and the teacher, Mr. Rudd, ignored him because he wanted to write on a chalkboard not a detention slip that smeared carbon onto your hands.

“Okay, take out your worksheets.” He said. Take them out slap them on your desks, sandwich ‘em up and pass them around with sticky fingers and pick a martyr to read the rotten homemade prose within the *opinion box*.

“Who’s reading first? C’mon let’s get some discussion going. Mary? No? Didn’t finish it? Okay. Anyone? Okay yeah, Marc. No sorry, I mean Mike yeah, okay guys let’s listen up, okay Mike, start.”

“I think that she didn’t deserve that kind of punishment, I mean, it’s not like uh, proportional to the, uh, crime.”

“Who?”

“Hester Prime.”

“Prynne. Hester Prynne.”

“Hester Prynne.”

“Okay thanks Mike.”

Rudd wrote names on the chalkboard with white chalk that dried out his hands and everyone waited for him to finish.

“Okay. Now what about Hester, what did you guys write about in the morality box. Um, Audrey, what do you have? C’mon guys this is discussion time let’s get into it. Okay, Audrey go ahead.”

“I thought...” Audrey said.

“Hold on, read from the box please, if you didn’t do it just pass.” Rudd said.

“I wrote on a separate sheet of paper because the box is very small.”

“Oh. Um, okay go ahead. But remember guys we can start from the box but take it farther. Let’s not hold ourselves back. Okay Audrey, whenever you’re ready.”

“I thought that Hester is abused by guys who act on the compulsion to apply sadistic punishments on her because she took pleasure with her own will. And this is relevant to us because men still do this to women through the same social morality.” Audrey said. Some people in the room laughed and waited to see Rudd’s reaction.

“Okay. Well that’s an interesting opinion but I’m not sure that it applies in exactly the same way because now, you know, we have laws and can understand how to help people in situations like this.” Rudd said.

“Women.” Audrey said.

“What?”

“Women, not people. You said to help people. I think it’s women that need the attention...”

“...Okay. Well any ideas on this?” Rudd said looking around.

“Yeah I think that situations like this apply to men too because they can be in situations like this too.” A student said.

“Okay, good. Who else?”

“Well she grew up in that society so she should have understood that things like that would make a problem for her if she did them and she did do them so I think maybe she just didn’t care because we all know not to break our own laws even if they’re not the best.” Another student said.

“So you think Hester *deserved* this?” Rudd said. He pressed together his eyebrows and made a grin that clearly indicated the right answer.

“Well no it’s just, you know, you have to respect the laws because you can’t just change them by acting out.” The other student said.

“That’s fair, remember, Marin Luther King Junior expressed peaceful protesting. C’mon guys, let’s remember.” Rudd said. He turned around and scrawled “P-E-A-C-E-F-U-L” onto the blackboard then underlined the word with a swish of his hand.

Audrey raised her hand and Rudd pointed in her general direction.

“Peaceful protesting isn’t always enough. The men tortured Hester for being sexual. I think that might deserve a forceful reaction.” Audrey said.

“Yes. Hmm no, we don’t know about that, because the protesting should be peaceful.” Rudd pointed to the underlined word on the board as he spoke and gave a meaningful nod. Audrey tried to smile in agreement but instead half shrugged and looked away out the window.

Rudd handed back papers, Audrey got a C on the quiz from yesterday (remember fill out all the blanks even if you’re not sure for 25% chance-Mr. Rudd). The girl next to Audrey chewed gum and Audrey watched the birds fly in different formations outside. The period bell rang and everyone shuffled out.

Audrey wore tight dark wash jeans and a plain black tee that shone like silk. She wore a red bead necklace and an unbuttoned cream blazer that felt stiff and flared outwards as she walked to her locker and switched a heavy English textbook for a heavier American History textbook. Next to her locker some kid threw a highlighter towards the trash and missed and hit some girl across the room.

Audrey walked into room 148 on the second level where there was a good outside view of the football field if the teacher placed you in the right seat. She had been given a seat farther away and she

lingered by the heater and looked outside. Inside she saw Sarah and Mike and talked to them about hanging out this weekend and maybe going to this haunted house and maybe smoking a little green.

The bell buzzed and Audrey sat down and looked out at the plain sky. Mrs. Harper wrote on the chalkboard then wiped the dust on her blouse without shame.

“Animal Farm, Animal Farm, Animal Farm.” Harper said. She spoke thrice when she wanted the class to discuss some subject. Mrs. Harper was an unpopular teacher and she had a special way of encouraging otherwise strange kids to speak their mind.

Two such kids sat next to Audrey and immediately responded to the stimulus.

“Meow, meow, meow.” The girl said. “Animal farm in lit, not so fun.”

Her friend joined her and imitated a pig, “Oink, oink, oink...oink!”

Class bullies wanted to antagonize the two but they were so disguising that all potential bullies opted to let the whole incident slip. The normal purple monkey machine would resolve this one.

“It’s time, class.” Harper said. “It’s time to prep for the pop culture test. American pop culture. Who knows what they’re doing? Here’s the sign-up sheet. Write your name next to a date...”

The pig kid passed the paper to Audrey. The two entries above her stated “Marilyn Monroe. Keith Herring.”

Audrey left the page blank and passed it on.

“Everyone should at least have an idea. Let’s talk about that. What’re you thinking about James?” Harper said gesturing towards a kid with black jeans and a black hoodie.

“I don’t know.”

“Do you have an idea yet? Have you thought about it?”

“Actually, I’ve been sort of grasping at an idea for a while. I was thinking about doing something about how only secrets that have a secret chance are secretly welcome.”

“Um. Let’s sort of pick something from history. Let’s think of

something from the book. There are lots of things to pick from the book. I love your idea but let's change it a little and pick something from the book. Eric?"

The pig boy next to Audrey spoke.

"I'm doing Marilyn Monroe."

"And where are you going with that?"

"I want to talk about how she is a strong woman and a role model and how people should mimic, or emulate, her. Yeah."

Harper walked around from behind her desk and leaned her poufy body against the olive drab desk. Her pastel pink shirt caught on the corner and she tugged it free.

"That's exactly what we're going for here, class. Think outside the box. Pick someone who you feel a connection to. Pick someone strong. This is a learning project don't be restricted by unenthusiasm."

Harper turned to James.

"Think of anything?"

"Helen Keller." James said.

"And where are going with that?"

"Well I was thinking that maybe people born healthy are broken because there is a standard that we don't know to compare ourselves to. Maybe you don't have to be crippled to be crippled."

"Helen Keller was blind."

"Maybe we're all blind even when we're healthy. I don't know."

"James, okay. Maybe let's do something about Helen Keller and explain how she overcame her disabilities." Harper waved her arms around an invisible ball and held it up to James when she spoke. James did not reach out to take it and when he resignedly offered to "just do a paper on Marilyn Monroe" Harper asked him to stay after class so they could "figure something out", "because that was already taken."

Harper then played a fifteen minute film that summed up the atrocities of the sugar triangle on the African peoples. Audrey watched the birds outside. The geese always seemed to flow. The bell

rang and Audrey pressed through the herd and reached down with her pen to the signup sheet that lay on Harper's desk. She wrote down Coco Chanel and walked through the crowd that were already coming in for next period.

The rest of the school day passed the same as usual. The weather became wetter and the books continued getting heavier until the weather passed and the final school bell rang. Audrey walked out back to the parking lot and drove to a nearby doughnut store and bought cheap tasting coffee that she filled with amaretto creamers. She also bought two glazed doughnuts, one for herself.

Audrey drove to Baroque Gold, an art shop on Main Street that supplied a bi-weekly art lounge to high school artists. Audrey met Sarah who sat outside until Audrey came and they both walked up together and Sarah enjoyed the doughnut but said she should have gotten a coffee instead if she wanted to get her something.

They walked through the narrow wooden room lined with paint tubes and hand stretched canvases next to tall rolls of linen and cotton and expensive wooden frames from which emanated an oak fragrance that filled the shop. Audrey enjoyed seeing one of the massive hand carved ebony frames and knew that she painted for a frame like that. But the ebony wood did not topple down into arms so she thought about her painting ideas instead.

A group of five people sat around in different chairs in a tall red room. Audrey sat on a seat with a cushion and relaxed. Alex and Axel were talking about their ongoing literary theme and the other girl, Maria, sat doodling on her notes.

"Are you still doing the shape thing?" Sarah asked Maria.

"Yeah, I'm working on a Matisse inspired canvas right now." Maria said. She showed Sarah and Audrey a photo she took with her phone.

"I want to hear about your idea, Audrey." Maria said. "It sounds really exciting."

"Oh I've picked out colors and know what I'm going to do, but my problem is I don't know where to put the objects. See, I want the

drab green background across here, and the pink sky but I don't know where to put the geese or what they'll look like."

"That's ridiculously good." Maria said.

"I know, it really is." Sarah said.

"And I know how I'm going to make it gothic." Audrey said.

"How?"

"One of the geese, in their flying formation, is going to be a fly."

Axel and Alex looked over and laughed. "A fly? How so?"

"It's going to be big and hidden among them, in the formation. I don't know where to put them yet though."

"That's awesome." They said and went back to talking to each other.

"Thanks." Audrey said.

"What are you going to call it?" Maria asked.

"The Secret Cripple."

"Awesome."

More people came in with ideas and talked until the group meeting time passed and people left the building. Audrey still sat on her chair and stared at the swirls on the red wallpaper when she felt a quick good feeling rush splash through her body. Her body knew what she thought before she did and she stood up. Sarah and Maria were in the far corner talking to each other and the boys. Audrey quickly moved to the main narrow room of the shop. She waited a minute until the owner walked into a back room that stood behind the counter where cardboard boxes towered over the floor. Audrey casually walked through the narrow hall and peered into the room and saw the owner bent down rummaging through boxes. She grabbed the ebony frame as she looked behind her and walked through the door. She felt the rush again and the outside breeze felt good. Everything felt good but her body shook and she ran around her car, as casually as she could, opened her trunk and stashed the frame. She walked back into the lounge in a minute that felt like five.

When Audrey left five minutes later she dropped Sarah off at a pretty green house where she lived with only her mom. Audrey felt

tired and drove slow to the end of Sarah's road as she tried to decide where to go. 4:30 meant that she could get home just early enough to deal with her parents. She might be able to snag some fruit before they started arguing about little things, about nothing. "I can see it in the way you're looking at me you don't have to say it." One would say. "You should care about my feelings", "look at me when I'm talking to you", "Dinner can wait don't walk away from me."

Audrey hated that house and getting closer than a block made her feel uneasy. Walking through the entrance and seeing the pasty yellow walls and frayed green carpeting made her sick, like getting stomach cockroaches instead of butterflies. She cried about it sometimes. Other times she stared at the wall. She would think about killing herself but thought about how she could then no longer ever experience pleasure and Audrey would become angry instead of sad and just try to sleep it off, which was not hard since sleep comes easy to people who feel like that.

But Audrey remembered fruit was cheap (she sometime's forgot little things like that and felt stupid) and drove left, away from home and onto Main Street instead of driving right towards home. The fruit in a café on Main Street cost double what it would in a supermarket but a cheap piece of fruit inflates very little in price even when doubled and Audrey pretended like money didn't exist anyway, especially if she didn't have much.

Audrey bought another coffee and a banana, apple and pumpkin muffin and carried it with her outside where rain started to fall. She walked around the block onto a dirty street that had an abandoned parking garage and very small stores. She took out a key and unlocked a hallway entrance door and then walked up a very steep stairway with rubber matted steps and old wood railings on both sides. Audrey opted to risk falling instead of using the dirty railings and walked through the narrow hall with many doors and a very high ceiling.

With another key Audrey opened door that held up a fake brass plate that read "18" and walked in and closed the door behind her.

She stood in a small old room with a very high ceiling and two tall arched windows that gave a panoramic view of the wet grey Main Street. The small studio had an eclectic assortment of desks furnished through careful garage sale exchanges. The walls majestically presented many oil paintings that Audrey hung. She believed that each painting was perfect and reveled in the view. It was the only thing in her life that she let herself be completely proud of and she loved it without shame.

Five small tables, some of them wood and some of a 1950s sort of metal, stood against the white painted walls with a single large oil painting above each table. Audrey sat down at a desk designed for computers and set down her paper bag of food amid stacks of papers and notes on the desk. There was no computer but she pressed the sideways triangle button on a cheap silver radio player that also played CDs and music with a fast beat and low bass played quiet enough for her to hear the loud rain.

Audrey knew her studio room, paid for by the generous death of a foreign great aunt, could only be her temporary solace but it was enough. She ate her muffin and cracked a window that pushed too much wet air in so she shut it again. Audrey finished eating and went downstairs to her car and pulled the heavy frame out from the trunk and held it close under her jacket to keep it hidden from view and safe from rain.

Back upstairs she pieced together a wood frame and stapled linen over it then painted a layer of gesso on the canvas. She painted more layers over the canvas that evening until it was thick and sturdy and the greasy oils could not bleed through to the back. Audrey sketched at her desk until the sun set and turned on a lamp but she felt pressed by the dismal fact that her beautiful studio had no shower and was not an apartment. Audrey had looked up the prices of apartments and a cheap apartment cost too much even with an unreliable roommate. Audrey locked the door behind her and walked down the stairs to her car and drove home.

That night her parents compelled her to eat a late supper with

them. They made prying comments about school and almost got into an argument about how Audrey never brought her friends over. Their dark looks spoke more than the forced words.

“You can bring them over.” Dad said.

“Who did you hang out with today? I know you went out to Tyler’s place last weekend, you should bring him over sometime.” Mom said.

“I’ll ask them.” Audrey said.

“Who’s them?” Dad said.

“What?”

“Them. As in plural. We should know who your friends are, this is basic stuff.”

“Your father’s right. If you get into trouble with grades we’ll have to take your phone and then we’ll find out anyway.”

“Your mother’s right, you know.”

“Uh huh.” Audrey said. She heard her hallow words and looked up to nod to reinforce her affirmation.

“Okay, well don’t come home late tomorrow. It’s a school night.”

“Okay, dad.”

Audrey went to her room after finishing the pea soup and was glad they weren’t arguing but felt dishonest because when she talked to them she always had to conceal her true feelings.

Audrey walked through school in a daze the next day. Maybe it was because she didn’t have any coffee. In lit Rudd asked her why Hester kept her husband a secret.

“Because she wanted to maintain the peace.” Audrey said. She didn’t even know what that really meant but she said it and Rudd agreed and moved on.

After a tiring day at school Audrey drove to the café to buy food and went up to her studio and changed into old paint stained jeans and a yellow smock that she thought looked ugly on her but were attractive.

She painted the scene. Ducks flew in formation away from a

nebulous green mist that might be an island. The sky had patches of blue and red. She painted a fat fly the same size as the ducks and stuck it inbetween two ducks. She wondered why the ducks wouldn't hear it buzzing even if they couldn't see that it was not a duck. That made her laugh and she sat down at her desk to take a break. Audrey stayed in the room and did not leave until the painting was complete. Then, as it was still wet, she set it into the ebony frame and the painting glowed a surreal green and the black seemed to suck light away.

Audrey hung the painting on the door and she drove home and slept well that night. The next day the clouds still poured rain and her dad snapped at her over the coffee machine but she made her coffee anyway and it tasted all the better later on her way to school. During first period she slept and dreamt that the studio building burnt down and that now all she did was stare at walls and sleep but when Rudd woke her up she argued about some feminist point and felt good to be alive because her secret hope was that the little piece of love she had in life would overtake her entire life regardless of how terrible anyone else ever acted.

2. THE FAMILY TREES

Byron made his living doing yard work for people who had gone to college and made enough money to pay a self taught handyman but not enough to employ a professional. Getting a rural job usually meant mowing fields of grass in the sun for hours while urban jobs were funded by homeowners who wanted their yards manicured.

Yard manicures meant trimming grass and polishing away trees. Since October the rural jobs were harder to come by and he relied on work around town, which was why he wore blue shirts. The conservative spirit of the townspeople could accept wretched pale blue on the sweaty laborers. Blue is a safe color. It's patriotic, exclusive to America. Wearing a shirt with just the right amount of sweat faded blue could be indistinguishable from voting Republican and going to church to talk about the effectiveness of saying grace properly or to discuss new apocalyptic novels that could substitute ungodly novels about vampires and teen sex with biblical demons.

Byron woke up and drove to work in a truck filled with partially rusted shovels and plastic five gallon buckets. The house was white and well kept outside. David, the homeowner and patriarch of the white house, explained which trees needed torn down.

“All of them can go, right up to this side of the creek. That's the property line.”

“All of ‘em?”

“It’s a mess, I know.” David said. He turned to walk away before speaking in a low confidential tone, the sort of tone he might have used to talk about a porn site he visited while drunk on red wine.

“Thanks for working today, Byron.”

“I work weekends if I can, sir.” Byron said.

“Well, Sunday. It’s great. Thanks” David said. He emphasized the “thanks” so that it felt like a signature on the bottom of an unpleasant legal document. It was final, it was official, and it could now be ignored until necessity demanded further attention at some later date.

Byron watched as David’s five member family climbed into a roomy car that was idling in the driveway. The driveway was elevated in relation to the cluster of trees that formed Mr. David’s, Sir David’s, eyesore. Byron reached around for his tools and dropped his arms for a moment to watch the Sir David family drive away. The thought of the tiny furnace blowing sweet smelling heat into their church faces and white hands reminded Byron that he could see his breath fade off into invisible air. But it also reminded him of a thermostat filled with sweet apple cider and the cheap flavored cigar jammed inbetween his seat and armrest of the truck. He went now and got those.

The pale green thermostat looked ugly sitting on the side of the truck where he let his arms lay earlier. The pale green looked even uglier next to the brown two door truck. He rolled the cigar between his fingers with one hand as the other grabbed a wooden shovel, the kind that would always stick a thousand tiny splinters into your hands after a day’s work with no gloves. Next to it was a neon plastic shovel but he would only use that if his employer was near. The plastic shovel was a good tool, but only in the way that a blue shirt was also a good tool.

Byron flipped out a brass Zippo and lit the cigar until a nice cherry burnt on the end that made the flavor feel smooth in his mouth. There were fifty trees, maybe a hundred. He ran his hand

down the side of one of them. If this area had been taken care of there wouldn't be so many different sorts with different ages. The mixture was like a forest of mutts. They were too old to train, to harness into a pretty urban sight, but even if they had been younger the David man would not want them kept up.

He got a chainsaw and cut one down. Then another. The work was quick and when the 12th one was down his cigar still had room to burn. His sweat mixed uncomfortably with the cold morning sun. He stopped the saw and tore off the lid of the thermostat and drank cider. It felt good in his throat. He gulped it so fast that he felt the warmth in his stomach sucked away from the splash of drink .

“Mutts.” he said out loud. That’s what they look like.

The oak looked like Scout, a black lab mutt that his family had when he was a kid. He laughed at the three freshly hewn maples that rolled onto the frost soaked mud that crunched as they fell. They were Roger, Pier, Cassy, the only time in his life that he had three dogs at once.

“Good dogs, good trees, good memories.” He hummed.

There were twenty trees rotting on the ground before the lumps and branches started to look like people.

“Mrs. Wallace!”

“Old John?”

“Bill.”

He had heard that people picked pets who had the same qualities of their master, but Sir David’s small forest was filled with living statues of all the people in Byron’s life. He wasn’t smiling when he had cut down Tom, the neighbor kid who wrecked his car one summer, but his hands shook by the time Bill crashed onto the ground. Bill had died earlier that year. Too much alcohol, too much stress from the tax issue. Bill became Catholic but couldn’t afford it so he went to a modern church that accepted homosexuals and where discussion groups talked about upcoming local elections and evolution the same way a stoner might talk about having tried ecstasy “that one time.”

Thoughts pounded through Byron's head. When the cigar burnt out only a few trees stood living. The cider dripped empty and the afternoon sun poured down. He had been avoiding the skinny birch tree that looked like mom. He pushed through a few more. Mostly family. Some he barely looked at.

Five trees left. His brother crashed down, a dark ash. Then a pine tree that didn't look like anyone, thank god. His mother took three separate tries; a gust of wind would come by and push the weight of the trunk down onto the damn saw blade. Byron noticed the dark clouds. There was a 60% chance of rain but that wasn't supposed to be until six. By the time he re-fueled the saw again the clouds were on him and the wind picked up. It was already dangerous to be cutting trees down with the wind blowing but if it started to rain too he would have to stop.

Byron grabbed his saw and forced his way through an old tree that was rotten inside. Ants crawled out and the tree broke down in separate pieces and one of the stiff old branches caught his cheek on its way down and left a trail of blood dripping across his face. One left. It was further away and on bank of the creek. Rain started pouring down and Byron almost slipped twice as he positioned himself next to the black tree.

It was unnaturally dark now and the thunder came closer. His hands were numb as he ripped the cord back to start the chainsaw. He swung the roaring saw into the fleshy tree which moaned as the heavy wind and searing blade cut through it. The rain was blinding and a streak of lightning flashed. For a moment he saw the graveyard before him: his dead mother, Bill, Tom the neighbor, pets and others were strewn across a mass grave. Then two cracks occurred simultaneously, another flash of white light and Byron saw the worst sight of all. Standing before him he saw in this final tree his own face, smiling and with a cigar sticking out the side of its parted lips. The second crack was a heavy branch that came from the wind ripping off a main branch above him. It fell and struck Byron on the head. He and the branch slid down the bank and into the water.

The next morning was sunny and cold where a group of police spoke to David near the bank of the creek.

“Even without the weight of that branch he still would have died. Knocked unconscious.” A police officer said.

“He was a decent guy.” David said. “I don’t know why he would work in that kind of weather.”

“He was employed by you to cut down these trees?” Another officer asked.

“That’s right.”

“Didn’t finish the job, left that one up. We’ll need to get a report written, can you come by the station?”

“Yeah, of course.”

David stood and watched the police leave. A towing company would come by to take away the truck later and the body was already gone. He walked over and leaned on the dark tree and thought about what an officer said earlier. There were a few scratches where Byron had pushed into the tree but the saw must have stopped running because it wasn’t cut.

“Survival of the fittest, eh Byron?” David said.

3. BIBLE BELT MUD

Emile Jaqueon drove for half a mile with a flat tire along a stretch of highway lined with green and brown florescent signs erected by committee members who were also on the committees for the local churchs and business. The Kentucky road is a beast situated below the dull fields of Ohio corn and safely above Florida's marsh deserts.

The silver car rolled off the exit and onto Main Street Centralia. The street looked clean and Emile parked in front of an old American house. He stepped out and locked his doors with the push of a button and walked up the sidewalk in front of the house with square porch columns and thin glass, the kind that broke easy with thin paint chips around it. Emile decided to enjoy the cool evening air because he had a thick wool overcoat and walked down the sloping road. He parked in front of a residential area but Main Street probably mean Business Street so he continued.

Emile breathed in the cold fragrant air that slowly lost its flavor as the pink sun set and cold smells were lost to a numb nose. Wind made the cold worse and Emile walked up to another white house; this one had Doric columns holding up a blue painted porch. He knocked and rang the doorbell button several times and took a step back to avoid appearing aggressive. Inside the house remained dark

and silent and he saw that the sign he mistook for “Mitt & Ryan” actually read “Foreclosed”. He frowned and walked back down the narrow steps and rubbed his hands together.

Emile continued walking. He felt like an adult playing a game of trick or treat. The cement sidewalk under his leather shoes knocked hard and he turned on the street named “Benjamin” where yellow lights shone out of businesses on either side of the two lane street.

The first place, a café with a short terrace over small black painted steel tables, refused all potential refugees with the one word command: CLOSED. Closed as in you are not welcome. Closed as in I have something better to do. Closed and go away, please and thank you. Emile tried to open the door but a man vacuuming inside pointed to the sign before attacking imagined dusk under a table. Emile glanced at the “Support our Troops”, and “County Fair, September three weeks ago” signs before going on to another business.

A faded red and white striped awning, much smaller than the café’s, seemed a kind gesture to say yes, we have thought about covering you from poor weather but no, we will not pay for the trouble. There were no signs in the windows and Emile stepped into the bar where many people sat drinking beer from red and brown bottles.

“Scotch, with ice. Thanks.”

The bartender walked back to the other end of the bar and leaned over to a group that wore red flannel shirts and made more noise than they had too.

Emile decided to avoid American bars if he ever passed through Kentucky again. A fuzzy TV played a sports game that no one watched. Everyone smoked then drank, or drank then smoked outside for a few minutes before coming back inside to drink again.

Emile paid and left and passed a group that stood huddled in a half circle smoking short cigarillos and cigarettes and kept his eyes away from theirs and tried to think of them in terms other than redneck.

But when he walked down the hard sidewalk and into a typical small town American park, the kind with small hills and signs that warn citizens in very stern terms that visitation ends at night, Emile felt angry and his throat choked up so he fake coughed and sat down on a wood bench that had long horizontal gaps where the wind blew.

In this town lived so many people but there were few activities. Sure there was probably a mall that sold generic American jeans and a few grocery stores but Emile thought about how strange it was that real life was so mundane. Life just was. He read about Greek and Roman festivals and about hippie music gatherings and knew that county fairs came and went around August and September but society just sat around existing in a very boring way.

Emile stretched out his legs and wondered where all this frustration came from. He took a deep breath and made sure to feel the cold air absorb into his lungs before exhaling and lapsing back into rhythmic respiration. This life mimicked a bad dream where you have a moment of full consciousness before fading back into whatever subconscious maze you were moments before. Emile looked down at his watch but immediately forgot the time.

He sat on the bench and thought about feelings and art. He knew very little about art and as much as anyone about feelings but tonight he felt full of fake stuffing. He was an urn filled with green ooze that oozed and oozed and foamed so that nothing else could fit and no matter how much dry heaving and vomit you spat out the ooze always stayed at a constant level, a level of full discontentment that became so typical that the knowledge of the pain would slip out of awareness.

Doric pillars held up an American house and oozing knowledge swam inside a strong man. Emile felt weak and alone. The white buildings were dim and hazy across the street. Farther away there was a bronze statue of an American colonial holding a gun. Some colonial statues held guns and other colonial statues rode horses and held guns. Emile sat on a cold hollow bench in despair where he wanted to be found but knew that nothing that could find him would be

enough so he slouched further into the stiff wood. At least if a police officer discovered him there might be a crime to pay for.

“A broken car is worse than a broken mind.” Emile thought. “Or broken feelings I mean.”

Emile wanted to address the problem when he realized that when he misspoke mind instead of feelings, he understood that there could be a solution because he could dissect the issue to some degree.

“Broken feelings. Broken feeling. What feelings? What is the question...?” Emile said. He might have thought some of it; the cold air made him shiver and he might be muttering or thinking loud.

“Loneliness? No, hollowness, the problem is being filled with gunk.” Emile thought. The thought sounded rotten. He thought, “I don’t need to be a psychoanalyst to know that seems bad. Being male and being filled with gunk, poisonous rotten gunk. Maybe it is not bad it just sounds bad. Maybe I do need to be a psychoanalyst to know if that seems bad.”

The sky became very dark and if the moon had wanted to come out it would be out by now. Emile looked down to see what the time was. He did not know what time the moon should be out but the sky was so dark that it must be a new moon night.

Emile stood up and walked over to the statue. “I want to sit”, he thought, “but there is no plot here, I cannot be the protagonist without a story.” The old statue looked beaten in the night. The brass did not look clean and Emile doubted that the city kept these sorts of memorials clean. There was no reason to. The statue was lifeless and nothing could add life to it. Really it was just a lump of hallow metal, a symbol. “Maybe a symbol that the dead will never live.”

Emile bent down and rubbed the cuff of his jacket over the embossed letters that spelled: *The Common Soldier*.

Emile decided to sleep outside on the park bench because he felt dead inside and hoped the cold would hurt him enough to evoke pain out of apathy. Emile sat on the bench again for a few minutes but then decided to get drunk to pass the night in a better way. The night would warm from the inside after many drinks. Emile took off his

overcoat as he sat on the bar stool because the vents inside the walls of the bar blew out hot air. The dry air gave Emile warmth but dried his skin and he wondered if the dry air had made the other men's skin so dry. They looked old. "But alcohol drinks do that too." He thought and drank another shot.

A half hour of drinking passed and Emile still sat mentally sober. He picked up a peanut and dropped it and picked it up again with his big hand. He missed the peanut and knew his body was sober but his mind kept clear and that frustrated him. Emile looked at his big hands and then up at the sports show. The TV image swam around in his vision but whenever he tried to check out of his mind his mind would say, *"I remember our problems. I am not drunk and you cannot lose me. You may drink yourself to vomit and black outs but I will be awake inside your body..."* It said the same thing always a different way but after another half hour Emile was drunk and the bartender did not stop another shot into his drink until he paid. He paid and drank and paid again and drank a tall glass of water and left.

Emile believed he could walk well and he found the way back to the park. Instead of dulling his apathy the drink provoked that quiet part of his mind that normal people ignore and morons do not have. Insane people have it too loud.

Emile slouched down under the statue. His mind streamed feelings through him now. That was a problem, about that part of the mind, it didn't have to speak in language it controlled feelings so when he replied Emile felt like an idiot because he spoke to his feelings, not even to a voice in his head.

Emile felt the feeling that translated into, "You cannot enjoy drunkenness because you there is no good tomorrow."

"No good tomorrow?" Emile said. "I don't even know how to begin to solve that problem. There is no solution for life, that's the problem."

His mind said nothing.

"Oh now you want to be quiet?" He said. Emile slapped the statue and fell asleep.

Early next morning before the sun rose Emile woke up and used the statue to pull himself to his feet. His head spun from still being drunk and more from a hangover. He walked out of the park and back down Benjamin Street and stepped into the open café and bought an early coffee. He intended on going back to his car and calling for a tow but he was a sucker for comfort and often gave in to the least possible amount of temptation and this morning the soft blue cushions in the café was a major temptation.

The barista brought over his coffee from around the bar with a look that said *“Good morning and life’s not a party.”*

Emile smiled back and squinted his eyes and said, “Thanks, good coffee.”

“You haven’t had any yet.” She said.

“I need it so it is good.” He said. She looked at him questioningly and so he added, “Thanks. Good morning and thanks.”

His mind was hungover so he wasn’t bothered by the bad conversation. Emile called a towing company and had the repairs taken care of. He bought delicious muffins that he could hardly taste so he would still be welcome while he waited for the repairs to be finished. When the automotive shop called him later he asked for directions and walked across town to his car. He passed the bar on the way and thought about going in for a drink to help his wounded head but the place was closed and he continued on the hard cement until he finally reached his car and drove away. Because Emile drove drunk and blasted his techno music when he drove he wrecked into a careless old woman and both of them died and now no one knows it but the statue in the park in Centralia Kentucky is a memorial for dead colonial soldiers but also stands for a desperate man named Emile who drank and lived then died.

4. I'LL HAVE WHAT SHE'S HAVING

“So what’s *Haze Grill* mean?” A man asked. He sat in a low chair getting a green fish scale tattoo drilled into his bicep by Marcus, the owner of the establishment.

“Don’t know.” Marcus said. “Anthony came up with the name, probably doesn’t mean much.” He looked up and smiled. “But who knows man, what do you think?”

“It’s cool. Reminds me of ...” The man, a guy around 19 or 20 said and looked at the computer playing music. It wasn’t great but it wasn’t bad either. The building wasn’t busy and a group of girls came in, probably to get their tongues pierced with fake ID’s after a month of planning.

“What’s that dude?”

“It’s like a name that means something but I’ve never heard before, like I fell off a tree and forgot what *school* meant or *factory* or something.”

Marcus laughed. “Yeah I know what you mean.”

“Why don’t you just ask him what it means?”

“Who?”

“Anthony.”

“Dude he’s dead.”

“Oh. Sorry dude.”

Marcus looked up at the kid. He didn't seem so old but he refused to call him a kid, even if it was in his own thoughts. No one over 18 was a kid. Why? Who cares. Just pick a number and be consistent. The kid didn't say anything else and stared at one of the girls with dark straight hair. Maybe he knew her. He sure hadn't known Anthony.

Marcus wiped away a streak of ink and brought the needle back to the fluorescent green scales. A cheaply framed picture of his former business partner hung over the counter. He was older than Marcus. He hadn't known that until the funeral, when he read "*1985-2008 in loving memory*" on the small stone slab. He had been the real artist, always spontaneous, never consistent. Never boring.

He heard the girls in the background. They were complaining that not all the black models came in pink, inbetween conversation sessions about things like "...where the food is was so good that one time but I don't want to go there on a Tuesday without talking to..." and "...oh Jeezis Kriiiiist he won't stop textin me what a stawkerrrr..."

Anthony loved those kinds of people. Girls or guys. Maybe he hated them, Marcus never knew. But he always involved himself with them. Marcus laughed. He probably would have gone over there and talked them into getting matching tattoos of something stupid, something he thought they deserved for committing the crime of existing around Anthony. Marcus visited the grave the first year, had even thrown down flowers but that felt weird so he stopped. He obstinately poured out a few drops of his drinks, whenever he drank for a few months. But none of that made him feel any better.

He knew what Anthony would have wanted. Not cheap liquor and daisies that were on the discount shelf of a hospital floral shop but something special, something human. Marcus still visited the grave occasionally, maybe twice a year, sometimes more but it had been hard this last time. Earlier that month he went to his grave and it was disturbing. It was silent and the grass was seamless and indistinguishable from other grave sites. No longer was Anthony a

ghost, a recently deceased friend. He really was one among many now, something that he would never be in life. Sometimes Marcus thought that he lived more in other people's minds than his own body. That when he surprised someone by doing something disturbing, being friendly like a predator with some hidden agenda, that he was imprinting himself. Marcus wondered now if that had been his intention. He wondered if those were the qualities that made someone an enigma or a parasite.

"Probably both." Marcus said.

"What?" The kid asked, and looked down.

"Oh, nothing. Hey I'm grabbing a bottle of water, you want any?"

"I'm good."

Marcus walked over to the counter where people paid. His sole employee, a single mother with more tattoos than himself stood talking to several of the girls at once, who were spoke over each other asking questions such as "...so the green ring costs the same as the black ball? Then what about the..."

"You girls here for some ink?" Marcus said with smile. He looked up at Anthony's picture then back to the girls.

"Oh we were just wondering about some of those piercings and stuff." One said.

"Yeah." Another said.

"You know a lot of people don't know what to expect with their first ink. You girls got IDs?"

They nodded but looked unsure.

"Inbetween the fingers is a great place to get 'em done." He said. "Can I borrow your hand?" He said and reached out and grabbed one of the girl's hands. He parted her hand and pointed along the inside of her finger.

"I can do all of you, no one would see it here."

The girls were looked at each other.

"Umm..."

Marcus moved in to close the deal. He could see they had talked

about the idea before, maybe when they were drunk last Saturday or in a passing joke. Then they wandered around The Hazy Grill, unconsciously hoping someone would drive them out and take a polaroid of them and mark it “NOT ALLOWED BACK” in large red letters. Either that or, even worse, something that was so real it was supernatural, someone might sense what they wanted. Not what they asked for, no-one cared whether the price of black and green piercings was the same, but what they desired. A tattoo. A taboo tattoo. That signature on their bodies that would officiate the *I’m independent and know it* attitude. With any luck Cosmo might still run articles about pretty little tattoos being vogue every other year periodically, *ad infinitum*.

“How much?” She asked. Marcus knew that question was very real.

“One finger? That’s not much ink, not much time. A lot of skill involved but not too much time.” He said. “I’ve got some small designs I’ve been working on. No one’s used any of ‘em yet. Ten bucks each for the group and I’ll burn the design as a bonus when we’re finished.”

Marcus looked at them. They looked at each other.

“Let’s do it.” One said.

“Hey why not.” Another said, with sarcasm.

Marcus walked over and cleared other kid out. They picked out a small golden ring design. It was a deep blue sapphire on the top of a golden ring with a light pale green solid color background that faded out with parts of the ring and gem accentuated with black outlines. He had been proud of how well that design turned out on paper. Now to transcribe that onto their flesh.

A shorter blonde chose to go first, egged on by the rest. The girls were nervous but patient and it didn’t take long before all five of them were connected through the bond of a mutual tattoo.

“Does this mean anything?” One of them asked. Marcus drilled on the last girl and they all looked up as if that was a critical question that they had forgotten.

“I didn’t design it with anything in mind. Guess that means it represents whatever you want it to.”

“Okay good.”

“It means we’re always going to be friends.” Another said, the rest agreed. One girl paid for them all with a fifty, cash, and they all left. The evening was cold. October just came around and the sky was an appropriate shade of burning red for the time of year.

Marcus reached up to the picture of Anthony and took it down, then took the cardboard out from behind the frame and put in the paper sketch of the sapphire ring behind it. He replaced the cardboard, put the picture back then closed shop.

He didn’t listen to music on the way to the graveyard and parked at the carry out store that stood a block away from the cemetery on the edge of town and bordered against a highway. The trees blocked the noise and Marcus walked fast. He approached Anthony’s grave. It was silent but felt different, felt alive.

“Liquor and flowers just aren’t good enough for ya, are they?” Marcus reached into his pocket and took out a small ring, one with a blue sapphire on it and tossed it on top of the grave and stepped on the ring, smashing it into the soft dirt below the grass. He smiled then turned and left.

5. MY SCREEN IS URBAN

The internet existed and Merci Klein was on it. She was on the internet registering for her spring semester classes at the college she went to. Her college was American so it cost too much but politicians stood up on her TV and told her that she didn't deserve to be an American if she took financial aid. Merci clicked a few Java buttons and went to the Colbert Report website to watch news. She watched a clip about the movie actor talking to an empty chair for some reason. Merci sighed and pushed back her chair. She went to her fridge and grabbed a yogurt and lit up a cigar.

The internet made her sad these days. Using the phrase *these days* was crap. She threw back her shoulders and sank into her chair and ate the delicious strawberry yogurt. Strawberry yogurt was so freaking good. Browsing the internet felt like visiting an embarrassing relative because it had fallen to such levels of crap.

"I am eating my delicious *yoguuuuurt*." She said out loud. She supposed she was doing what the word drawling meant but wasn't sure what that was. "I am *eeeeeeating* my delicious yogurt." She typed "drawling" into Google and found out that she was right about the definition.

Merci finished her yogurt and started to explore the internet. Exploring the internet is a dangerous activity these days. There's

always a lawyer lurking around ready to sue someone for downloading one thing or another. Merci thought the imaginary lawyer's face. Some people just had a way of making her feel guilty of being too liberal.

"Go ahead kid, take out that financial aid!"

"I need this!"

"Arrrrgh why? So you go to college and turn into a feminist slut and take contraceptives and go to hell when you forget to take them and make a baby inside you and abort it!"

Whatever dude.

Merci browsed a few archaic websites that talked about UFO abductions and urban legends. Abductions are heavy on the soul so she closed that tab and checked out articles on fall fashion and played music for free by streaming it. *"Things out of fashion include: yadda yadda yadda."* Merci had a strong suspicion that people just made random lists up when they wrote about fashion that was out of fashion only last season. The fashion and political musings made her bored so she went to Wikipedia and looked up some feminists. Merci respected women who were strong. Some days she felt alone but reading about historical woman often made her feel better. Reading about some historical men also made her feel strong, because she felt that supporting the basic feminist idea was the concept of a fundamental humanity transcendent to both genders. She supposed that the same humanity would connect her to some men.

Merci felt a little guilty about not donating to Wikipedia when an ad popped up begging for money. Wikipedia was like a friend that always let you smoke their weed for free but then made constant insinuations about being broke that would occasionally escalate into an embarrassing request for cash. *"If everyone who smoked me out chipped in... yadda yadda yadda."*

Merci clicked on a link about a woman she had read about several times before. Her name was Elizabeth Cady Stanton and she had created the *Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions*. Merci would usually claim that Stanton was her favorite feminist if anyone asked

but really she just loved her name. Cady Stanton sounded very much like *Candy Station* if pronounced right. Merci smiled at the thought. It was a private ongoing joke that she loved. But today it was boring and she did not laugh.

Merci pushed her keyboard away from her and stood up. She wasn't in the mood for the internet today. The jokes, the wit, the emphasis on textual communications, the general atmosphere were all sitting there but she just wasn't feeling it.

Merci went outside and drove to the mall. She lived in a small town but even a crappy mall was still a mall and few pleasures surpassed the sport of shopping. Merci wondered if she should stop thinking about her love for shopping. It was very stereotypical. What would Lady Candy Station think of her? Merci laughed and turned on some random music from her playlist and danced with her head. Chill out Candy Station, what do you know?

Merci drove past a Fundamentalist (sort of) church as she was going to the mall and saw a group of middle aged men handing out Bibles. Perhaps it was a bad idea but Merci pulled into the parking lot because the music was good and the anticipation of a good shop at the mall put her into an excellent mood. She stepped out of her car and walked up to the group. One of the men turned out to be an ugly woman who looked like a man.

"Good morning, sweetie." The woman said. She drank coffee from a tiny Styrofoam cup.

"Good morning. Want a Bible?" A guy said and hopefully raised a small orange book.

"No. I read the Bible and don't like it." Merci said.

The group turned and looked at her. Didn't she feel awkward about confronting them? She was such a slut they could tell she was a heathen by looking at her face and body. Merci was an attractive girl.

"Ok sweetie well good morning!" The woman said.

"I'm going to suck my boyfriend's dick tonight when we get drunk."

The group looked at her. Several people walked past them and

they forgot to try and shove a Bible down their throats.

“Ok...” One of them men started. He had his hand up in her direction like he was trying to deflect any unholiness that might be spreading in his direction.

“I just wanted you to know that. I don’t believe in your god. I’m just being honest.” She said.

“Well maybe you want to come to church and think about your lifestyle...”

“I thought about being religious but then I made out with a girl and thought *‘well Merci, there’s no turning back now. If there was a Christian god then kissing girls wouldn’t feel so good.’*”

“Holy son of baby Jesus!” The man said. He moved he arms from the air and covered his ears.

“Holy! Son! Jesus! Baby! Of!” The woman said. She dropped her tiny cup and water splattered onto her hiking books. For some reason she was wearing hiking boots and Merci laughed very hard when she saw that the woman was drinking water not coffee.

Merci smiled and went back into her car and drove. Forget the mall. “Fuuuuck!” She said. Some days it just felt good to be a bitch. She thought about how religious people weren’t allowed to ever let themselves be bitches.

“I’m a fucking awesome bi-bi-bitch!” She said. “Okay Merci, let’s take it down a notch.”

She smiled and wondered what to do. She felt like a god of inspiration had possessed her and then fucked her and left her with a warm accomplished feeling.

Merci drove around for a while. She didn’t feel like going to the mall anymore so she texted some of her friends and picked them up. She picked up Alara and her friend Mike who she didn’t know was coming. Mike was sketchy and thought he was gangster and talked about hard drugs at inappropriate times.

“So what’s up.” He said.

“Hey Merci.” Alara said.

“What do you guys want to do?”

“I don’t care.” Mike said. He kept making loud nasal noises that sounded like some kind of grunting and sneezing.

“Okay well...”

“Mike wants to go to Steven’s. We could get some coffee and chill somewhere.”

“Hell yea Steve’s got a fat sack of some good tree. You girls should come.”

“I’ll text you later.” Alara said to Mike who stepped out of the car and got into his car and drove away.

“Okay let’s go.” Alara said. They pulled out of her driveway and Alara put in a CD and they blasted E-40 on the stereo system.

“Want to smoke?” Alara asked. She pulled out a long fat blunt that was rolled from a strawberry cigarillo.

“Oh my god Alara!” Merci said. “Mike is such a bad influence on you.” They laughed.

“I know.” Alara said smiling. They lit up and soon the entire interior of the car was full of thick marijuana smoke.

Alara and Merci walked into the Café Green high as fuck. When they ordered their grandes and muffins they tried so hard to be serious that the server behind the counter laughed at them. He laughed at many people and they did not realize it was unusual until they sat down at a small table and argued about whether they should leave because...

“...He might call the police!”

“He’s not going to call anyone, stop acting high!”

“Okay, okay I was just discussing our options here Merci.”

“Well then that’s quite acceptable. I thought that you were considering a possibly reckless action.”

“I don’t know what you’re trying to say.”

“Neither do I.”

The conversation was superficial at first and involved many repressed laughs that attracted the attention of other more serious denizens of the café. Soon the conversation turned to other matters.

“I was browsing the internet earlier today.”

“Uh huh.”

“And I’m sad to see the frontier of the web giving way to police and lawyers and governments.”

“I don’t follow.”

“Whenever a place is first explored it’s free because there’s no way for people to meddle with freedom in a frontier.”

“I don’t think that’s bad. People use the internet as a way to post things like child porn. Like in chat rooms.”

“I agree. But it’s sad to see the loss of such a personal freedom. I mean when people went to another country to be free they had to actually go to another country. With the internet you can just sit down and arrive.”

“That’s profound.”

“It just sucks that any moron can now have a say about what goes on online.” Merci said. She finished her muffin and took a drink of coffee and thought about the woman who dropped her tiny cup of water. That woman influenced what happened online. People had to hide online now. That made her angry despite the comforting weed that felt like it was massaging her body all round. Then Merci had a tiny feeling that felt like a revelation and she tried to piece the feeling together out loud.

“If I can be angry for my principals even when I feel this good then I can do something about it. No matter what I feel I know that I can adhere to my beliefs. Feeling good can’t appease that need.”

Merci took a deep breath and felt strong. Strong as Candy Station. Strong as Helen Keller or Margaret Thatcher.

The two spoke about fashion and the internet and politics. Then they left. Merci dropped Alara off at Mike’s and she ended up doing cocaine, a habit that would become an addiction by the end of her college years. Merci tried cocaine several times in the future but did not develop a habit. Also she did not go to Mike’s, that night she went back to her comfortable apartment and enjoyed reading and listening to music before going to sleep.

6. AGNATHA

“He looks like a sloth, she looks acts like a sloth. They’re my dogs, don’t be a rat. Elephant in the room, the hills look like elephants and the hills are in the room and you act like a sloth and squeal like a rat. Like a rat to get out of the room with the police or a bad situation you play the rat to get back to your room and sit up and shut up and eat your fried onions like a pig.” Nobody said. Everybody said. This is the synopsis, an abstract, of the conversation where low red neon lights shone on cigarettes and drinks but did not reach the dark faces around a small table in the back of the bar that had an entrance in the front and back.

“Colloquial euphemisms, is all. Vernacular disease.”

“There aren’t enough drinks for this.”

“Enough drinks where?”

“Here.”

“The table or in the bar?”

“There’s enough drinks in this place for a zoo.”

One of the men at the table walked to the bar and spoke to a woman who wore cheap blonde hair and black jeans that hid every stain except foam white ones. She brought over more drinks.

“Some people are bred predators but we’re more insects than animal. Centipedes and ants. Either raping whoever’s caught with

their pants down or living as the proverbial automaton.” The oldest said. He sat with a cigar instead of cigarette but his smoke was cheaper than the other’s cigarettes.

“Won’t happen to me.”

“Oh yeah?”

“I’m not an automaton.”

“You’re not a predator.”

“I’m not a centipede.”

“So you’re an ant.”

“It’s a stupid analogy. Metaphor. Euphemism. Whatever, I’m getting a drink.” He said and walked into the bathroom.

“Paul’s a cockroach.”

“It was just an example. A youfemisum.” Jack said.

“We’re all ants, really, always building things. Construction, you know?”

“Or termites, tearing down earth and trees, fucking nature.”

Paul came out from the backroom and walked over and leaned his brown bellied shirt against the bar and talked about something the group at the table couldn’t hear though their ears all unconsciously tried.

The group tried talking about insects and then animals but the conversation did not hold without Paul’s arguing and when he walked back over Paul sat down in a bad mood.

“Well we know Paul’s not going to be the bed bug tonight. Not tonight, eh Paul, eh?” The old man said. Everybody looked him.

“I’m not a cockroach, I’m a fly.” Somebody said.

“What?”

“I’m gonna be the fly on Paul’s wall tonight!” The kid said. They stopped calling him “kid” since he worked with them since the sidewalk project and won a fight with some other kid when that kid rode his adult bike through the wet cement. But now his comment amplified the awkwardness that hung around the table that everyone wanted to ignore but now could not. They paid their bill and stood up and when they stood up Paul punched the kid in his face and he

fell down hard and his blood mixed with the beer and he stood up and wanted to fight but the rest of the group shoved him back down. Paul killed the elephant in the room and now the old man talked about horse flies and the group laughed and Paul argued and led all the group apart from the kid out to the sidewalk.

7. COLORS

Read and see black crayon smearings on cheap white dyed white printer paper. Outside the black in the sky sucks all light colors away. There are lights from insects and sky gases but a black mist caused by distance stops my vision.

Red and sea black carpeting smudges the beauty of light colors when I look up from the white computer screen. Past the computer are faux colors that move light from waypoint to waypoint, dimming at every stop, tainted at every stop until my eye ends it.

Outside the air is dark because the sun is set but light is around. Wind carries noise and stench to my seat but the carrier is of the wrong type to bring blue-copper paint that moonlight dew shew it.

Old beer brawls from a bar with chain fencing paints an impromptu mixture of rotting violet blood and amber milk and this breeze tries to tell the story with the smell of onion ring grease and cricket music.

Before the backwards glass of St. Asmodius the moonlight transubstantiation made moon white into crimson red that splashed in a rectangle on the concrete floor. A fly passed the pane beam and the waning moon moved a mile or a foot and red became a blue glass reflection. All this the wind says with cricket hymns.

On the computer I smear language stories of people who eat
rotting onions while crickets chirp in the dark.

Wind cannot bring
copper-blue color,
its message
To me.

Amber violet poison,
ethanol and beer.
Wind cannot bring
That story here.

The wind brought
onion grease.
The worst smell,
The best sight.

A light wind,
my messenger,
light is too heavy
to color your story.

8. CLEARANCE ON AN URBAN LEGEND

Dear reader. Dear Mr. Mrs. Miss Ma'am Sir and others. Dear critic and most emphatically of all I say: dear casual reader. I speak to you as myself; the author. To entertain you I will employ several unhappy characters. These people believe they live in America about ten years ago, ten years from whenever you read this. This is the sort of B grade story that you might find for 50 cents in a box of cheap yellow novels in a used bookstore's vestibule. When you go inside to pay the fifty year old couple who run the place are pissed that you picked up their cheapest book and will ignore you unless you ask about the first edition of some heap of parchment that smells like it sat in a haunted Victorian basement for the last 200 years. But when you read this cheap story be aware that I believe you are getting close to the dark side of the American day. It's the dream that you don't remember after your morning coffee. It's the anti-dream. I wish I could say urban legends like this are a kind of real *Twilight Zone* without being cliché, but there you have it.

Isabel Blue Cressida went out with a few friends to the mall. They perused or browsed department and clothing establishments. Bella, as she was called in the vernacular, bought a few fashion magazines at the newly renovated bookstore. She thought about starting a fashion line and possibly going for fashion in college.

“You hear about that kid, Foster, did today?” Sam said.

“What?”

“Got detentions for all next week.” Sara said.

“What for?”

“We were using the computers in the library to work on those research essays.” Sam said and licked her lemonade straw into the side of her mouth. A few years later she would be doing the same with cigarettes. The small group pulled two tables together and ate in a small pretzel shop.

“He went on Backpage.com.” Sam said.

“Oh yeah I heard about that.”

“What happened?”

“There’s an escort section there, he went on and tried printing some ads off.”

The group laughed.

“Oh my god.”

“Haha yeah, I know. So ridiculous. That kid’s so crazy.”

“Who caught him?”

“Mrs. Fariom.”

They laughed more and a few of the girls said they had to go. It was 6 o’clock and some had homework to do. Bella got up with to walk with Sara and Cas who parked near the same entrance.

Bella threw away a tray of delicious pretzels that she had half eaten with a syrupy chocolate dip.

“You coming Blue?” Sara asked, turning around and pulling out her phone.

“Oh my god, really? You want to bring this up?” Bella said. Sara and Cas smiled and waited as Bella caught up. Her father had given her the middle name “Blue” because he had once spent a week in France and thought that b-l-e-u-e was the same as b-l-u-e. She intended to get that mistake fixed. Maybe before she went to Paris herself someday. All fashion designers go to Paris.

Sara walked over to her car and drove away. Bella had picked Cas up and they were going to hang out for a while ostensibly for the

purpose of “doing homework and stuff” which would start with a geometry sheet and end with looking stuff up on the internet or watching a movie.

They got home and started doing an essay they both had to do. They both managed to push through an introduction and with that done were satisfied that they had paid their dues and could safely move on to something less banal.

“You want to watch something?” Bella asked.

“Sure, what’s on?”

“I don’t know. Let’s watch something scary.”

“I hate scary movies. And your parents aren’t home are they?”

“They’ll be home around nine I think. Jason’s out of town, went to Columbus so we get the house to ourselves.”

The two girls went downstairs into a room with a large flat screen TV and an “L” shaped black leather couch. They flipped through a few instant stream movies and picked out one about a group of fake ghost hunters who got trapped in some haunted place. The movie played for the better part of an hour when suddenly something loud crashed against the window.

“Jesus!”

“What was that?”

They stood up and looked outside. The sky was still light.

“It was probably just a bird or something.”

“That was intense.”

“You want to get a drink?”

“I don’t know. It’s a school night Bel.”

“Yeah well it’s creepy here.”

“Okay fine.” Cas said and smiled.

“Okay good.” Bella grabbed her keys from the counter and two hoodies for the both of them before locking the door and getting into her car.

“We don’t even really have to go to school tomorrow, I mean if you don’t.” Cas said.

“I mean, I don’t.”

They drove downtown which was only fifteen minutes away. They decided to go to *Smoke & Café*, a hookah bar that stayed open all year round and until 1 a.m.

“We’re so bad,” Cas said and laughed, “Smoking and drinking and not going to school.”

They ordered the peach and blueberry flavored hashish and felt the red coal heat up the sweet tobacco below. Bella brought back four shots of some kind of whiskey with little ice cubes in the plastic glasses.

“For both of us.” She said, setting down the tray and scooting further into the cushion on her seat and wrapped her orange hoodie a little tighter.

Ten minutes later both were sipping on the second drink and blowing out thin white streams of flavor into the air.

“This is so delicious.” Bella said.

“I know. I wish doing this was a job.”

“You could be a hashish flavor tester. It’s probably a job.”

The lights strung around the screened in porch were heavily colored. Blue, green, and red lamps hung around making for an aquatic or Arabian theme. Outside giant heaters radiated hot air down and the night wind blew on their necks. Other groups were seated around, talking and chilling. Lounge music played overhead. Bella’s phone buzzed and she tapped the screen.

“Great.” She said and held up her phone for Cas to see. “It’s my mom.”

“What does she want?”

“She’s talking about babysitting for one of her friends that works with her or something.”

“Are you going to go?”

“Not without you.”

“I guess we can go. I’m a little buzzed but I’m cool”

“Me too.”

The two girls left and drove back from town.

“The house is on Oak Ridge.”

“That’s really close to my place.”

“What’s the house number.”

“137. Why?”

“It’s kind of creepy down there.”

“You’re just saying that because of the movie, Cas.”

“No seriously. I live on a creepy street but that side is even worse.”

“Whatever. Then stay so I don’t have to be alone.”

“Yeah I’ll come. How long do you have to stay?”

“I don’t know yet. Stay in the car while I talk to them. You can come after they leave.”

“Okay. Don’t take forever.” Cas said and Bella parked in front of the street. The night was dark and the front door was hard to see. She grabbed a piece of her hoodie and threw stuffed it up to her nose. Smelled like blueberries and fabric.

She rang the door bell. It was the sort of place where the entire house chimed whenever the bell rang. A middle aged woman in a tight black dress with pearl earrings opened the door.

“Oh come in, please. I’m so glad you could make it, our normal sitter fell through and your mother mentioned you and...” She continued chatting and led Bella through various rooms of interest. “Here’s the living room... dining room... kitchen... bathroom...another bathroom.” The downstairs was large and cluttered with antiques. The main living room had a large fireplace with a brass covering. The woman turned around. “We turned on the furnace so you won’t have to light a fire, dear.”

She followed the woman through narrow passages and tall hallways that led to other hallways. The baby was already asleep upstairs. She tripped on a large grandfather clock in the dark hall but soon the woman and her husband left and she called Cas.

“Okay come in.”

“I’m at the front door.”

Bella opened the door and turned the large weighty deadbolt behind her.

“It smells like pee and fruit in here. Do they have cats?”

“I don’t know.” Bella said.

They went through the house to the living room where a TV was set up against the wall. There weren’t any ceiling lights and they had to turn on a standing lamp made of wood that might have been a modern decoration for Theodor Roosevelt. Cas cringed and wiped off the yellow dust that had smeared across her finger and thumb.

“This place is a museum, Bel.”

“Come watch TV with me.”

“Jesus Christ!”

“Don’t yell, what’s wrong?”

“That statue. That’s messed up.”

There was a life sized clown statue with bright red hair with a matching ball on its nose and polka dots on its sagging jumpsuit.

“It’s goes well with the curtains.” Bella said.

“Don’t make fun of me, that’s messed up. Like crazy person messed up.”

Cas maneuvered through an old table and several stacks of magazines and curled up next to Bella on the yellow and brown couch.

“I think they’re hoarders.”

“I think you’re a hoarder.”

Bella leaned down and kissed Cas.

“I’m glad you came.”

“I’m not.” Cas said sarcastically and looked around. She took out her phone and snapped a picture of them cuddling.

“The fact that there’s a lamp in the fireplace is extra weird. It’s like a symbol.”

“At least she turned on the furnace for us.”

“Furnace? More like a boiler. This place reeks.”

“I think you mentioned that already.”

“Well I wanted you to hear it again.”

Bella and Cas watched the news and weather for a few hours, nothing else came through the rabbit antenna. Cas fell asleep. Then

Bella started to nod off.

A phone rang in the other room and Bella woke up with a start. She was awake and alert but alone. Cas wasn't in the room. Bella's phone was on the table so it was Cas in the other room. Maybe she was in the bathroom or kitchen. Bella walked around the corner into the living room and called out.

"Cas?"

There was a buzzing sound and Bella ran over and picked a phone that lay on the ground and creeping forward when it vibrated. Bella picked it up and answered. She missed the call and looked down to see who had called. Green pixels wrote: *mom* 1:37a.m.

Bella felt tense as she walked back to the living room. She called out for Cas a few times but didn't get an answer. Maybe she had gone out to the car for some reason or wanted a breath of fresh air.

She got back to the living room and her heart nearly stopped. Her phone was gone. It had just been on the table. This was too weird. She reached into her pocket and pulled out the number that the woman had left her for emergencies. It had *911 in case of emergency* written on it.

"You can't be serious..." Bella said. She was calming down. Something might be wrong but it wasn't 911 wrong. She looked up her own name in Cas' contacts and dialed. The phone took a minute to connect. What happened next terrified Bella so much that as it happened she felt a sudden pit in her stomach that stopped her from screaming her brains out.

Her familiar ring tone went off behind her. She managed to fight the paralyzing horror enough to twist around and see the rectangle screen of her phone light up in the pocket of the clown. It had her phone. It had eyes.

The next morning the husband and wife were interrogated by the police. Over the hours no evidence was found. Not bodies, no signs of struggle. Video footage showed the husband and wife having wine and steak at an upscale French restaurant half an hour away during the whole night until they decided go with the proverbial flow

and “get a room”. A neighbor had called the police just around 1:30 a.m. when he thought he heard a prowler outside. The officer found the door to the neighbor’s house open and investigated. He had heard the baby crying upstairs.

“This mean anything to you?” Detective Brad asked. He held up a picture of Bella and Cas huddled together.

“Oh my god. There’s a man, a clown, behind them!” She said.

9. BIRDS OF A SEASON

Jain Egret was sixty eight and had an irregular heartbeat that had been identified back in the fifties by her uncle who was a surgeon. She enjoyed listening to Bob Dylan and a band that called themselves *The Band*. When the sky rained she would wake up and make coffee and have breakfast out in her sizable lawn where she could see the birds feeding. On clear days she woke up and took a shower and went out to swat the gnats and flies and watch the birds. Her neighbors were business men and woman who drove to work at 6am and came home at 6pm to watch sports highlights and news updates.

Jain pulled her body out of the smelly bed and made coffee. There was a red notebook on the yellow counter and she put that under her arm with the coffee in hand and walked outside. The birds were already there. The sun was already there. The birds and sun were always there and that comforted the old woman who eased into her chair that had several pillows propped up behind her. When the birds were gone she imagined that she could hear them and when the sun went down she knew it was secretly still there because if it wasn't then there would be no way to see, even at night no matter how dim it was. She considered this her private joke between herself and the sun. That was why she could smile when her body was too old to have even the desire for passion.

Several birds were hunting around the feeder closest to her. There were also several birds around a feeder which was father from her but her eyes were too bad to see them and her ears were too bad to hear them. She smiled at the birds closest to her and wrote in her notebook: *Yellow billed cuckoo, Sparrow hawk*. She wrote it down so that when she went to the pet supply store she could pick out the right kind of feed. The birds might not come around if the feed was wrong. Or they might get sick and be mad at her for being served a poisonous meal.

But there was a secret she had. One that even the sunlight and the birds did not know. One that she would not write down in her journal or notebook. A secret that would not be passed on to daughter Margaret or son Barry. Her neighbors would not guess this secret as she mentioned that the mailwoman didn't make her rounds that day and that she must be sick or worse.

She was outside but her door rang and she heard it and went to answer it. She was barefoot and the cold earth felt good as it pressed against her feet which warmed her smile. She went through the clean kitchen and stale living room. Jain answered the door. It was a little girl that lived across the street. She wore a giant smile and was missing a front tooth.

"Hello Mrs. Egret!" She said as she stood there.

"Oh hello, hello Miss Elizabeth! Would you care for some ginger snaps today?"

The girl parked her pink bike and followed Jain inside. She wrinkled her nose as she passed through the living room and ran over to the fridge.

"Have some milk with that sweetie."

A few minutes later the girl had left with a basket full of fresh ginger snaps and the important task of telling her mother that "Mrs. Egret said to say hello and that she loves the fence."

Jain sighed and walked to her cabinet and grabbed a bottle of scotch and poured herself a respectable amount into a crystal glass. She carried it out along with the few cookies that she had reserved

for herself.

She soon sat back down into the seat. Everything was the same but her body felt tired. Her body was tired all the time now. Jain looked over at the bird feeder. The birds had left but she knew that in a few minutes more would come. She picked up her notebook and the pen slipped and fell to the ground. She stooped down to pick it up. While she was down she saw a fat black cricket and tried to touch it. She did touch it and it crawled up to her and pressed its head against her. She smiled. Was it trying to nibble her? Maybe eat her. A cloud passed over and a gust of cold wind passed her face. The cricket jumped into the grass, she must have accidentally twitched. She lifted her feet one at a time and set them on the footstool across from her.

She thought about her life. She voted Republican and went to church for most of her life. Letters about gun conservation and life insurance promises came in the mail regularly but they were written by computer machines and she didn't bother to read most of them. The atmosphere was good for reflecting she thought and took a sip of the scotch. Scotch. That had been her husband's favorite. He was gone now and would not see her here drinking and reflecting and remembering dreams and wishing and comparing hope with dreams to see if she had done well with achieving what she wanted.

Her teens were spent doing well in high school and planning for college or work. She ended up getting good grades and her father had supported her decision to pursue college. College was fun and hard, for what it was worth, and she had graduated feeling strong and wanting to work with animals. Horses specifically.

After college she worked for a man who raised horses to run in races. The races were dirty and dirty men and their dirty mistresses went there to gamble and drink there. Gambling and drinking were expensive but Jain always guessed that the mistresses were more expensive than anything else at the races. It was during those years that she learned to love birds. They were always fresh, always singing and dancing and then singing some more. They sang and danced. No

other animal could dance in trees and she loved to watch a bird prop itself up in a branch and sing.

During the years that she cared for horses and watched birds she had met Scott, her late husband. They had gotten married and lived together and had two children. Both Margaret and Barry had children now. Jain took another drink. More birds were now around the feeder.

A shiver ran down her back and she retracted into the cushions. What she knew she could never tell anyone. Sometimes it made her feel sick. She daydreamed about regaining youth to live a second life, this time different. Sometimes she cried and prayed for a second chance. Then she would imagine the line *“Sorry ma’am this ain’t no ball game. Ain’t gonna find second chances lying ‘round here.”* She wondered if that line was from a movie or if she had made it up. She wished that she could believe that it was God who was dignifying her prayer with at least a response. But she knew better. That line was hers. The voice that recited it in her mind was hers.

Jain picked up the ornate glass and finished off the drink in a large gulp. Why did she do it? Why had she held back? It hurt to think about. It was too damn hard. Jain took a deep breath and relaxed her limbs that had unconsciously stiffened in response to the anxiety of her thoughts. She couldn’t think the words she wanted to. She had to speak out loud. Her mind couldn’t stop her from doing that. It was hard and forced but it came out.

“I wish I had fucked more, sucked more, hurt myself more and healed myself better. I wish I had kissed everyone that I loved and bugged everyone I didn’t. I wish that I had said goddamn instead of goshdarnit. I wish I cursed and tried ecstasy. I wish I had tried to write and travel. I don’t want to be a writer but goddamn I wish I had tried it so I knew what it felt like! I wish for so much! I hurt so bad now, the pit in my stomach the weight on my shoulders, it hurts so goddamn bad!”

Jain breathed heavily found herself standing with sweat soaked hands. The birds were silent but the sun was shining. She sat back down. She didn’t feel good but speaking those words out loud had

eased a pain. Maybe it was the effort that had tired her and that exercise alone eased the pain but she thought it was the words.

“Oh there’s one.” She said as a bird flew down from a tree to the feeder. She wrote down: *Mourning Dove (!)*. With the exclamation point actually placed in parenthesis, a private note to indicate her luck on seeing the dove. The doves didn’t come around as much as she wished.

Yesterday she saw a news bit where the newsman had explained a new policy one of the popular presidential candidates had adopted. It was anti-pornography. She remembered how that angered her. Who was he to decide what sort of morality people could have? Jain looked down at her notes and felt sad. She was always angry or sad these days. And she couldn’t tell anyone why and even if she did tell someone why there would be no one who could save her. No one could restore her chance of living.

Jain sat in silence for a few more minutes. Her mind was clear and serene and when she picked up her red pen she knew exactly what was going to happen in the next fifteen minutes but had to stop and think about how to write it. She scribbled it down in cursive as she stood up. She then tossed down her notebook and took a deep breath and undid the slim leather belt she was wearing. She picked up her glass and threw it at two birds who were eating and they flew away in fear.

The next day the police taped off the house and talked about hockey as they drank coffee and took pictures. Jain Egret’s body hung from a tree. A step ladder had enabled her to reach a large but low hanging limb. An officer named Dave walked over to the notebook and picked it up. His friend and fellow officer, Jason, walked over.

“Check this out.” Dave said.

“Suicide note?” Jason asked.

“Uh-huh.” Dave affirmed with his throat as he downed a gulp of coffee. “Oh wow this is good.”

“What’s it say?” Jason asked.

Dave began to read: “*I want to express a matter of...*”

Jason smacked the notebook. “I was being sarcastic dude.

C’mon lets go check out that deli that on McFareson.”

“Is it new?”

“Since last month.”

“Let’s do it.”

Jason tossed the notebook down and the two officers left.

Eventually everyone left and everything was cleaned out and the birds that had eaten the old woman’s food came back to feed even when her feeders ran empty and her body had long since been taken away and put into the cold earth. People in the neighborhood saw many of those birds but didn’t notice them. The grass over the old girl’s body grew thick. The years passed and birds went away. The people lived. The birds left. The end.

10. A GLAMOROUS CONVERSATION

“There’s a reason I’m satisfied and you’re not.”

“Why’s that?”

“After I took a shower this morning I wrote a story. And I listened to good music while I was in the shower. And I dressed myself in attractive clothes when I was finished with the shower.”

“I don’t see how that makes you happier than me. You write, I don’t. So what?”

“When I got this coffee a few minutes ago I also got a dozen pistachio muffins. I’ll only eat three before they go bad but I wanted a dozen, and voila!”

“You’re just being excessive, wasteful. I don’t see the point.”

“That’s because you’re too literal.”

“You’re too literal. You’re the writer.”

“That’s not what that word means.”

“What word?”

“Satisfied.”

“I don’t follow.”

“You substituted it with happiness earlier. I was talking about being satisfied.”

“I see.”

“When I’m excessive it’s not about being excessive.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that I’m happy because I fill my free time with pleasures.”

“Pleasure isn’t always happiness.”

“I was talking about being satisfied.”

“Whatever. But I’m interested. So what do you mean filling voids with pleasure?”

“Okay, my point is that I’ve identified some pleasurable activities and I do them when I have a moment here or there.”

“Such activities as buying extra muffins?”

“Exactly. Also I have a cigar, pen and paper, an agenda.”

“You sound like a writer.”

“I’m not.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because my stuff doesn’t sell and I don’t drink.”

“Why don’t you drink? You seem like the kind of guy that would enjoy carrying a flask of whiskey around.”

“I don’t drink because my body doesn’t handle alcohol well. It’s weird I know.”

“I guess so.”

“See that girl over there?”

“The one with the book?”

“Yeah.”

“What about her?”

“She’s not satisfied.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean she isn’t happy.”

“How can you tell?”

“She’s reading *Lolita*.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“Because if she wanted to be satisfied she would be reading Shakespeare or Fitzgerald.”

“What about Hemmingway?”

“Sure.”

“Well that’s just a matter of taste.”

“I suppose so.”

“Well then you don’t know if she’s happy or not.”

“If she was happy she wouldn’t match a pale green handbag with those dark wash jeans, a clean black tee, and that red and black necklace.”

“I don’t follow. Her clothing isn’t indicative of her happiness just like her book isn’t.”

“But that bag doesn’t go well with her outfit. She’s either poor or careless. Poor people always worry about money and careless people never take the time to figure out what makes them happy.”

“Then you can’t be happy because you’re an unpaid writer.”

“I’ll be paid in the future. I’ll make it big. I know that’s a cliché but it applies. You know I can write.”

“Yes.”

“Then you should also know that it’s only a matter of time before I get published.”

“Probably, but that’s not very existential of you.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“You said Hemmingway would be a good book to read.”

“I can appreciate his perspective without adopting it as my own.”

“I agree. And the girl over there can appreciate Lolita without being unfashionable.”

“That’s an interesting opinion.”

“Your argument wasn’t very good.”

“I just wanted to tell a story, not argue.”

“You haven’t told me a story; we’ve been discussing our opinions on happiness.”

“You might be right. Hey I’ve got to go, I’ll see you later.”

“You’re leaving already? I wasn’t trying to insult you.”

“Oh you haven’t but I need to practice writing.”

“What, right now?”

“You were right about...”

“...about what?”

“Everything. I’m going to write until I’m good at it because it’s what

I need to do. I need to be recognized and respected. I need to be paid for it.”

“You will be in time. You know your stuff is good.”

“But I need it to be good enough now and if I start working at it now and don’t stop until it’s perfect then maybe I can sell something tomorrow.”

“You know what?”

“What?”

“That purse is ugly.”

“See you later.”

“Bye now.”

11. COURTHOUSE BALCONY

A tall boy in jeans pushed open a door on the dark side of a small town's courthouse. A pretty girl followed and grabbed his arm and the doorknob behind her and heard the door click in the dark. The dark excited both of them and they walked through more doorways into the main forum of a large central room. The second and third floor ceilings were constructed around a circular hole with imposing railings for people to look down.

Shadows moved across shadows and the boy walked up the large marble staircase to the second floor.

"Wait for me." The girl said. She stayed very close to the boy who pressed forward because the bottom level felt watched.

"It's better up here." He said.

"It's so open. We can go anywhere. Why don't they lock the doors?"

"We can see Main Street from that office." He said and motioned towards one of the many doors that transitioned the architecture from American regalism to municipal office deco. The air hung dry like old paper that sat at the bottom of a locker through the lean summer months.

They pushed the door open and walked through rows of desks and stood before a huge rectangular window and saw dim yellow street lights that turned red cars orange as they passed.

“It’s beautiful.” She said. “I hope we won’t get caught.”

“No worries.” He said and held her through the thin hoodie she wore. He thought she looked attractive in it, more attractive than when she made an effort to ‘dress up’ in whatever for whatever. For church. For friends. For school. She looked best now with the grey hoodie where he could feel her underneath.

She looked up and kissed him and he smiled and walked over to a desk.

“You know this place is haunted?” He said. He and his friends were also convinced that his house was haunted and had a bad vibe.

“Oh come on.” She said.

“Let’s check it out then.”

“What?”

“The basement.”

“Really?”

“Not if you’re going to make a big deal about it.” He said and pulled her. “Let’s go.”

They walked downstairs and found a white door that led down to the basement. She had never been there and guessed that he discovered the door open during one of his many visits to the courthouse for his OMVI.

The door stuck at first but then budged open when he pulled back with both hands.

“It’s really dark.” He said.

“You’re scared.”

“I’ll use my phone.” He said and opened his phone for a light. The steps were narrow and went down further than his basement. When he reached the bottom he saw stacks of old furniture covered in white sheets with gray dust. The room smelled of rotting paper and stale water.

“Stop that.”

“That isn’t me.”

A noise vibrated through the room, hampered by the heavy furniture. They walked back and found a silver radio quietly playing

music.

“Wow.” He said. “They keep this on down here?” He picked it up and they walked back upstairs followed by uprooted plumes of dust that burst into the air following their motion.

They walked up the stairs until it ended at the third floor where the air was too dark to see through to the ground level.

“There’s a balcony up there.” He said pointing with his empty hand.

“I don’t see it.”

“It’s there. The way up is a staircase in the back of the library.”

The legal library had glass sliding doors that pushed apart with a motion sensor but opened manually if you could squeeze your fingers in between the two pieces of glass to push sideways.

Inside the library rows of shelves were packed with tall red books that looked untouched. They walked past the librarian’s desk and through the rows. At the back corner there was a red “exit” sign and across from it a single chain across a narrow doorway through which stood a spiraling staircase with metal railing. They both held on and were careful not to get cut on the sharp edges. Behind them he re-chained the open door to ward off any bad luck that might happen to patrol around there.

They walked through the small passage that led them to a balcony overlooking all three floors of the courthouse. Below was darkness but their eyes adjusted to catch light and they could make out the black outlines of statues and paintings and small lights that came from electric security devices that were never turned on or windows where the moon shone.

“I love that feeling.” She said.

“What’s that?”

“When your body is tired but your mind is completely awake.”

“That’s uh, contentment.”

“I like that.” They sat down and looked around below. A shadow would move and they would ask each other if the other had seen it.

“No, I’m sure I saw something, over there by the row of paintings yeah, I’m sure those are paintings remember? You mentioned them...”

They talked about memories where friends had vomited at bad parties with underclassmen and taken picture of it. They talked about the places where they had been and new cities to travel to.

“Take me to Genoa and Milan .”

“I’ll take you everywhere, if you’ll come.”

“We should go to Vienna sometime.”

“Want a drink?”

“And of course Barcelona and Paris.”

“From the bottle, here.” He took a drink of sweet bourbon and passed the bottle to her. He thought about foreign cities and really wanted to go and almost believed she meant it. Maybe if he could go he would take her. But she might not really want to be taken. She might not really want to be here or take a drink of bourbon. He looked down at a portrait of a magistrate who had a very large head. She looked at his face.

He leaned in and kissed her.

“I wanted to kiss you after the first drink because then your breath is as bad as mine but before I drink more because I will want to kiss you drunk but I also want to kiss you sober, right now and sober.”

She laughed and he liked that she always laughed at his stupid jokes.

“You make no sense at all.”

“I know, you do that to me.”

That night the insects in the large halls below felt the presence and kept along the walls while the boy and girl came closer.

12. YOUR COFFEE STAIN LOOKS LIKE A GREEK TRAGEDY

Ezra Kilo licked barn straw from his dry mouth and felt his head pound against the bright square of warm autumn light that shone down with morning candela.

“Morning misery.” He said. He clung onto a gray beam that injected splinters into his hand as he rose from a bed which had fallen apart during some early morning hour. The black wool blanket that transformed straw into party bed disappeared along with most of his guests. A few responsible drunks chose the grace of blacking out in the rented barn instead of driving home through long country roads where farmers drive million dollar lawn mower machines.

Ezra climbed down the loft of the barn and once on the ground searched for one of the many plastic water bottles that experienced drinkers drink with hard liquor to prevent hangovers. The stench of morning wet straw and rotting grass smelled putrid instead of like summer nights through the discerning nose of the hangoveree.

Ezra found a virgin water bottle on the cement floor and cracked it open and drank the water that tasted too warm to be refreshing. It felt bad and tasted sweet and Ezra drank the whole bottle as he walked out to his silver car and opened the door and sat

down. The drive back to town was ten miles. Ten miles is the perfect party distance and Ezra listened to bad indie music that someone gave him or that he made while drunk.

“Whoa...” Someone said behind him.

“Jesus!” Ezra said and twisted down the stereo volume. He turned around but his neck didn’t reach around so he smacked his mirror and looked back and saw a girl.

“Where are you... where am I?” She asked. She looked out the window.

“You’re in my car.” Ezra said.

“Why?” She asked.

“Why?” He said.

She looked at him and pushed back her dark hair and orange hoodie but then put the hoodie back up and squinted her eyes.

“So...” She said.

“It’s your own fault,” Ezra said, “violating my vehicle.”

“Violating? You got me in here.”

“What?”

“Or someone...” She looked out the window again and the scenery was still yellow fields full of corn and sometimes short plants, soy maybe.

“Where do you need to go?” Ezra asked.

“You could drop me off in town, I didn’t drive.” She said.

“I can drop you off. Why don’t I know you?”

“Oh sorry I’m Liza.”

“Okay Liza, I’m Ezra.”

“That’s a lot of Zs.”

“What? Oh ha, okay. Uh, want to sit up here Liza? It’s kind of creepy with you back there I feel like a dad or something.”

“Stop the car then.”

“Just, crawl up.”

“Oh my god, pull over.”

“I’m not going to pull over, make a big deal of it, then start again, the engine will cool off and I’ll be wasting gas and destroying

the environment and whatever. I hope you're not one of those girls." Ezra said and tried to look mean and questioningly at her. She looked pretty and he liked the way she looked when he made fun of her, even if the jokes weren't very good, maybe they weren't jokes at all.

He didn't know her but Ezra knew he liked pushing people and saying strange things that sometimes came out as a joke and other times sounded weird but then he could just dance in his head and laugh at everyone else because we and they and he and she all lived in the same meaningless world where the only meaning came from a mutual feeling felt from a shared perspective.

"Whatever." She said and she crawled up and bumped into him and fell twice but finally sat up next to him.

"I wouldn't have asked you to if I knew you were going to tear the place apart."

"Oh my god, are you serious." She said. The cornfields turned into housing and Ezra turned on the music again and the techno beat through a good stereo system.

"I hate cliché phrases." Ezra said. There was no point in acting fake.

"I wouldn't want to live in a story without adjectives." She said.

"Neither would I." Ezra said. "I'm taking you to my place for coffee. You look like you could use some." He looked over from behind his shades to watch her expression and carefully listen to her reaction. He preferred to handle people rough, to lead and test the limits of someone, especially smart or attractive people. He was sure this girl, this Liz girl, was pretty. But smart girls would refuse to be treated poorly. Some girls wanted to be treated poorly. She still sat silent.

"I mean if you're cool, with that." Ezra added.

"I'm a mess." Liz said.

Good, Ezra thought, I didn't break our relationship, whatever that might be. Not that we're in a relationship per se, but that every living creature is in a relationship with every other living creature. Even dead objects that never lived are in relationship to each other

literally, he thought. Man, I think weird crap when I'm with a pretty girl. I always think weird crap but now this weird crap is uncontrolled, my mind is in diarrhea mode. Say something, Ezra.

"Yeah." He said.

"Take it easy."

"You said it. I'm honest, not easy."

"I think I look pretty good hungover."

"I didn't see you last night, I don't think."

"We were outside mostly. It was really nice out. Country skies are so clear."

"Yeah but I wouldn't trade the city life for anything."

"I like the city too."

"I love the city."

"You win then."

"I wasn't trying to."

Ezra pulled into a parallel parking space across from the apartment building he lived in. Ezra led Liza through the steel and brick lobby and up a new black matte elevator that had dangerous red buttons and accelerated fast.

On the third floor they walked out of the elevator through a hallway to the room on the corner of the building that Ezra picked because he really did love the urban life and the street views made him happy, especially when rain make that sweet asphalt and ozone smell.

They walked through a large living room with black furniture and a modern kitchen attached to it. Ezra took off his gray jacket and shades and twisted off the lid to a French espresso machine. Blue light reflected off the copper machine and Liza thought about how attractive the apartment looked. The prints that hung on the wall were probably cheap but they looked attractive and clean and she enjoyed seeing them.

"You like art?" Ezra asked as he made coffee.

"Yes, but I don't know very much about it."

"Neither do I except that I love the French impressionists."

“Bal du Moulin de la Galette.” Liza read. “I’ve seen this in books but it looks better on your wall. The slimy green looks surreal, sort of like your party.”

“Thanks, I really put a lot of effort into that but all the parties would fail if people didn’t get high. That’s what makes them surreal.”

“Every party is like that I guess.”

“No, drunken parties aren’t. I use alcohol to tempt the drunks. Let the drunks drink. We surrealists can get high.” Ezra said and handed Liza one of two porcelain coffee cups in his hand.

“Merci.”

“De rein.”

“You speak French?” Liza asked. They sat at a steel and blue glass table by one of the windows that stretched almost to the floor.

“No, but I would like to. Do you?”

“Some, un peu.”

“Everyone should know a little French.”

“That would ruin it for us, like if everyone had an original Le Moulin de la Galette.”

“If I had an original Galette I would get rid of mine and buy a print because I couldn’t stand knowing that it was decaying in my possession. But if everyone owned that painting it would still be good because few people would understand it.”

“So speaking French doesn’t mean understanding it, to you I mean?”

“It’s the same with English, just look at a newspaper.”

Ezra enjoyed the coffee and he thought Liza did too. He made excellent espresso and all insane and most sane people love excellent espresso. Ezra made his coffee with Amaretto liqueur and buttery whip cream that a local bakery made. He sprinkled it with cinnamon and drained the liquid into small red porcelain cups that they now drank from.

When both Ezra and Liza finished drinking Ezra offered to take her home. The conversation, the jokes and ideas could go on but it was better to end the conversation at a strong point instead of

waiting for it to taper off marked by awkward pauses.

“I’ll drop you off.” Ezra said and asked where she lived. Down by the college dorm. Okay. Ten minutes later they were in his car and he drove her to a university building and then drove out again.

Ezra picked out organic groceries at Grocery Market. The fresh bread always reminded him of red wine even though he hated alcohol because it felt like poison and he suspected he had some kind of allergy to it, except maybe for good whiskey, he told himself.

But Ezra ignored that part of himself and put a load of cheese bread into his basket and refused the whiskey because he knew that his mind wanted always to trick and tempt him into drinking. Ezra paid for the groceries with cash and looked at the swollen cash register. His sulked because even though it would have tried to tempt Ezra to steal it all and run, he had never truly been tempted too and his mind only put effort into temptation he might pursue. “Like the girl.” His mind thought. Ezra drove into the street and said, “No. Not like the girl, don’t be like this.”

“I am we and we are like this.” His mind thought.

“You’re so fucking lame sometimes.” Ezra said out loud and turned on the radio so if anyone saw him he could pretend to be embarrassed at singing alone to the lyrics because everyone sings along to good lyrics but not everyone has real conversations with their rouge minds that are devilish with temptation.

“Don’t hurt my feelings, Ezra.”

“Then stop tempting me.”

“I can only tempt you because you feel tempted. Here I’ll send you a feeling that explains it all.”

Ezra felt that his feelings prompted and pushed his mind into thinking about temptations because he secretly wished to be able to give in to all temptations, like any sane man.

“We’ve gone over this. I can’t trust my feelings if you can send me feelings at will.”

“Don’t be weird, Ezra.”

“No, you don’t be weird damnit, that was what I was going to

say and you know it.”

“Your schizo, dude.”

“Don’t say that it’s not funny. I’m just thinking. Everyone does it.”

“Okay I’m sorry.”

Ezra didn’t reply. His mind always had the last say. Back inside his apartment Ezra make another espresso, this one without the cinnamon and he wondered if the cinnamon he put on Liza’s coffee made him look pretentious. He decided not to think about it and to go to sleep but he lay on his bed and thought about it anyway before falling asleep and not dreaming anything.

Ezra awoke the next morning and felt good. He ate fruit and eggs for breakfast and put it in the fridge because he preferred cold meals and he would run before eating. He ate a spoonful of raw honey because he suspected it was healthy. Someone had told him once that honey never went bad, like mammoth meat stuck in an iceberg.

He ran around a small pond and lamp posts and park benches. The lamps were painted black and still lit because the dark of night lingered until later on. His mind never interrupted him when he ran so he never ran with music. Instead he thought about his day. Ezra thought about that girl but he wasn’t tempted to get a hold of her. The party was awesome and his friends would want to do it again so he thought about a different theme. At the barn parties they threw there was always weed and beer and after that there was a scale that tampered off from items that were highly likely to be present to things that no one ever brought. Every party had beer. Few parties had opium. Occasionally someone would go hardcore and do meth out in the open.

But apart from all that Ezra felt he lived a healthy life. Ezra finished his run by the time the sun began to get hot and he ate a delicious breakfast with no ideas for the rest of the day. He cleaned before reading several poems. He read through a poem and sat trying to decide if he liked it when his phone buzzed and saw Thomas

texted him.

The message said: Ridiculous party dude. Want to chill?

“Yeah. When?” Ezra wrote.

His phone buzzed again: green café.

“When?” Ezra wrote again.

“Dude I don’t know just come down in like a few minutes.”

Ezra could tell Thomas was agitation because he his texts became longer and quicker.

“Okay.” Ezra wrote and threw his phone on his bed and pulled into a gray sleeve polo with a black tee underneath.

“Dark jeans look good with everything.” Ezra thought.

“Dark jeans look better on drunken legs than sober.” His mind thought.

Ezra looked picked up his phone and keys and looked in his body length mirror again and shrugged.

He drove to and parked around the side of the café that had brick walls and a green oning with gold letters that spelled Coffee from a computer generated cursive detail. Non-church goers sat around small wooden tables in makeshift booths and the store smelled strangely clean. Not much of a coffee scent for all the coffee made there and not much of a rotting book smell despite the rows of old used hardback books for sale.

Ezra spotted Thomas and ignored him and walked into the next room and ordered a latte to go. He walked back into the book room and sat down where Thomas sat eating a pistachio muffin and pretending to text because he was bored and none of the books around him were worth reading for one morning only.

“Dude what’s up.” Thomas said.

“Not much dude.” Ezra said.

“We need to do that again. Will that guy let us use the barn again?”

“Yeah, he’s old and won’t care. I don’t even think he wanted money he was kinda out of it.”

“Yeah well he wasn’t using it anyway.”

“I don’t want it to get boring. I mean we need more people.”

“Why? There was like over a hundred people there.”

“Including us.”

“Dude, you set these arbitrary standards and feel compelled to meet them. It’s the quality that matters not the quantity. Don’t be difficult.”

“Take it easy man.”

“Okay I might have been out of line there. My apologies.”

“So why’d you want me to come here?”

“Whoa, I enjoy your company, but hey way to make me feel insecure. Thanks for the internal doubt, man, I’ll be sure to drink an extra shot for that one tonight. I like seeing your face, that’s why, Jesus Christ dude.”

“Chill out man.”

“You know I’m joking man.” Thomas said. “But seriously I heard there’s this shaman, like a legit voodoo doctor, who might have some exotic stuff for next week.”

“What’s exotic stuff mean?”

“I don’t know exactly but you should check it out.”

“We should check it out.”

“I’ve got overtime later today.”

“Oh.”

“But since you’re a lazy bum you can investigate.”

“Dude I earned this.”

“I know. But seriously dude this could be something.”

“Okay, but if this is something I’m obscuring it. I need something now that I’m finished with the crickets.”

“Whoa, don’t be hasty man. It might not be obscurable, this voodoo drug. It might be a bogus sham. Probably is but find out for sure dude you know I hate when you get my hopes up like that.” Ezra and Thomas finished their coffees and talked about obscuring, the verb used as a noun, which described an activity whereby an individual learns all they can about an otherwise obscure topic. Ezra recently obscured the gryllidae family (crickets) and Thomas

obscured the life of Montague Summers which turned out to be difficult and boring. Along with Ezra and Thomas their friends Ephra and Pat had most recently obscured pipe crafting and the element Palladium. They met regularly to discuss their obscuring subjects.

But now Thomas left to work at a hot and dirty steel fabrication factory and Ezra left with an address that “might be his house or church or something”. Ezra enjoyed the quiet of the café and walked to order more coffee and a cinnamon muffin now that he was alone. He picked out a book containing short stories by American authors and read a few chapters until late morning became noon.

Ezra left the café and drove his car to the place he thought Thomas described. He had part of the directions from their conversation and the rest in text messages. He was looking for an aquatic blue trailer just outside of town. Ezra felt sketchy and played jazz as he drove through lunch time traffic and a light rain that started pouring. Twenty minutes later Ezra was sure he was where the directions indicated but doubted Thomas’ mapping ability.

After more time Ezra found a small gravel road that led into the circular street named Paris Boulevard. Ezra found the aqua blue trailer, it was white too, and checked the same three digit address against what Thomas had given him. The numbers matched and Ezra wondered where Thomas had heard of this.

Ezra turned off his car in the middle of the tiny road and felt concerned that this guy might be a meth dealer as he stepped up the three cracked cement steps to the screen door. Ezra knocked and put his phone deep into his front pocket because if the guy was crazy and chased him he didn’t want to lose his driver’s license with all his info.

“Won’t matter if he’s taking pictures of your license plate”, Ezra thought and looked up at a window with white lace curtains faded to a vitamin C pee tone yellow.

Inside Ezra heard someone move and the door opened and a man in surprisingly attractive attire opened the door.

“Hi.” Ezra said. “Okay this might sound weird but my friend

and I were looking for someone who might know of some..."

"Purple monkey machine." The man said. He pushed the screen door open and stepped out and down the steps. "Well, the guy with no sense of taste has it."

Another man walked over to the door, he smelled like stale beer and either had that same beer dribbling down the side of his mouth or was drooling.

"Oh fuck, what do you want? Purple monkey machine." He said.

"Uh yeah, actually." Ezra said. The other man picked up a bicycle and started peddling it through the rough gravel. Ezra turned to the man who motioned for him to step in and he heard the other man crash into the gravel behind him and curse.

"You bring cash?" The man said.

"Uh..."

"Don't worry it's not illegal."

"Okay well I take some then."

"Fifty."

"For what?"

"For this bottle." The man said and pulled a green beer bottle out of his pants (did he have pockets?) and handed it to Ezra who paid him.

"How many times is this good for?"

"One time is all you need."

"Dude, I need enough for a few people."

"Okay. Okay! Give me that."

The man walked to a kitchen sink filled with beer canisters and paper plates and filled the bottle up with tap water.

"Now it's good enough for, you know, maybe 3 big friends, maybe 5 small little friends."

Ezra went to grab it but the man jerked it away. His mouth hung open.

"Fifty."

"Dude I just saw you put tap water in that."

"Twenty or you get nothing. This is the machine; water won't

delude it from my family recipe. You want to drink my voodoo with your friends? You want machine power?”

Ezra paid another twenty so he could leave. If this was bunk Thomas could fucking pay for it. Ezra turned and left and dropped his keys and saw the fat old greasy man watching from behind the curtains. Ezra drove back into town and washed his hands back at his apartment and then washed them again before deciding to just take a shower.

After his shower Ezra texted Thomas and Ephra who came over after Ezra ate an early dinner. Ephra walked in without knocking and Ezra showed him the dirty bottle containing a pale green liquid that looked like diluted swamp water and smelled like nothing.

“Dude this is nothing, you got ripped off man.” Ephra said.

“Maybe, but there was another guy there and I’m pretty sure he was high, or at least buzzed.”

“Whatever man I’m not drinking this. Anyway there won’t be anymore barn parties at the old farmers place. He filed a police report after we left.”

Ezra and Ephra laughed and Thomas knocked and came in with a pizza that they all paid for.

“Oh yeah get me some of that.” Ephra said and took a piece of slopping pizza.

“You’re not serious.” Thomas said as he looked at the bottle, “You’re messing with me, you didn’t pay for that did you dude?”

“Yeah we both did, you sent me to some nut shaman, voodoo man. This is what we got.”

Ezra did not mention the tap water incident or that the man referred to it as a recipe. If morning glory seeds and a San Pedro cactus can get someone high, there might be something worth tripping on here. Ezra felt uncomfortable when he realized that he thought the same thing about robo tripping back in highschool but brushed it off as an inevitable personality trait.

“Maybe we should try this tonight.” Ezra said.

“You’re not serious.” Ephra said.

“Dude be cool, we can just do a shot and see if we feel anything.”

“What if that’s bleach or something?” Thomas said.

“You can smell it’s not bleach don’t be annoying.”

“I’m just saying there might be something in there. Why don’t you do it if you want to so bad.” Thomas said and walked over to a cart with bottled spirits on top and various alcohol glasses on the bottom. He picked up three shot glasses and walked back with a bottle of whiskey under his arm.

“You do the potion and we’ll do the whiskey.” Thomas said.

Ephra sat down next to him on the sofa.

“I’m not waiting then.” Ezra said

He grabbed the bottle and drank a gulp real quick and choked and spat at the floor but the drink was already down. Ephra and Thomas laughed.

“That’s nasty; I’m not having any more.” Ezra said and walked over to his sink and emptied the rest out.

“You feel trippy?” Ephra asked. He drank another shot then wiped his mouth and leaned back.

“No that was complete...whoa.” Ezra said.

“What?”

“I, uh, can’t walk man. I think it’s really hitting me.”

“Dude sit down, you might be sick.”

Ezra stepped forward and stumbled and when he tried to lift his arm it didn’t move and he slammed down on his face and everything became black nothingness.

When Ezra awoke he felt the warm bed under him but his vision spun so he kept his eyes shut and tried to feel. The air was silent and no one seemed to be around. He tried to check the time on his alarm clock and then his watch but failed both times and laid back quickly and hit his head on the backboard and he scream in pain. His

stomach and head hurt and everything confused him. Ezra collapsed and fell asleep.

Ezra woke again and his head felt clear and he moved his arms. Ezra looked around and stepped out of bed. Things were different, someone had moved him. He looked at the black wallpaper with strange flowers and walked over to his kitchen. His eyes focused more as he untwisted the lid of his espresso machine and began to wake up. This was his house. He looked back to the distant walls and saw tiny movements, like flowers twisting.

“I’m nuts or infested with bugs.” He thought, not joking. Ezra continued to make coffee because he thought madness more likely. Silence, then a steady draining, then spurts of brown foam, the espresso machine puked it out and Ezra thought about drinking it straight because that seemed dramatic enough for the situation but instead shuffled over to his fridge where sugar cane sugar and half and half were kept.

Ezra drank the espresso with too much cream and looked around with one arm supporting him on the counter. “More bugs.” He thought. “Guess this is me nuts.” Ezra found some humor in the fact that even being mad wasn’t enough to drive him from his ego because he always had difficulty in losing himself to drink or drugs the way other people could. His mind always stayed chained to his brain. “No sense in losing my mind now.”

On the counter a fat slopping translucent chunk oozed around his toaster. Ezra jumped and looked closer. The word, the letters were large and smooth near the edges and cube shaped. It spelled: SWEET. The three dimensional word crawled around and Ezra saw it. He stared and the creature never left the surface toaster.

Ezra thought about dramatically setting aside his espresso cup to feel up the walls with both hands- more letter bugs there- but instead walked over and sipped his drink. The bugs all crawled but never left the object they described and these bugs spelled “WE CAN TALK WE CAN TALK CAN WE TALK...” the CAN bugs scrambled to follow the erratic WEs but they kept getting jammed behind the

traffic of the TALKs. The resulting mural made no sense but the three words were not difficult to decipher.

Ezra laughed. The word bugs had a sort humor. He stepped forward to go take a shower now that his espresso was empty and stepped down hard on a fat word bug, about the size of a football, and it squished then poofed away into nothingness. Ezra turned around and smacked the palm of his hand against the painted drywall and mashed a caravan of letters. They dissipated into nothingness, their white translucent quality increased rapidly until nothing remained. More letter bugs crawled over and filled the gap but there were no less words.

After taking a shower with an odd shaped GUNK bug and an awkward VOYEUR word he dressed and walked outside. For a moment he really did lose himself, his ego, that part of him overwhelmed by the sudden influx of millions of word bugs. In the sky a giant ASTROID bug loomed. Words too small to read even up close crawled over everything. Large bugs sat on the backs of people and some carried so many that their faces were an opaque blur. When Ezra felt his mind return he thought “At least they’re not numbers”, and moved forward again. He called a taxi service from his phone and waited.

His phone rang and the taxi came up at the same time. Ezra answered then told the driver the coordinates to the voodoo shaman.

“Hello?” Ezra said. Why didn’t they just text?

“Hey, this is Liza and I was just uh, I had lost this...”

“Okay, okay.” Ezra said after every word. He went to place the phone closer to his ear but a slimy word slithered out of the holes on his phone designed for the speakers. THEIF leeches out onto his arm then exploded like a rocket, hit the ceiling fabric, then bounced off it and down Ezra’s shirt and he screamed.

The cab driver yelled something about shutting up and Ezra slammed his phone shut and pushed back hard against the seat and felt word squish against his shoulder then evaporate. Ezra sat still and felt like a child in the back seat of his angry father’s vacation car.

Drive on, Mr. cab driver with HIGHWAY DIEWAY crawling
though your hair.

DIEWAY was a nasty little thing and tried to sneak down nearer
to Ezra but it couldn't seem to attach itself to anything except cab
driver's hair. Ezra watched the mountains of words in the sky until
the taxi pulled up to the trailer home.

Ezra ran up to the steps and knocked until the man answered
without opening the screen door. On his belly sat BURNT
FLAVORBUD. He looked down and they both looked at it and he
smashed it. Then another one crawled around from behind and now
sat on his belly, the same word, the same bug.

"Let me save myself some explaining here. No, you can't stop it,
they always come back, and you can't have your money back." He
said.

"What do you mean they don't go away?" Ezra asked. He knew
what the man meant.

"It's a marriage, a diamond." He said and laughed, "You'll find
out, you'll see those pretty words. Diamond words, or worse, or
better."

"So what do I do?"

"Kid, you got a voodoo super power now. Go do whatever you
want." He said and shut the door.

Continued in Clearance on an Urban Legend, 2 of 2.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas Bisbee writes short stories at his home in Ohio. All characters in this text are fictional and do not represent real people, living or dead. Part two of this two part series will be completed around Christmas 2012. The author can be reached at thomasbisbee@hotmail.com or at dirthammer.deviantart.com

COVER IMAGE

The front image is a photograph by Michael Domaradzki who can be reached at mdomaradzki.deviantart.com

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