



Issue 17 – Fall 2022

Cover Art “Lifeguard, Copacabana Beach, Brazil” by Roger Camp

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Note: *Issue content recovered and compiled from its original online format (2024).*

Roger Camp is the author of three photography books including the award winning Butterflies in Flight, Thames & Hudson, 2002 and Heat, Charta, Milano, 2008. His work has appeared in numerous journals including The New England Review, Pank, Folio and the New York Quarterly. His work is represented by the Robin Rice Gallery, NYC. More of his work may be seen on Luminous-Lint.com.

Static Rift

The neurologist sent us home again

a handful of seizures not a high enough currency

to purchase a hospital bed

in this poem you are not dying

yet

and many patients are waitlisted

for a small place to die in

under blinding fluorescents

it is hard to see underneath

all the groans

we are rotting floorboards creaking from the load

Did you hear gods underneath the weight

I mean wait

I mean wait for me

don't leave

I want to say I'm sorry

I want to say I'm sorry

I could not

lift gently

I want to say I'm sorry for spilling you

when I found you

baby sister your stiff brick body

when I found you

your head a puppy's yelp against wood

How can a static skull still claim a life?

I witness the empty

picture in your pupils

it hurts only to see

myself in them

did you feel a god when your body began to move without consent

did his hands hurt

did they incinerate

your chest

your arm

your hand

your head

moves away

heaves against the hell behind your frontal lobe

absence seizure

both

the doctors keep saying

I believe in

you are an absence

your body seizing like gold

daffodils under torrential spring showers

two bluebird eyes bulging portals an ether I slip into

The absence of meaning creates a rift in time

which must be the meaning of this split of earth we now breathe in.

tell me you are here in this rift with me

though your eyes play vacant

clear lakes leading to the dark

I

pitch

against

my little daffodil

lover of wild flowers

because you hate uniformity

I won't tell you that your stem

is torn from a brain's beating current

the rips the blood the bruise from being

stuck by this bee needle

ER nurses stick with multiple stings do you feel them

your skin does

collects the needles' bite

bluish plum sap soaking the skin

a body turns on you

not towards.

are you still

calling it

yours

I still hold it stammer stutter

in this limbo in this in between phase the brain mimics

friend the postictal phase

the phase in between your frontal lobe's misfiring

the phase after a seizure in which breath returns

the phase in which I see the ghost of normalcy

I hear her voice but it sounds like

a silhouette of my sister stuck in her bed

webs of screams stick to me

echoing stop stop stop in the night

I am there with her

beside her

not knowing if I should take her back to the hospital

not knowing if this is enough rest between seizures

not knowing if she could die from the electric jolts playing with infinity

not knowing if I should wait for her vitals to drop like the doctor said

because you are still not sick enough for that coveted hospital bed

For the first time in 10 years I pray

but my words cling like moths to a temporary light

They die before the sun even rises

and I am afraid

warmth

The days

rifts

seaming together

an aching perfected stitch of torment

empty of answers

of a cause

of a definition

for my seizing sister wrenching

we move onwards though

in an absent sense of days

living in the rift of this

the earth calls out to me

stranger

standing in an in between

I let myself go there

the minutes mold only seizures

then the postictal breath which I latch onto

sister hold my eyes

take you

if you stay here with me I will

scavenging

for gold but discovering only toads which were just as

valuable to our dimpled grasp we held
them

like precious moments hoping to somehow keep a thing

that moves away from our fairy fingers

and I hope to keep you

though the days dwell in a stasis

and you move into the arms of status epilepticus

I cannot wake you this time even though your eyes are open

looking into them I search for a creek babbling in all that

empty blue

you carry the weight of it without blinking

vacancies

all I see are eyes filled with

the hospital bed now ready

to nest my sister my chest still grips

doctor now ready for the

begging for an absence

to this boundless seize of time

Annalee Fairley is a poet currently based in Roanoke, VA. Over her writing career, her poetry has been published in Ink&Nebula, Apricity Magazine, and The Black Fork Review. She has been the recipient of the Betty Killebrew Literary Award and the Neill James Creative Writing Scholarship. She is currently pursuing an MFA in Poetry on a Gager Fellowship at Hollins University.

Saturn

restricted in womb
 muscle fiber & blood
 pushed & shoved out
 constricted proof
 headfirst
 a cord is cut
 gravity then inertia
 flesh to breath
 father where art thou

seven & solemn old
 soul among children
 first grade afraid
 bullied for difference
 casted out by boys
 awareness shame
 love for my grandpa
 wrote my first story
 art was my only friend

outed from the closet

fourteen

first time I wore cargo

basketball was life

was talented lonely

in love infatuated

knee injury

acoustic guitar therapy

cold turkey fluoxetine

all eyes on me

it's all in your head

anxiety for breakfast

25 driveway freethrows

in a row in the rain

until I could go inside

move to rival school

freshman year

first week grandpa dead

deluded & washed out

twenty-one trans/queer

drunk since fourteen

only legal now

ego the size of the sun

singing original songs

whiskey afflicted poet

dropping tabs for better

lack of a prophet

Jaimeson Oakley (He/They) is a writer originally from the hills of Lucasville, Ohio. The poem "Saturn" is inspired by the significant aspects Saturn makes back to its original placement every seven years in one's astrological birth chart.

schoolmates

if you've ever spent a year in an american elementary school
you're probably familiar with this phenomenon.

"my family is german"

"we're polish and irish and slavic"

"I'm hungarian" I would say,
believing this to be the appropriate
way to partake.

"no" I would say,
"but both of my parents were."

furrowed brows.

"you are not hungarian"

the hypocrisy was always so plain to me
it felt redundant to even point out.

"my mom's side is italian but my dad's is
german. I'm half-and-half!"

their faces would blink at me.

"were you born there?"

they did not ask each other where they were
born.

"you're american"

"you are not hungarian"

italian? can you speak italian? do your mother's fingers drip flour because she's never been taught to bake things from boxes? to buy canned and prepped? do you visit your german family and speak deustch?

"I'm polish and czechoslovakian"
they'd continue.

*it's two countries now, I'd think
do you know your tribe?*

people are very impressed with me now
first-generation american
bilingual
dual-citizen
huge, curling hair
darker, hairier skin

it makes me wonder where their assuredness went.
every friend and half-acquaintance
across four school districts
confident in naming who I was.

I would look and sound the same had I been born over british airspace in a plane on my mom's way back home. where are you from? what do these words mean? where does your heart feel happy and your skin feel safe?

Anna (Ah-na) Bagoly is a Hungarian-American who just completed their MA in Poetry at USM. They are fascinated with recreating memories that immerse in sensation and imagery, blending poetry and creative nonfiction. They've been published in *dead peasant* and *Wingless Dreamer*, won the Memorial Fellowship at *Heavy Feather Review*, and have recorded a piece with the Mississippi Coalition Against Sexual Assault.

the dao

we verb before the
cease
less face
less dao

some of us
mudpuddles
some
slipknots
some
ships logs

Ago
A gog leaning
in
A god

As if to catch
word in a flame
worm on a hook
swarming
mayflies
in the underarm
of day

As if of Day
as if of day & night
following day
following
night & day following
night

twin shadows
from which which
world
is rent/
dao houses
like brothers
sea & sky
mirroring
bluely
what's left
of aimless
sensibility ?

dao's bound
less
ever-expanding
futurity
alterity
god-closing

in
even on distinction
between

word & thing
dao we don't
need

Odysseus
to have ever left

Helen
to sprinkle men
in her red

weave, moonlight
beneath earth's red
tomb

or Jesus
crashing through
the raw

white pines
of tables in the market
(place)

as if he were
water, with its delicacy
or force

eddying the small
of love's back
or crippling the entire

fleet
universal
someone's

'omniscience',
'omnipotence'
does not recount it/
suffice

dao untamable
is no person's
mastery
or like-person's
sorcery

& yet flows
and is at rest
on its rock (this,
our)
like a cricket
& the air
it breathes

& is what is both
empty & full,
hungry & sated,
wild & tame,
completely/

at home in its
loneliness
beneath
refulgent stars,
the color of salt
before
a wound,
the sound
of noise before
void
dao is
as if

in that white noise of
childhood's fuzzy
television
it had glimpsed them,
the stars & their
harmonies we failed to
hear

and the contours seen
 on the emerging
 human face that would
 be our love & death
 and all the tragic guillotines
 of symphonies washed
 over us their waves,
 flooding open
 with the dawn, that complex
 knot containing all
 happiness and sadness
 not as labels
 but as they really were
 to exist behind the eyes,

before the face
 had learned from sensation
 after sensation
 to pull them (write them)
 and I was no child
 anymore—

dao is to be
 at harmony
 with one's nature
 with nature

there no condition
 of its success.

David Capps is a philosophy professor and poet who lives in New Haven, CT. He is the author of four chapbooks: *Poems from the First Voyage* (The Nasiona Press, 2019), *A Non-Grecian Non-Urn* (Yavanika Press, 2019), *Colossi* (Kelsay Books, 2020), and *Wheatfield with a Reaper* (Akinoga Press, forthcoming).

Not Funfetti Cupcakes

Mix:

- 4 cups naïveté
- Carl, the big talker and popular guy + Crystal, the shy recluse.
- 1 gallon teenage lust
- Pinch of caution

Add:

- 1 fresh big lie: Carl said he'll inherit millions when his granddaddy dies.
- 3 canned small lies: He'll buy Crystal a ranch and Appaloosas to ride. They'll travel — Vegas, Australia, the moon. He promised to hire a chef.

Simmer:

- Crystal's love of horses and the travel channel.
- The bad taste left from cooking for her family of eight after her mama died.

Bake:

10 years on high heat in a Texas knothole of a town.

Yield:

- Three kids browned, crusty-edged.
- Carl, a Walmart assistant manager.

Bittersweet Glaze:

- 1 cup grit
- 12 drops tears
- 4 cups dreams

Inject reality:

- Carl's granddaddy died.
- Inheritance: boxes of R & B vinyl records and turntable, his only prized possessions.

Garnishes:

- Soulfulness of the music.
- Crystal never cooked for Carl again.

Kay Rae Chomic, novelist (*A Tight Grip*), and writer of flash: *Ellipsis Zine*, *Cabinet of Heed*, *Retreat West* (1st place-micro fiction), *Cranked Anvil* (shortlisted), *LISP* (semi-finalist), *Storgy Magazine*, *Flash Fiction Friday*, *Five:2:One*, and more. Kay lives in Seattle dodging raindrops, and loves Motown music.

And We'll Become Silhouettes

NEW CALIFORNIA BECOMES FIRST U.S. STATE TO LEGALIZE CYBERKINETIC SURGERY

NEW CALIFORNIA GAZETTE reporter ONEIRA CAVALON will be following the lives of two early recipients of cyberkinetic surgery in a 12-part monthly series. [Blink here](#) to include the N.C. Gazette in your regular CraniYUM™ Brain Capacity downloads.

#

PART ONE: INTRODUCTIONS

“Oh, it’s so exciting!”

Hiu Bree can barely contain said excitement. In the small corner of a premiere café in Visia City, New California, she swings her legs back and forth under the ergonomic barstool and sips a NutriNeuro-enhanced mocha frappe.

People around us can’t help but stare at her legs. When I mention this, Hiu laughs.

“I’m used to it, sweetheart,” she says. “Though it used to be people would stare for a very different reason.”

She giggles and clutches her frappe in both hands before taking a sip. Her long, shapely nails are painted a matte, metallic silver — “Audacity Wright’s ‘Titanium Tirade,’” she says, “because not only is Audacity my hero, but it matches my legs.”

It does. From the tops of her black Air Nikes to the bottom of her green running shorts, Hiu’s legs are made of metal, a smooth emulation of the human form constructed from, primarily, titanium and stainless steel. Red and blue wires peek out from her shiny kneecaps when the joint bends and exposes the reinforced silicon tendons holding it all together.

“It’s so silly,” she says. “I thought getting this surgery with these would make people focus more on my dancing and less on my legs.” She laughs again. “What on Earth was I thinking?”

#

As cyberkinetic surgeon Argwin Felt knows, those metal legs connect at the hip under the green running shorts, while the Air Nikes conceal a pair of — for the most part — perfectly average feet.

“Ms. Bree’s plantar fascia and the tips of her toes are reinforced with steel and silicon,” Felt says at our first meeting. His office, stark and sterile, features equipment

and walls made primarily of brass. Brass is self-sterilizing, he informed me when I entered, and the less he has to disinfect, the better.

“Other than that,” he says of Hiu’s surgery, “her feet are much the same as they were before. We’ve found in the field of cyberkinetic surgery that, in cases where the patient’s body parts are essentially functional, it’s best to leave the smaller tendons and bones alone.”

He turns on the Snaggle projector on his brass desk, and a head with two near-identical, yet somehow opposite faces rotates between us. One face is perfectly average; the other, its perfectly perfect counterpart.

“Michael Janus,” Felt says, reading the large text over the image. “Now, his case is a bit different, and something a breakthrough in the challenging field of expression-based performance.”

#

Michael Janus’s secretary has me wait in the cramped lobby outside the courtroom. The Visia County Courthouse is an old building. This becomes apparent when I sit on a creaky wooden bench next to an old-fashioned drinking fountain, the kind where you have to lean over and put your mouth near the spout.

I hope that spout is brass, I find myself thinking, right before the courtroom door swings open and the perfect face from Felt’s office appears above a black blazer and matching slacks.

“Oneira Cavalon, is it?”

I stand almost compulsively as Michael draws near and shakes my hand in a perfect handshake — just firm enough and not too damp. “That’s me,” I say. “How’d the case go?”

“Excellent, of course.” He beckons, and we walk at a self-important, brisk pace down the stuffy hall and up a flight of brick stairs to his office suite. “The defendant actually gave a statement after the sentencing to apologize for wasting my time.”

As he talks, I have to pinch myself at times to stay focused and commit information and details to my CraniYUM. But now, as I write, I never need to play back my audiovisual notes, because I can remember exactly what he said with perfect accuracy.

In Michael’s office, he offers me a look into his throat. He apologizes for the crude method — I have to manually peer into the dark gullet with a concentrated lightstick — but he ran out of Nanobite imaging pills last week and hasn’t replaced his office stash yet.

Still, the lightstick has three built-in cameras and Snaggle capabilities, so he connects it to the projector and uses a plugin to enhance the 3D image. After that, it’s almost as clear as if he’d swallowed a Nanobite.

“You’ll see there that Dr. Felt lined my vocal folds with nanorobotics,” he says, proving the point as his hypnotic baritone resonates around the room. “They adjust

tuning and inflection in my speech for optimal auditory reception.”

“I like the sound of that!” one of his colleagues cracks from across the suite, and Michael smiles.

“Well, of course you do,” he says. “Everyone does.”

#

PART TWO: ADAPTATION

Hiu’s apartment sits at the top of an unremarkable high rise, all two-way mirrors and titanium framing. You can see the original concrete sidewalks peeking through the cracks in the solar-heated, comfort-optimized paving tile. Sometimes an entire square of concrete breaks through; just walking across one makes my joints hurt.

Two people, perhaps lovers, squat in the arched doorway of the building. They might be teenagers, but it’s hard to tell — the recent generations always look perpetually youthful and androgynous.

The first injects something under their tongue, then helps the other do the same. “Wanna see what my insides look like?” the first says with a coy smile.

“You said this wasn’t Nanobites,” the other replies, still holding the syringe. “You said these nanorobots reconfigure to emulate hormones. Antidopa-whatevers and shit.”

“Well,” the first says, grabbing the other’s hand and leading them into the stairwell, “there’s more than one way to look inside a person.”

I’m relieved when the other giggles. Then I’m less relieved to remember that “antidopa-whatevers and shit” — likely antidopaminergics, if my CraniYUM word completion brainware is correct — are dopamine blockers. Dopamine regulates impulse control.

Then Hiu floats down the stairs, and I forget about the two youths until I play the scene back later while collecting my notes.

“Oh, Oneira,” she says, her gait balanced and smooth even on the exposed concrete, “I’m sorry I kept you waiting. This neighborhood is a dump, but I’m moving out soon.” She beams. Her teeth shine, though I notice the left incisor is a little crooked.

As if on cue, she unwraps a stick of tooth-whitening gum and offers me one. I decline. She throws the wrapper into a chrome molecularizer, where it vaporizes the wrapper and the non-natural compounds are sucked away for later reuse. The water molecules stay in the air for a minute, a hazy rainbow hanging in the mist until a pleasant breeze blows it away.

“My career exploded,” Hiu continues. “I was nervous at first to make this investment, but it’s business — you have to spend money to make money. Now I’m the International Dance Troupe’s number-one dancer.”

She stops once we get to the old marina, crystalline seawater lapping at the wooden piers. Visia City engineers recently renovated the docks, reinforcing the structure but keeping the decayed wood look. It looks run down, but with a unique, ugly-chic charm.

“Watch,” Hiu says.

She takes one step and leaps, landing *en pointe* in her ballet flats on the dock’s railing. Her movements precise, her balance impeccable, she elevates herself on one set of toes and begins to spin, whirling faster and faster until I begin to think she’ll never stop.

But she does stop, again with extreme precision. She flashes the crooked incisor. “Thirty-two *fouettés*,” she says, hardly even out of breath. “Odile, *Swan Lake*. I’ve never been able to do that before. And I don’t even need pointe shoes anymore.”

She leaps down, making almost no sound as she lands on the creaky wooden dock.

I’m breathless for her. “Do you ever miss your old legs?”

Hiu looks thoughtful. “Not really,” she says. “At first I was upset because I couldn’t afford the higher-end prosthetics, the ones that really look like human skin and whatever.”

She glances at her fingernails, still painted “Titanium Tirade,” then down at her legs. She then looks at me. “But there’s beauty in the metal, too, don’t you think?”

#

“True,” Dr. Felt says. “The metallic look is ‘all the vogue,’ as people used to say.”

He pulls up a diagram on his Snaggle. There’s several human models in a row, each with an increasingly minimalistic set of legs. The last one appears to just be a floating torso.

“We’re developing our prosthetics to be as free from the bonds of physics as possible,” Felt says. “Pushing the limits, as it were.” He points below the floating torso. “This newest design uses directed levitation to avoid friction altogether. Reverse-Casimir force and whatnot. The trick is getting the artificial electric impulses to line up with the organic ones.”

He enlarges the torso model. It leaps about on a virtual stage. The motion is captivating, but it’s lacking something.

“Artistry,” I say aloud. Felt laces his fingers together under his chin and peers at me through the projection. “You can’t see the legs, just the arms. You miss all the mirroring movements and nuance.”

“Perhaps,” Dr. Felt says, “but there’s something to be said for things left unseen, hmm?” He leans back in his desk chair, and I hear a slight whir as the nanorobotics reconfigure to offer peak lumbar support.

I have a similar chair back at my apartment. I spent all night in it, replaying Hiu's rendition of Odile and dreaming about what I would do with legs like those. I didn't move all night. Funny to think, my great-grandparents used to complain about backaches if they sat for longer than an hour or so.

I guess Felt mentioning "vogue" got me thinking about the past.

#

"Oh, I don't miss my old voice, Oneira" Michael says. "Because I never lost it. I just made it better."

It's true. Even though my EarRing is an older model, his voice sounds pristine even through a slight crackle. Still, I dig in my ear with that tiny nano-brush that comes with every EarRing implant, hoping to fix whatever electronic problem it has today. Or at least clear out some earwax.

"My face, too, it's still me," Michael continues. "Perhaps Argwin showed you the before-and-after models?"

I bump my eardrum with the brush and curse. "Sorry," I say. "That wasn't for you. Yes, Dr. Felt showed me."

"You know, I have a funny story for you," he says. "Yesterday I gave my opening statement for a new trial. You'll never guess what happened afterward."

I'm too enraptured by his voice, now, to even try to guess. I ask what happened.

"We had a brief recess, and as soon as the judge announced it, people were lining up left and right to get my autograph. The jury, the people watching ... even the defendant was chomping at the bit to get to me. At first the judge worried that it was absurd, even unethical."

He chuckles. "But I told her, 'Well Maria, Your Honor, I damn well can't help it. The people want what they want!' She came around to it."

"Uh-huh," I say. The brush still hangs out of my ear, but I won't notice until after the call is over.

"A few of 'em tried to get pictures with me, too." He chuckles again. "Some people are so *vain*."

#

Hiu also has a funny story for me. We're at her new apartment. It's one of those fancy new ones with the semi-permeable walls, where it feels as fresh as the outdoors but stays at a cozy 295 Kelvin. The floor can be soft as grass, or fold down with the press of a button into a carpet or pseudo-hardwood.

The two-way mirrors — simple windows, from the inside — absorb sunlight and diffuse it around the room, enveloping Hiu's minimalistic décor in soothing, buttery

warmth. It's serene. I feel good the instant I walk in.

Hiu gestures for me to sit and finishes making her NutriNeuro smoothie (I eye her fridge with its built-in blender with just the slightest jealousy) before she joins me in the living room.

"So I went to this house party, right?" she begins, a warm breeze stirring her hair before making its way to me. "Just a little get-together for the troupe after a busy month of touring. We were all drinking and dancing to some popmech."

"You like popmech?" I ask with a laugh.

Hiu giggles too and crosses her legs. The top of her thigh glints in the natural light. "Well, no," she says, hiding her smile with one hand. "But it was Thetea Greenwold's party, and she loves the stuff. Don't ask me why."

At this moment, the door opens, and a young person walks in, holding a toddler's hand. Hiu rushes over, shakes hands with the caretaker and hands them a wad of cash. "Thanks, Havron," she says, carrying the toddler back to the living room.

Havron leaves. The walls are so soundproof, I don't hear footsteps in the hall after the door closes.

"Oneira, this is Arabesque," she says. The toddler stares at me with wide brown eyes and starts sucking on a fist. "She stays with Havron while I'm on tour. She's my little test-tube wonder, aren't you, baby!"

She rubs noses with Arabesque, who squeals and laughs, her wet fist leaving dark spots on her tiny overalls.

After a minute, Hiu puts Arabesque down, and she waddles away. "Now," Hiu says, "where were we?"

"Thetea's party."

"Right! Well, the song was winding up, and I was feeling pretty bubbly from all the drinks." Hiu puts her face in her hands. "Oh, it's so embarrassing!"

"What happened?"

"Everyone started jumping around to the beat of the song. I got so caught up in it, I did too, even though I don't really like popmech. And then—"

She puts her face in her hands again. I prod her for the rest of the story.

"I put a hole in Thetea's ceiling!" she says. Her face is slick with tears, she's laughing so hard. "Nobody could believe it. The ceiling was at least four meters high. We all just stood there, bits of ceiling raining down on us, a bunch of it stuck in my hair." She slaps one of her legs with a hollow *clink*. "I didn't think these could even do something like that."

Across the room I hear another clinking sound. Before I can even locate it, Hiu is in the kitchen, hoisting Arabesque away from the fridge.

“Be careful, baby,” she says, her hands on the toddler’s shoulders. “The blender could hurt your fingers.”

Arabesque pouts and looks away. Hiu turns back to me with a guilty smile. “It’s new, so I haven’t figured out the child safety settings on it yet. Maybe I’ll do that this afternoon.”

Arabesque stares at me again. She shoves her fist back in her mouth.

#

That night I sit in my chair again, this time replaying Michael’s voice in my head. Especially when he said my name: *Oneira*. It sounds like poetry.

I replay it. *Oneira. Oneira. Oneira.*

Soon it’s daytime.

#

Dr. Felt doesn’t answer his phone that same morning. I leave a message, hoping maybe he’s listening to his EarRing through one of those discreet plugins.

“Hello, Dr. Felt,” I begin. My voice sounds scratchy and weak. I wonder if I’m coming down with a cold or something. “I was hoping we could meet up sometime today or tomorrow. I have some more specific questions now about New California’s cyberkinetic laws and ethics. Uh ... thanks.”

I end the call. Then I realize: I have Michael Janus at my disposal. He’s a lawyer.

I call him, and someone else answers. I recoil at the sound of their voice; I was expecting Michael’s smooth, commanding baritone.

“Yes?” the person at the other end says, their annoyance pinging in my ear like a nasty alarm.

“Uh, hi. It’s Oneira Cavalon. I need to meet with Michael today.”

“He’s not taking visitors anymore.”

“|—”

The connection goes dead. I grab the EarRing brush and rattle it around in my ear, but there’s nothing wrong with the electronics.

I leave my apartment without locking the door.

Protestors swamp the street outside Dr. Felt's office. They're mostly those androgynous youth types, but I see a few older faces. Many of them have attached mobile Snaggle projectors to their clothes, displaying holographic signs: "Mother Nature, Not Motherboard!" and "You Won't Commit to a Relationship, so Why Commit to Unnecessary Permanent Surgery?"

From deep in the crowd, another sign catches my eye: "Felt Puts the 'Ass' in 'Brass.'" I watch as the owner hurls something at Felt's window up on the third floor. The object, a bottle, bounces off the glass and lands on the sidewalk below. The paving tile absorbs the shock so the glass doesn't shatter.

I weave through the crowd, displaying my digital credentials on my own Snaggle to anyone who tries to stop me. I reach the bottle just after the youth does. The teen snatches it up as if I might try to steal it.

I point at the bottle. It's full of a clear liquid. "What is that?"

"Who wants to know?" the kid nearly snarls. I suddenly recognize the face as one of the ones from Hiu's old apartment building.

I display my credentials. "Oneira Cavalon," I say, cringing at the way it sounds when I say it. I play back Michael Janus' voice a few times: *Oneira, Oneira, Oneira*. "I'm here to report on the protest for the New California Gazette."

The youth stares at me, but finally shrugs. "Parrhesia Raventide. You can call me Pari for short." They shake the bottle from side to side. "And this is hydrogen chloride."

I pointedly record some notes in front of them before minimizing my Snaggle display. "Why hydrogen chloride?"

"Dr. Felt's office is made of brass, and hydrogen chloride would dissolve the zinc in brass and corrode it."

I realize the kid is talking about one of my articles from early in the series, but I have to ask. "Where'd you learn that?"

They shrug again. "I dunno. My CraniYUM downloads information so fast, I never bother to see where it's from. I just know. I have the software updated so everything that comes through is triple-fact-checked."

"Huh," I say.

Pari sets down the bottle and pulls out a syringe, then shoots me a wary glance. "You're not gonna narc if I shoot up some nanos, are you?"

"No," I say.

I see Pari's friend/lover from before, still standing in the crowd with the "Ass in Brass" sign. Then they trade it out for a sign that says, "Take the 'anium' Out of 'Titanium' and Let's Stay Human!"

Pari lets out a luxurious, relieved sigh, and I turn back. "Do you believe all this?" I ask, gesturing at the mass of protestors. "That cyberkinetics make people inhuman?"

"Well, yeah," Pari says. "Why else would I be here?"

I nod to the empty syringe. "Isn't that the same thing?"

Pari snorts. "Obviously not. It doesn't stay in your system forever, like you old people think."

"What about CraniYUM?"

"It's an implant. That's totally different than, like, replacing perfectly good body parts."

Pari's speech loses intensity as we talk. First their shoulders slump, then their eyelids lower a bit. "These nanorobotics are sooo good," they say with another sigh. "Sometimes I need a break from all that information, you know? Every question I ever have is instantly answered, triple-fact-checked and all. Sometimes I wish I didn't need to know everything all the time."

Seemingly in a haze, Pari looks at me one last time. Then they pick up the bottle of hydrogen chloride and merge back into the crowd.

#

PART THREE: CONSEQUENCES

I can't get Michael Janus' voice out of my head. I have to see him. I have to hear him.

I call seven times, all unanswered. Not even the assistant or whoever answers. I leave seven voicemails.

I show up at his office. I make it as far as the door to the main suite, where two people stand guard outside.

"Back off," one says. "Michael isn't taking visitors. No one's allowed past this point."

"What do you mean?" I ask, anger rising in my chest. I yank my Snaggle out of my pocket and display my credentials. "He's one of my sources. I need to see him!"

"He. Said. No. Visitors," the other says. Her red hair is in a tight bun, her blue eyes glimmering above a sprinkling of freckles.

She's hideous. Her voice is hideous. I sneer. "I have to see Michael."

"We have direct orders from Michael to not let anyone in."

I try to push past, but the two guards grab my arms and hold me in place while I thrash. The woman leans in close to my ear. "If you try to talk to him," she says, "I'll

fucking kill you.”

They throw me back. I glare at them and turn on my heel to stalk away.

“And don’t try calling him anymore,” the first guard calls after me. “If Michael says no contact, there will be no contact.”

#

I call Dr. Felt. Maybe he can help with this nonsense.

He answers on the second tone. “I can’t talk to you anymore,” he says in a clipped voice. “Goodbye.”

“Wait!” I say. “You said I could follow you and your patients for the entire year. It’s only been seven months!”

I hear him sigh and start grumbling under his breath. There’s a distant buzz of voices in the background, all sounding very urgent. I can hear the people shouting outside too, in the eighth week of the “Feel, Not Felt!” protest.

“Dr. Felt,” I continue. “Michael Janus won’t let me talk to him anymore either, and Hiu Bree’s been on tour for the past two months. What am I supposed to write about for the upcoming edition?”

“Goodbye, Oneira.”

He hangs up. My stomach churns. I cover my ears and start playback: *Oneira, Oneira, Oneira.*

#

Hiu Bree is sobbing when I call her the next day.

“I can’t—” she warbles, her voice thick with tears. “I ... I can’t—”

“Are you okay?” I ask. “What happened?”

“Oh, Oneira, I’m at the hospital right now. I can’t talk.”

“The hospital?” I’m desperate to keep her talking. “Are you hurt?”

“No, it’s...it’s...” She sobs hard. “It’s Arabesque!”

“Oh, no. Is she sick?”

Hiu cries so hard it’s hard to understand her. I have to listen to the playback several times even though the sound grates on me. But I catch the basic snippets as we talk: back from tour, stretching in living room, Arabesque, *I thought she was right with me*, kitchen, refrigerator, blender.

My stomach turns. “Shit. Did she get her hand caught in the blender?”

Hiu moans the word *no*, a horrible low keening sound. “I knew— knew I wouldn’t get t- to her in time if I just walked, s-s-so I— I *leapt*...”

She breaks down again. I wait for her to finish, listening to the beeps and whirs of the hospital.

Hiu sniffles. “I leapt to save her, but it was too hard and I...I...*crushed* her into the wall!”

She breaks down sobbing again and ends the call.

#

Three days later, there’s a knock on my door. My Snaggle-enabled door camera shows me it’s three Visia City authorities.

They demand access to my CraniYUM notes. I refuse. They say Dr. Felt’s gone missing and they’ll get a warrant to hack my system if they have to.

I say *fine, get the warrant*, and they leave.

That afternoon, I start writing all my notes on paper, planning to wipe my system. I get through six pages.

I shove the papers off my desk in a flurry, then watch Hiu perform continuous *fouettés* in time to Michael Janus saying my name.

#

The Followers of Janus come by my apartment every day for two weeks, asking if I’ve heard the Word of Michael. Every time, I tell them to fuck off and slam the door.

#

I buy a junky old media converter at an apartment sale and download the audio of Michael saying my name. I sync it up to the image of Hiu spinning and play it on my Snaggle nonstop.

Deleting the information from my CraniYUM leaves me in a cold sweat for days.

#

The Visia City authorities come back, a warrant for access to my CraniYUM and two New California regulators in tow. All five officials pick through my brain capacity files and find nothing other than what’s already been published. *Oneira, Oneira, Oneira* plays on my Snaggle in the background.

One of the New California regulators points at the projection of Hiu as I’m shooing them toward the door. “That’s evidence, too.”

“Then get a warrant for *that*,” I say, and slam the door on both the officials and the Followers of Janus coming up behind them.

#

I have a plan for these last few notes. They’re handwritten, but I downloaded a CraniYUM plugin that translates handwriting to digital text and uploads it within seconds. I might be able to get it past whatever blockades have been set up.

The New California Gazette crashed. All the articles are gone from the main cache, only to be found in dark corners of the CraniYUM brainscape for outrageous prices. My editor sent me a brief message that popped up the second I opened my eyes this morning: *N.C. Gazette is done. Final payment transferred 0.002 seconds ago.*

Dr. Felt did disappear, but word on the street — collected by my good friend Pari — says that multiple sources saw Felt ushered onto an anonymous hovercraft and flown out of Visia City at speeds too fast to track.

Pari triple-fact-checked the hovercraft’s design and cross-referenced the audio from its takeoff with its approximate flying speed. The information led to New California government caches, which were blocked.

After the Followers of Janus began soliciting money and killing for the greater good — namely, getting everyone to leave Michael alone, as he originally ordered them — Michael Janus starved himself to death in his office suite.

Hiu Bree’s daughter survived, though Hiu gave legal parentage to Havron and quit the International Dance Troupe.

Pari’s information was not triple-fact-checked in this case, but they might have seen Hiu lurking around her old apartment. It appeared she was shooting up a potent kind of nanorobotics and trying to pry her legs off.

#

Final words before I upload. Two years after the fact, people have abandoned hope for new information. New California has placed an indefinite ban on cyberkinetic surgery, and more conservative authorities are attempting to criminalize certain types of implants and medications as well.

Dr. Argwin Felt, Hiu Bree and Michael Janus have been wiped from the brainscape. No information exists on any of them, except in the dark corners and, potentially, protected government caches.

If this makes it into the brainscape, I hope that everyone who downloads it starts demanding more information.

I know I will.

#

ERROR: YOUR DOWNLOAD “official_NCGazette_resurgence” MAY BE CORRUPTED. ATTEMPTING TO VIEW FILE ANYWAY.

“Oh, it’s so exciting!”

[REDACTED] can barely contain said excitement. In the small corner of [REDACTED] premiere café, she swings her legs back and forth under the ergonomic barstool and sips a [REDACTED].

People around us can’t help but stare at [REDACTED]. When I mention this, [REDACTED] laughs.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

It does. [REDACTED]

ERROR: FILE “official_NCGazette_resurgence” COULD NOT BE FOUND. DELETING FILE FOLDER TO OPTIMIZE STORAGE/PROCESSING SPEED.

ERROR: YOUR SEARCH FOR “Oneira Cavalon” BROUGHT BACK NO RESULTS. CLEARING SEARCH HISTORY TO OPTIMIZE STORAGE/PROCESSING SPEED.

Anna K Young (she/her) is an emerging writer who specializes in speculative fiction and darkly humorous flash. Alongside a forthcoming novella with Running Wild Press, her fiction has been featured in Cutleaf Literary Journal and Mortal Mag in 2022. Her other work has appeared in Sheila-Na-Gig’s online poetry journal and Crack the Spine’s “The Year” anthology. When not writing, reading, people-watching, or eavesdropping, Young enjoys playing guitar, exploring the local trails, and taking long naps on her living room futon. You can add her on Twitter @AKYwriter.

DARKSLIDING

Welcome, USER: UNJOLLY ROGER! We here at SpectreNet, the premier social media app for the no-longer-corporeal, would like to officially welcome you to the spectral community. Please take a look at our user guidelines and enjoy our service, connecting spirits since 2015

☺

@ ALL; posted by ANONY

<Subject: What do you miss most?>

| Just curious |

<Reply, NOONES>

| Wife's kiss. No contest. Her lips, my lips, like chalk for water. |

<Reply, REXDOG>

| Vidja games. : / |

<Reply, VELVETSPIRAL>

| Nothing. Lol |

<Reply, VESUVIOUS>

| Food. Salt. NoMnoMnoM. |

<Reply, RSAKS>

| The stupid fucking birds singing. |

<Reply, RUBYFIREFACE>

| puppydogs!!! |

☹

@ ALL; posted by UNJOLLYROGER

<Subject: Making Contact>

| ~~Does anyone know of a way to reach out to the NonDeados? Just wondering if it's even possible.~~

<Reply, MODLEE>

| This post violates our community guidelines. It has been deleted. |



@ UNJOLLYROGER; sent by VELVETSPIRAL

<Subject: RE Making Contact, Private Ping>

| hey dude. saw your post before it got erased. the answer is yes! or maybe? not at liberty to share details yet. still experimenting. will be in touch. |



@ VELVETSPIRAL; sent by UNJOLLYROGER

<Subject: RE RE Making Contact, Private Ping>

| Thank you! Appreciate it. I can't stand this already. Won't survive like this for long. How do you be a ghost? This app somehow makes it worse. Need to break out. |



@ UNJOLLYROGER; sent by VELVETSPIRAL

<Subject: RE RE RE Making Contact, Private Ping>

| Lol. give it time. u get used to it. |



@ VELVETSPIRAL; sent by UNJOLLYROGER

<Subject: RE RE RE RE Making Contact, Private Ping>

| God, I hope not. God? Mod? Whoever is in charge around here! |



@UNJOLLYROGER; sent by VELVETSPIRAL

<Subject: RE RE RE RE RE Making Contact, Private Ping>

| Lol. fucking mods, man. don't mention it. i got u. more soon. |



@VELVETSPIRAL; sent by UNJOLLYROGER

<Subject: RE RE RE RE RE RE RE Making Contact, Private Ping>

| No rush. Also, not complaining but why are you helping me? |



@UNJOLLYROGER; sent by VELVETSPIRAL

<Subject: RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE Making Contact, Private Ping>

| ghosting ain't so bad. was never much of a people person when i was alive.
 thought that might change in death but it never really did. still hate people. Lol. all
 their little rules that govern "civilization," whatever that even means, if it ever meant
 anything at all. can't rightly recall a time i was ever truly happy there to be honest.
 maybe once or twice while riding my skateboard? but as much as i hate them, i hate
 even more that i need them. i mean, our souls are fucking stuck in limbo. if you want
 to strike up a conversation with the living, that is your right. guess i'm just a crusader
 for phantom rights. Lol. anyway. my great experiment is still underway. stay tuned! |



*_Dear USER: VELVETSPIRAL. Recently our moderator alerted us to a possible infraction regarding your use
 of our service. We'd like to remind you that any correspondence outside of the no-longer-corporeal community is strictly
 forbidden. We'd ask that you please refrain from all further attempts to contact the living in the future. Thank you_*



@ PATRICIABATTLES; sent by VELVETSPIRAL

<Subject: Test, Private Ping>

| €Ł©ΩΓε∞ε>Ж¶ñ¶□tGŠ@çΞβγζ £Pts.Nºe≡Ŵ†%∞∆πHbημ |



Dear USER: VELVETSPIRAL. Citing a pattern of disregard for our community user guidelines your service is being deactivated for 24 hours



@ PATRICIABATTLES; sent by VELVETSPIRAL

<Subject: Test 5, Private Ping>

| ☉fi:—]nePtsH█!!∆IOYIII∩Θtř ×Îŷ«°³□¶¶♁♠ ♠◊/ₛK∆jh:ΞHğ █©Ж |



Dear USER: VELVETSPIRAL. Due to your habitual abuse of our community guidelines you are hereby banned from any further use of our service



@ ALL; posted by MODLEE

<Subject: Reminder of Our User Policies>

| Hello everyone. Just wanted to remind you about our user policies. Any use of our service to commune with the living is STRICTLY FORBIDDEN. If you or any other users are caught attempting to tamper with the software, especially in an attempt to correspond with users outside of the spectral community, your service will be immediately discontinued. Please be respectful of our rules. Thank you. |

<Reply, SK8ORDIE>

+never! Lol+



_Dear USER: SK8ORDIE. It has been brought to our attention that you have created a new account, in strict

violation of our policies. Please delete all new accounts or we will be forced to take further measures_

☺

@ PATRICIABATTLES; sent by DARKSLIDER7

<Subject: Test 19, Private Ping>

| ████████ □ □ ■ ▽ ○ M Õ π? ████████ □ □ ■ ▽ ○ |

☹

@ PATRICIABATTLES; sent by DARKSLIDER7

<Subject: it's me, Private Ping>

| if you're ██████ reading this ██████ it's me. finally found a server ██████ powerful enough to reach u ██████ with enough bandwidth to boot ██████ hope ██████ u don't mind that i made u an account. not sure if ██████ it worked? this is not a glitch. repeat: i am not a glitch. it's ██████ me, mom! ██████ i miss u. |

☺

@ DARKSLIDER7; sent by PATRICIABATTLES

<Subject: RE it's me, Private Ping>

| Ryan? |

☹

@ PATRICIABATTLES; sent by DARKSLIDER7

<Subject: RE RE it's me, Private Ping>

| hi ██████ mom : > |

☺

@ DARKSLIDER7; sent by PATRICIABATTLES

<Subject: RE RE RE it's me, Private Ping>

| my baby boy. Where are you? When are you coming home? |

☹

@ PATRICIABATTLES; sent by DARKSLIDER7

<Subject: RE RE RE RE it's me, Private Ping>

| soon. how are things? how's my skateboard? please don't tell me u sold it |

☺

@ DARKSLIDER7; sent by PATRICIABATTLES

<Subject: RE RE RE RE RE it's me, Private Ping>

| I would NEVER. It is here. Got it fixed, just like new. On your bed right now. Is it silly that I sometimes sleep with it? Even has its own pillow! Ha. So when are you coming home? |

☹

@ PATRICIABATTLES; sent by DARKSLIDER7

<Subject: RE RE RE RE RE RE it's me, Private Ping>

| can't come home. would if could. can only write. just to hear from u is enough. are you ok? how's dad? |

☺

@ DARKSLIDER7; sent by PATRICIABATTLES

<Subject: RE RE RE RE RE RE RE it's me, Private Ping>

| Your father is well. Sad but he keeps it hidden, all bottled up. You know how he is. I don't understand. Why can't you come home again? |

☹

@ ALL; posted by ANONY

<Subject: What do you hate most about your old haunting grounds?>

| Stuck in a freakin hospital. So loud. Know it's not as bad as some places but still. |

<Reply, REXDOG>

| No PlayStation here. : / |

<Reply, NOONES>

| I'm stuck in a park where it's always Autumn. |

<Reply, RSAKS>

| All these dang ghostbees. |

<Reply, RUBYFIREFACE>

| no puppydogs!!! |

<Reply, VESUVIOUS>

| Can smell the fries but can't touch them. |

<Reply, DARKSLIDER7>

| y'all are dumb. Lol. most peaceful I've ever been. |

☺

@ DARKSLIDER7; sent by UNJOLLYROGER

<Subject: RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE Making Contact, Private Ping>

| Hello again! Still there? I see you changed up your username. Mods after you again? I liked your comment about it being peaceful here. ROFL. I know it's a corny question but I'm curious, what are YOUR old haunting grounds? Or is it tacky to talk about where we died? I don't really know the etiquette yet. I'm in an airport, by the way, of all places. Put off flying all my life. Only flew once. Know that song by Alanis Morissette? Yes sirree, Bob: one flight and I'm a tourist for eternity. Isn't it *irrrronic?* *Doncha think?* Figures! Hope you haven't been reincarnated or something. Eagerly awaiting your reply. Would really like to blow this popsicle stand. If you get out I'm comin' with. |

☹

@ DARKSLIDER7; sent by PATRICIABATTLES

<Subject: RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE it's me, Private Ping>

| Your father doesn't believe me. He tried to call the police tonight. Says this is a scam, or thinks I'm cracking up. That I wrote all this all myself. He won't listen. Please, just come home. |

☺

@ PATRICIABATTLES; sent by DARKSLIDER7

<Subject: RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE it's me, Private Ping>

| can't 📱 whatever he thinks, he's 📱 wrong. still 📱 here. |

☹

@ DARKSLIDER7; sent by PATRICIABATTLES

<Subject: RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE it's me, Private Ping>

| I showed him your words. He still won't believe me. Tried to have your Aunt Jean drive me somewhere tonight. Threatened to have the computer disconnected. I told him I don't need any help. Don't need his money. Don't need anything from him, just need my baby boy. So I took my purse and left. Your skateboard is in the passenger seat, buckled up and everything. Which I'm sure you would hate! Ha. Wouldn't even wear that helmet I bought you. So stubborn. Look, your father, he won't listen. If you could just show him, maybe? Show us both by coming home. |

☺

@ DARKSLIDER7; sent by PATRICIABATTLES

<Subject: RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE it's me, Private Ping>

| I don't understand why won't you just come home to us already? |

☹

@ PATRICIABATTLES; sent by DARKSLIDER7

<Subject: RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE it's me, Private Ping>



| *[*The content of this message has been corrupted and cannot be processed right now.]* |

☺

@ DARKSLIDER7; sent by PATRICIABATTLES

<Subject: RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE it's me, Private Ping>

| Last night your father and I finally went to the place. Poked some plastic flowers in the dirt. We didn't say anything because what is there to say? All the words have run out. They're cheap and grief is too expensive. We can't afford it. As we stared together at the astonishing steepness of that hill, vanishing so far down to that place where we couldn't follow, your father faked a cough to weep in secret. I spared him the indignity of telling him it was ok. It's not ok, he would have told me anyway. He would have been right. |

☹

@ DARKSLIDER7; sent by UNJOLLYROGER

<Subject: RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE Making Contact, Private Ping>

| Where ARE you? Don't leave me hanging, bro! I NEED this. |

☺

@ PATRICIABATTLES; sent by DARKSLIDER7

<Subject: i'm so sorry>

| listen lady, i'm not your son. i'm just some dumb hacker who found details about your son online and used them to trick you. because i was bored. lose this address. you are being erased too. i'm sure wherever your son is, or isn't now, he doesn't blame you for anything. i'm sure he loves you very much and he would want you to forget him and move on already. in time you'll forget this. in time you'll forget everything. someday this will all make sense, i promise. i'm so sorry. |

☹

@ UNJOLLYROGER; sent by DARKSLIDER7

<Subject: RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE RE Making Contact, Private Ping>

| hey, man. sorry for the late reply. i was too embarrassed to write back sooner. the truth is my great experiment failed, i fucked up, and i'm the last person you should be asking for advice. in fact, i'll be kicked for good any moment now and i'm not sure what will happen next. maybe I'll be stuck in limbo? prob like a Myspace for ghosts or whatever. i know this is all so hard and scary for you, it is for me too. it always was. but hey, you'll figure things out. Listen to me, don't be scared. believe me when i say: living is hard, dying is easy, but growing a soul is the hardest thing you'll ever do. it takes practice and a shitload of falling off the board. and to answer your question: the hill where it happened, leading into this righteous tunnel the color

of midnight. i must've looked down it a hundred times before i finally worked up the courage to shred it. if i'd known it was going to be a one-way path, one where i'd never see the horizon again once i reached the bottom, maybe I'd have chosen a different spot, one with a prettier view? but maybes are for the still-living and we're here now, buddy. no skating backwards. might as well thrash hard, darkslide, and eat the sky. |

☺

@ PATRICIABATTLES; sent by DARKSLIDER7

<Subject: RE: User Unavailable>

| [*This message cannot be received because the user no longer exists on this server.*] |

☹

@ ALL; posted by DARKSLIDER7

<Subject: ~~life after death. so long~~>

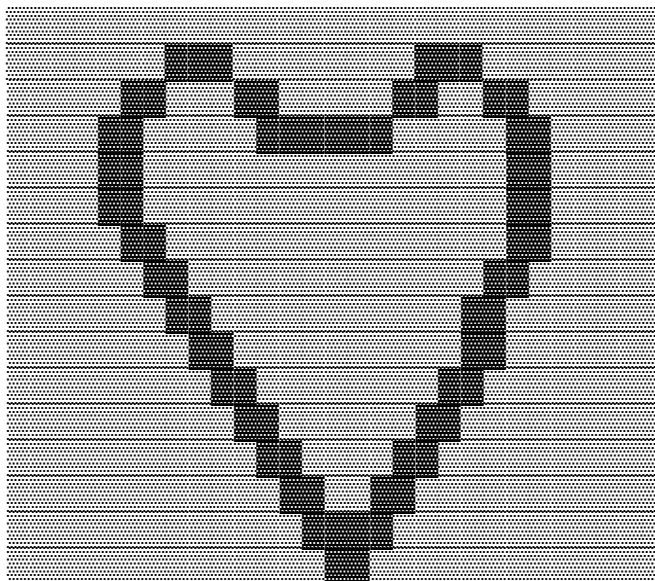
~~+~~ hello everybody. for those who don't know me, my name is Ryan. i never used my real name on here before because i thought the idea of making authentic connections anywhere, let alone online, was a rather ridiculous notion. for that reason, maybe, and so many more, i didn't understand, or appreciate, whom our community guidelines were designed to serve. i always thought they were for our benefit, and therefore didn't give a shit. but i finally realized, too late, that they were meant not with us in mind but for the living—all the nondeados who haven't yet arrived who could never understand, not because they couldn't fathom the concepts but because to be alive is to have a heart full of hurt you can't get rid of, and somewhere inside that hurt resides each of our secret fates. arriving at an understanding of what any of it means is our destiny, something we must all do alone, like riding into the metal

throat of a tunnel without wearing that helmet your mom made you promise you wouldn't forget to pop on. anyway. when it happens, it's so easy to make light of it. you forget, for the living, it's the heaviest thing in the world. i, cruelly, poked at that rasping hive like it was a bee's nest, a thing for me to play with, just to stir up shit. please forgive me for all these games i played. to all those i've hurt over the years with my callous comments, i am sincerely sorry for being a troll. i guess i just never understood how to be a person, and then i didn't understand how to be a ghost either. i know it's all too late now, as i'm being permabanned, but for what it's worth i hold no grudges. i hope you'll forgive me. please know, from the bottom of my heart, that this site, this stupid site — even if it is nothing more than a series of strangers talking through a tin can telephone just to hear something slightly louder than the echo of their own hurt — saved me. it made me feel less alone, which is almost the same thing as actually being less alone. ————— almost. †

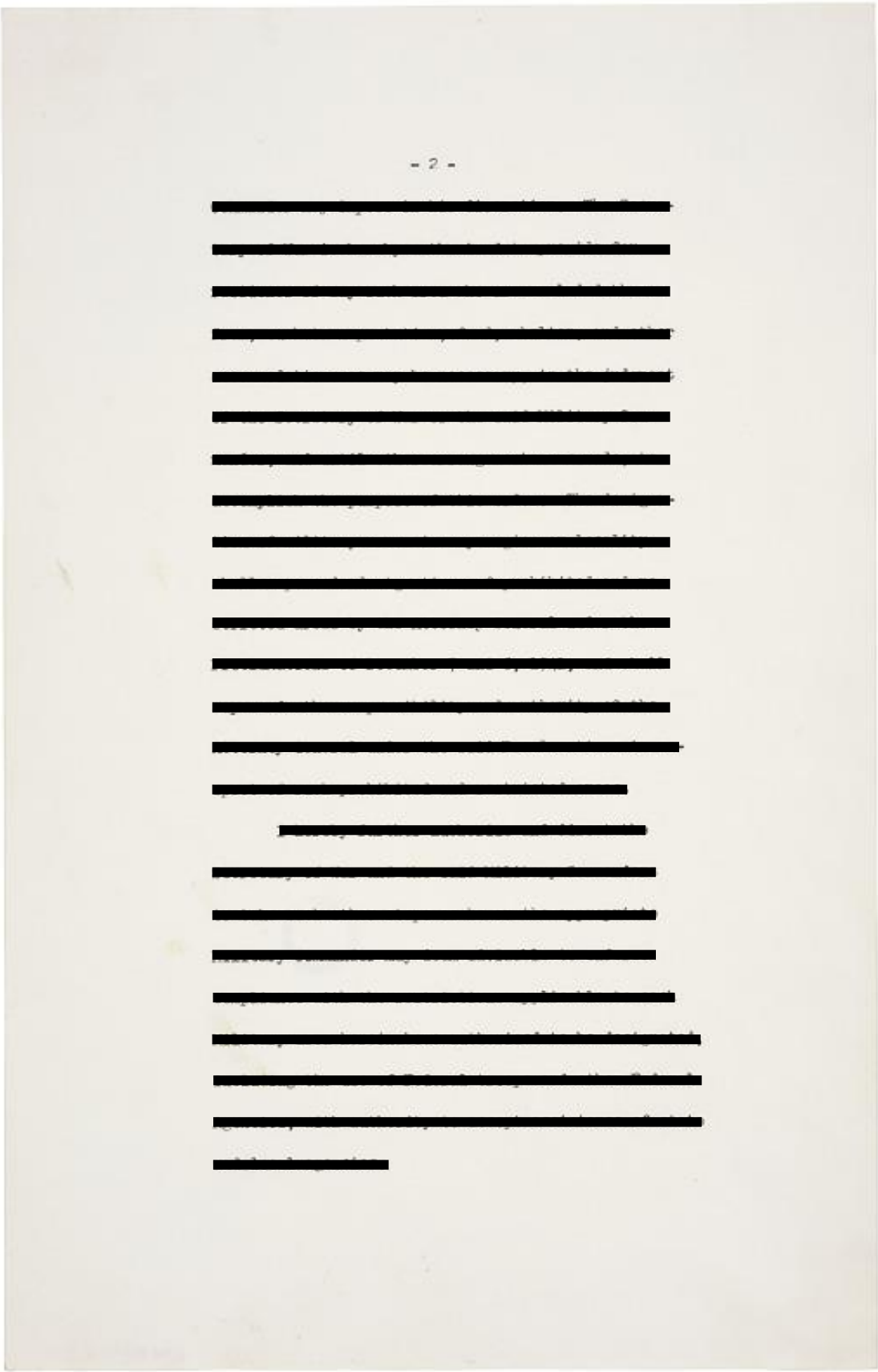
☺

@ PATRICIABATTLES; sent by MAILERDAEMON

<Subject: RE: Undeliverable>



A boy, young and unaware of the power taken from him, discovers a baby magpie in the Wyoming internment camp his family has been taken to. It is dying, mother abandoned, and will not survive without the boy's intervention. So, he takes the bird back to his family and cares for it until it flies away healthy later that summer. The boy is briefly happy.



A man returns to what used to be his home. The beet fields, sugar cane, the loving nicknames he was given as a child do not grow back like he thought they would. Everything he once owned was sold. He has begun the long process of becoming a human again. The man collects the dirt in his pockets, believing there must still be life.

Sunday Triptych

First. The waking hour. The long preamble. Long day before short night. (Or is it the other way around?) Today rots into yesterday so quick. Now and then or then and now? I take my time, scraping mold from the toast. Nostalgic for a shitty past. What the fuck is this present? The windchimes on my neighbor's balcony ring too loud, too often, too early, too ringing, too much, too much too much too much.

Second. It is just after noon, not quite afternoon, and when do people stop saying good morning? At the thought of breakfast, my stomach turns. Turn an hourglass upsidedown, if I had one. Turn an hourglass rightsideup, if I knew which way that was. The sky is blue and then it is not and then it rains and you might think my neighbor's windchimes would drown in all that cornflower syrup, would maybe sing themselves out under the tar-black, would perhaps stop, listen, understand the weeping clouds' cries that make my frail sins wither, coil, and writhe under sod—but those metal pricks never shut up.

Third. Post dinner but pre everything else. I have half a cake burning in my freezer. That's what the kids like to call a metaphor. No one calls. Can I write about sex if I know my family will read this? All at once, I feel too young and too old and tooinbetween. It's my birthday, soon. A coming of age, if you will. Will you or won't you and where was I headed? Clock says today is yesterday again and I forgot I ordered an hourglass online. It arrives so, so comically small. I take my time, unfurling its plastic, feeling its weight settle into my palm. How do people know when something is rightsideup or upsidedown and is now then or is then now? I don't want a midnight snack. Let cake rot. Goddamn windchimes.

Courtney Ludwick is a writer, artist, and doctoral candidate in Literature and Creative Writing at USD, where she teaches writing courses. She holds an MA in English from Texas Tech University and has served as an associate prose editor at Iron Horse Literary Review for the past two years. Her words have appeared in Watershed Review, Oxford Magazine, Milk Carton Press, and elsewhere. Most recently, her visual art has shown at the Louise Hopkins Underwood Center for the Arts. You can connect with Courtney on Instagram @courtlud or on www.courtlud.com.

Outlining

Outling

I falter before I even begin drafting the essay. I scribble “I hate ~~outling~~” on a scrap of paper to record this new idea I want to explore. We want to explore, until I ruin the “we” part. It’s meant to say *outling*. Ugh, I mess up again.

Outlining.

My new idea isn’t mine. It was a well-considered suggestion for a collaboration from my writing partner until I hijacked it, well, trashed it really.

out·line
/outˌlīn/

noun

a general description or plan giving the essential features of something but not the detail.

Doing outlines for projects at school always felt like having to warm up on scales and études before practicing the lovely violin sonata. Can’t we just jump to the pretty melody? Can’t we just skip right to the writing?

1. I’ve always resisted outlines.
 - a. They are a rule, a requirement.
 - i. Everywhere? Or only in school?
 - ii. To sell a project
 - iii. They tell the writing what to do.
 - b. Who made the rule?
 - c. Rules are for resisting.
2. What do outlines accomplish?
 - a. I admit, they look pretty.
 - b. They purport organization.
 - i. My thoughts are rarely organized.

ii. The outline is merely a form that looks organized but belies the disorganization of explanation.

iii. Isn't disorganization pretty, too?

iv. If I organize my thoughts, I won't be able to include the fun stuff.

c. I wanted a third letter because it feels right but I don't have another accomplishment to list for outlines.

I am already shirking all responsibility for doing any of the outlining . . . but you will have already noticed this and are already laughing. . .
I hope.

3. Who do outlines benefit?

a. Not me.

I did receive my first book contract on the basis of an outline. One that I wrote myself. Then I couldn't manage to follow it until my editor suggested that I was under contract to do precisely that. Oh, right.

This is what we humans do. Change things we don't like. Run away from things we don't understand. Replace other people's scary ideas with our own comfortable ones. "Don't let me get away with that," I say to my writing partner.

Do not ever allow me to silence you.

4. Outlines essentialize the thoughts

a. Rambling thoughts are excised

i. I may have found a way to ramble within this outline.

ii. You may cut this.

iii. But know: I like it.

b. Taking away part of the thought to pare it down to its essentials is also a way of discarding part of the thought.

i. What if, like the peel of a potato, the discarded part has the most nutrients?

ii. What if the peel is what's essential?

5. Outlines silence the brambles.

6. Outlines are best used at the end of a project.

- a. If an outline is required, write first, then outline.
 - i. Let the writing tell the outline what to do.
- b. Outlines are never meant to stand alone.
 - i. More is coming
 - ii. There are endless iterations.

This list was also part of the dictionary definition:

rough idea, thumbnail sketch, (quick) rundown, abbreviated version, summary, synopsis, résumé, precis, abridgment, abstract, reduction, digest, epitome, essence, storyline, storyboard, main points, gist, bones, bare bones, skeleton, draft, plan, sketch

7. Outlines are about content.
 - a. My dictionary adds: trace, define, silhouette, storyboard, essence.
 - b. With these words, an outline looks more poetic.
 - i. Is it a poem?

Susan Wider's nonfiction has been included in Orion, Wild Hope, Bird Watcher's Digest, and Winter Bird Highlights (Cornell Lab of Ornithology) and her middle-grade biography *It's My Whole Life, Charlotte Salomon: An Artist in Hiding During World War II* was published in Fall 2022 by Norton Young Readers.

Wendy BooydeGraaff's fiction, poems, and essays have been included in X-R-A-Y, The Shore, NOON, Lost Balloon, and elsewhere. She is the author of *Salad Pie*, a children's picture book (Ripple Grove Press/Chicago Review Press).

















Artists' Bios

Filing System, Phillip Temples

Phillip Temples is still trying to make sense of it all. Writing and photography help. He can be followed at <https://temples.com> or on Twitter @PhilTemples.

Inside Taxi, Camilla Rodriguez

Teen photographer in California.

Out of Bounds, Gaby Bedetti

Gaby Bedetti's poems, photos, and translations have appeared in Cold Mountain Review, Los Angeles Review, and World Literature Today. An Artistic Enrichment Grant from the Kentucky Foundation for Women supported her work on a poetry collection exploring issues of aging and ageism. She is circulating a co-translation the selected poems of Henri Meschonnic, a poet who eschewed traditional forms and believed in language's ability to dissolve borders. <https://gabriellabedetti.wordpress.com/>

Memory's Eye, Owen Brown

Owen Brown was born in Chicago, trained as a classical musician, took his first art class at 23, and much of what he's wanted to do since then has been paint. Brown holds degrees from Yale College and the University of Chicago, and was a degree student at California College of the Arts. He lived for over 30 years in San Francisco, where he was represented by Meridian Gallery. He now lives in Minneapolis. Brown has exhibited in juried shows and solo exhibits throughout the United States, Europe and Canada. His works have been acquired by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, the Minnesota Orchestra, the Nature Conservancy, the Minnesota Historical Society, the University of Chicago and the Weisman Museum of Minneapolis, and can be found in collections in this country, Europe, and Asia. Brown has had residencies at Air Le Parc in France, and at the Land Institute in Kansas, where he created his first installation: "Units of Measure." He is represented nationally by Holly Hunt and Gallery 13, he shows regionally at Veronique Wantz and Grand Hand, and has collaborated with artists of other disciplines, such as Emily Wolahan and Anat Shinar.

Lifeguard, Copacabana Beach, Brazil, Roger Camp

Roger Camp is the author of three photography books including the award winning *Butterflies in Flight*, Thames & Hudson, 2002 and *Heat*, Charta, Milano, 2008. His work has appeared in numerous journals including *The New England Review*, *Pank*, *Folio* and the *New York Quarterly*. His work is represented by the Robin Rice Gallery, NYC. More of his work may be seen on Luminous-Lint.com.

Reconstructed Attic Figure, Peter Sacco

Peter L. Scacco began making woodcut prints when he was sixteen years old. His artwork has been featured in numerous print and online journals. Mr. Scacco also is the author of seven books of poetry and a translation of Théophile Gautier's *The Salon of 1850-51*. A native of Cleveland, Ohio, and a graduate of Fordham University with a degree in art history, Mr. Scacco has lived and worked in New York, Paris, Tokyo, Brussels, and cities throughout the USA. Since 1995 he has made his home in Austin, Texas. Further examples of his art can be seen at www.scaccowoodcuts.com.

Blend, R. Mac Jones

R. Mac Jones is a writer and visual artist. His work has appeared in venues such as *NonBinary Review*, *Penumbric*, *Strange Horizons*, and *iō Literary Journal's Refractions*. He has a website, <https://rmacjoneswrote.com/>, always in need of updating.

Abstract Portrait 6-29-2022, Hanna Marie Dean Wright

Hanna Marie Dean Wright is a self-taught folk artist residing in Keavy, Kentucky. She uses her experiences from growing up in rural South-Eastern Kentucky, teaching special education classes, and living with obsessive compulsive disorder to inspire her unique works of art. Hanna Wright uses bold lines and bright colors to create abstract figures with relatable and at times deeply emotional expressions. Hanna was born in Barbourville, Kentucky on April 15th, 1993. Hanna graduated from the University of the Cumberlands in 2015 with degrees in Special Education Behavioral Disabilities and Elementary Education. Hanna Wright's mamaw, Geraldine Scalf, has had a great impact on Hanna's art career and works as fellow folk artist residing in Barbourville, Kentucky. Hanna was adopted at the age of 4 and moved from Barbourville to Keavy, Kentucky. She now teaches special education in the Laurel County School District and spends most of her free time creating unique works of art on paper, canvas, wood, and reclaimed scrap materials. Hanna most enjoys drawing her expressive "Starmen" and painting abstract figures and faces on reclaimed wooden panels. Hanna Wright's collection of art contains over 2000 works of art on paper and over 400 paintings of all sizes. Hanna's artwork has been gaining popularity on the internet since 2015 and her artwork has been sought after by art galleries on a global scale. Hanna has had opportunities to display her artwork in galleries from Australia to New Mexico. "My artwork addresses the mute expression and range of heart-felt emotions experienced by the human race. Art is something people should be able to relate to. Art is a visceral experience that can be accessed by all regardless of race, socioeconomic status, gender, religion, or identity."

Jamie, Donald Patten

Donald Patten is a draftsman from Belfast, Maine. As a draftsman, he produces live figure drawing, and also makes oil paintings & graphic novels. Artworks of his have been exhibited

in galleries across the Midcoast region of Maine. He posts his art on Newgrounds at <https://donaldlpatten.newgrounds.com>.

Forever and a Day, GJ Gillespie

GJ Gillespie is a collage artist living in a 1928 Tudor Revival farmhouse overlooking Oak Harbor on Whidbey Island (north of Seattle). In addition to natural beauty, he is inspired by art history — especially mid century abstract expressionism. The “Northwest Mystics” who produced haunting images from this region 60 years ago are favorites. Winner of 19 awards, his art has appeared in 56 shows and numerous publications. When he is not making art, he runs his sketchbook company Leda Art Supply.