

Serpentine

Magazine

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Serpentine Magazine



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

WHAT UP KIDS? IT'S YA BOY RA'CHAUN. THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF SERPENTINE MAGAZINE, THE PREMIER LITERATURE AND ART MAGAZINE OF THE COLLEGE OF STATEN ISLAND. THIS TIME AROUND WE GOT SOMETHING HOT AND FRESH FOR YOU GUYS. OUR FIRST POD CAST IS UP, CHECK IT OUT ON THE WEB AT SERPENTINEMAGAZINE.BLOGSPOT.COM AND PLEASE BELIEVE ME THAT WE WILL HAVE MORE FOR YOU HOT AND FRESH FO'REAL IN THE NEAR FUTURE. WE HOPE YOU CHECKED OUT THE SERPENTINE FLASH FICTION EVENT THAT TOOK PLACE ON APRIL 2, 2008 IN THE GREEN DOLPHIN LOUNGE. WE WORKED LONG AND HARD (THAT'S WHAT SHE SAID.) TO GET THIS INTO YOUR HANDS WE HOPE YOU ENJOY IT.

P.S. IF THIS LETTER OFFENDED ANYONE, I APOLOGIZE, I SUPPOSE WE DON'T HAVE THE SAME SENSE OF HUMOR.

PEACE/ LOVE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Ra' Chaun Rogers

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SHOWGIRL

BY
ALISON LANGLEIBEN

In this light I am bizarre.
My eye sockets glow.
This is my stratagem, my disguise.
They tell me the curtain is rising.
Here are my teeth that reflect the light,
Here are my bloody ballerina toes.
I am invisible beneath my glittering cloak.
I must be invisible now.

What are they looking for?
My guts?
I have hidden them carefully,
Tucked them gently beneath the skin.

They want to enter my head.
They want to chop it off,
The visceral plug to my soul.
They want to scalp me clean.

But my short golden hair is a helmet
And everyone loves a blonde.
There is a shadow sitting on me.
The stagehands are all touching me.

Do they know how much I cost?
I am auctioned off three times a day.
People love to see the bizarre,
To touch it, then scamper away.

My production is quite a scene.
How madly I always tap dance.
There is a monkey in the sixth act,
He is plotting to steal the show.

What a great number of visitors
Have come to watch me go.
The fourth act is me cutting my nails.
I say it's a metaphor for hara-kiri.

The audience loves a mad ride
And I give it to them for free.
They always seem to forget my fee.
But we have to give them a show.

The fifth act is what kills.
I do stand-up comedy, I magically evaporate
Till all that is left of me, is a hollowed out laugh
Sometimes I can't even see.

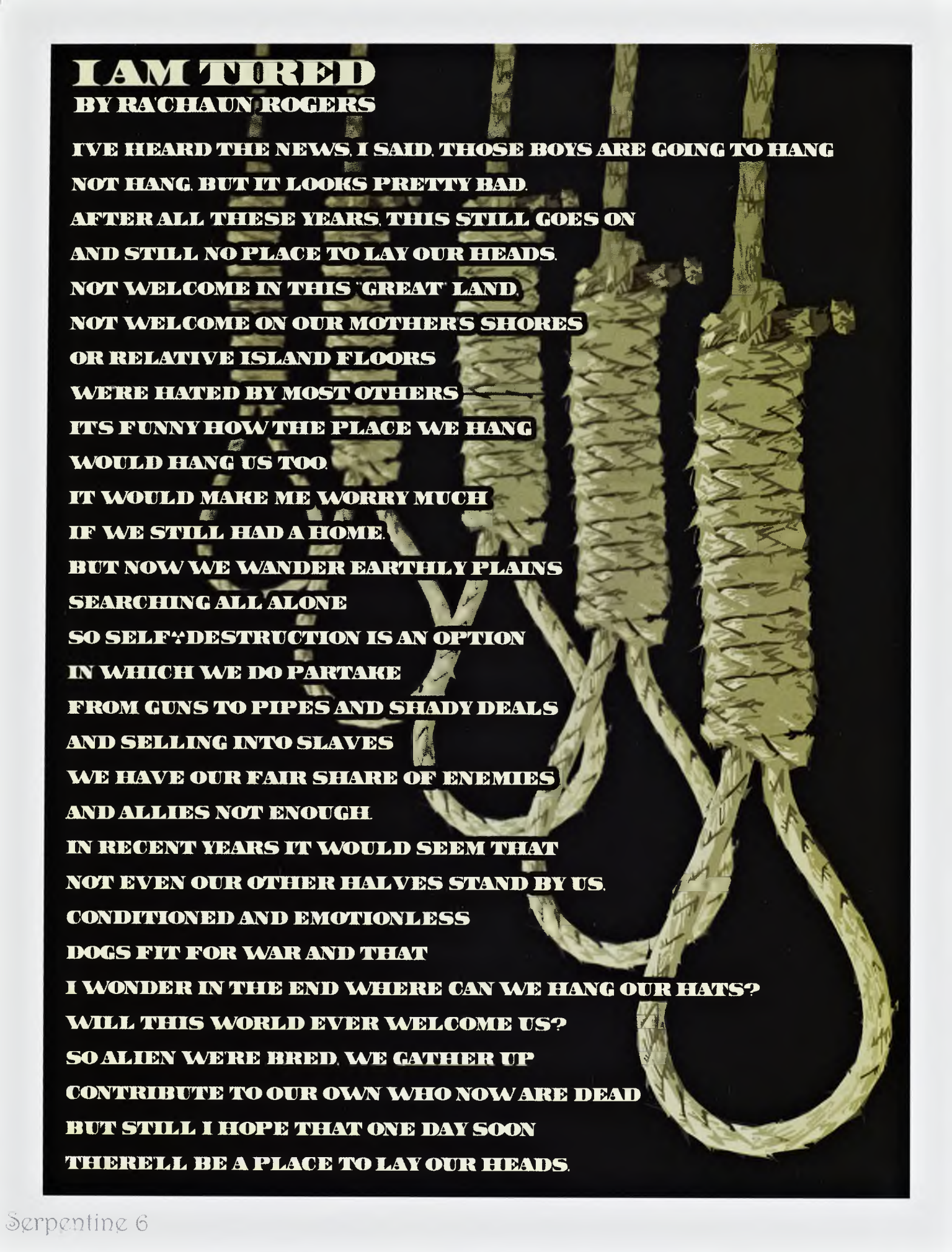
The sixth act and I'm somebody else-
The monkey, with my diamond edged voice.
He is wearing my glittering show-heels.
He is wearing my corset and top hat.

How they hee-haw at what I've become.
But this is always what they saw in me.
I am a traveling show thing.
I must belong in a zoo.

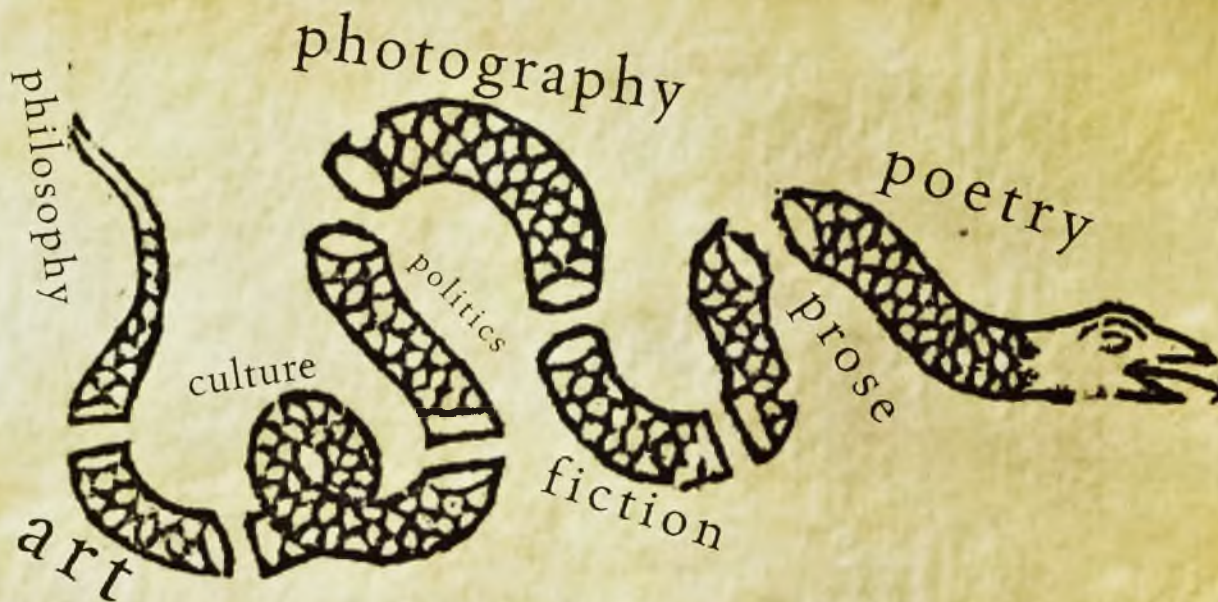
Now the curtain closes, the big "Oh my!"
Now I can escape this humbuggery!
But the manager is waiting for me.
But the audience is howling for an encore.

I AM TIRED

BY RACHAUN ROGERS



**I'VE HEARD THE NEWS, I SAID, THOSE BOYS ARE GOING TO HANG
NOT HANG, BUT IT LOOKS PRETTY BAD.
AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, THIS STILL GOES ON
AND STILL NO PLACE TO LAY OUR HEADS.
NOT WELCOME IN THIS "GREAT" LAND,
NOT WELCOME ON OUR MOTHERS SHORES
OR RELATIVE ISLAND FLOORS
WERE HATED BY MOST OTHERS
IT'S FUNNY HOW THE PLACE WE HANG
WOULD HANG US TOO.
IT WOULD MAKE ME WORRY MUCH
IF WE STILL HAD A HOME.
BUT NOW WE WANDER EARTHLY PLAINS
SEARCHING ALL ALONE
SO SELF-DESTRUCTION IS AN OPTION
IN WHICH WE DO PARTAKE
FROM GUNS TO PIPES AND SHADY DEALS
AND SELLING INTO SLAVES
WE HAVE OUR FAIR SHARE OF ENEMIES
AND ALLIES NOT ENOUGH
IN RECENT YEARS IT WOULD SEEM THAT
NOT EVEN OUR OTHER HALVES STAND BY US.
CONDITIONED AND EMOTIONLESS
DOGS FIT FOR WAR AND THAT
I WONDER IN THE END WHERE CAN WE HANG OUR HATS?
WILL THIS WORLD EVER WELCOME US?
SO ALIEN WERE BRED, WE GATHER UP
CONTRIBUTE TO OUR OWN WHO NOW ARE DEAD
BUT STILL I HOPE THAT ONE DAY SOON
THERE'LL BE A PLACE TO LAY OUR HEADS.**



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"STACEY'S FIFTH APPENDAGE"

By NANCY SMITH

I'M SICK AND TIRED OF BEING HELD AGAINST STACEY'S EAR. HER HANDS ARE SO FULL OF GERMS AND HER BREATH SMELLS LIKE A TOILET. I GAG ALL THE TIME FROM THIS. I ESPECIALLY HATE IT WHEN SHE TEXT MESSAGES HER FRIENDS. I HATE IT WHEN SHE PUSHES MY "BUTTONS" WITH THOSE PRISSY FRENCH MANICURED FINGERNAILS OF HERS. HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE POKED CONSTANTLY? HER VOICE IS SO LOUD; I END UP WITH AN EARACHE EVERYDAY. AND DON'T GET ME STARTED ON THE WAY SHE CARELESSLY TOSSES ME IN HER FENDI BAG FULL OF CRAP. SHE SWINGS HER BAG SO MUCH I GET SEASICK. WHEN SHE ARRIVES HOME, INSTEAD OF GENTLY LOWERING HER BAG ON HER BED, SHE SLAMS IT DOWN LIKE A WRESTLER. I HAVE THE BRUISES TO PROVE IT.

I KNOW ALL HER SECRETS. WHILE SHE GABS TO HER FRIENDS, I PASS ALONG THE INFORMATION TO MY OTHER COHORTS. BLACKMAIL IS SO CHIC NOWADAYS. REVENGE AGAINST STACEY HAS BEEN ON MY MIND LATELY. I'VE BEEN WEIGHING THE PROS AND CONS OF THIS. I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT I'LL DO. I WILL ATTACH MY TENTACLES TO HER EARDRUM. SHE WILL CRY TO HER MOM AND WE WILL BE RUSHED TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM. THE INTERN WILL EXAMINE HER AND IMMEDIATELY ORDER A CAT SCAN. AFTERWARDS, SHE WILL CONSULT WITH A SURGEON. THEY WILL DISCUSS THE OPTIONS WITH HER PARENTS. I'M SURE HER FOLKS WILL OPT FOR SURGERY. IN MY MIND'S EYE, I SEE STACEY SCREAMING HYSTERICALLY, "NO SURGERY! I LOVE MY FIFTH APPENDAGE SO MUCH THAT IT HAS FINALLY BECOME A PART OF ME."

I WILL REJOICE WHEN HER PARENTS INSIST ON THE SURGERY BECAUSE IT WILL FREE ME FROM STACEY'S OBSESSION. AFTER THE DECISION IS MADE, I CAN SEE HOW THE DOCTORS AND NURSES WILL PREP FOR THE SURGERY. IT IS A SOLEMN OCCASION, AS THE SURGEON HAS NEVER SEEN SUCH AN EXTREME CASE AS STACEY'S. STACEY IS WHEELED INTO THE OPERATING ROOM. SHE IS GIVEN ANESTHESIA AND TOLD TO COUNT BACKWARD FROM ONE HUNDRED. THE DOCTORS HAVE ALREADY DECIDED HOW THEY WILL MAKE THE INCISION. IF THEY CUT AN ARTERY OR VEIN SHE WILL BLEED TOO MUCH, AND IF THEY CUT TOO FAR INTO HER EARDRUM, SHE WILL LOSE HER HEARING. HER PARENTS NERVOUSLY PACE OUTSIDE THE OPERATING ROOM; THEY GLANCE CONTINUOUSLY AT THE CLOCK. THE SURGERY LASTS FOR ABOUT FIVE HOURS.

FINALLY, I CAN IMAGINE BOOR STACEY BEING WHEELED OUT AND INTO HER ROOM. THE ANESTHESIA WEARS OFF AND SHE ASKS HER PARENTS IF THE OPERATION IS A SUCCESS. HER PARENTS ARE OVERJOYED TO FINALLY HAVE HER FREE OF THE DANGEROUS FIFTH APPENDAGE. TEARS WILL SLOWLY COURSE DOWN THEIR CHEEKS AS THEY AFFIRM THE OPERATION'S SUCCESS. STACEY WILL ASK ABOUT HER MOST DEEPIED POSSESSION: 'MR.' HER PARENTS WILL EXPLAIN TO HER THAT THE SURGEON WAS SO FASCINATED BY THIS CASE THAT HE ASKED IF HE COULD KEEP ME. I NOW RESIDE IN AN ALCOHOL FILLED JAR. I AM GERM FREE AND REST ON TOP OF THE SURGEON'S DESK. I WILL HAVE MY FIFTEEN MINUTES OF FAME AND STACEY WILL BE FOREVER DISCONNECTED FROM ME.

Summertime and the Livin' is Easy

By: NSRB

I can finally see myself now, and at last, I can see my companion. But coming to see was not so easy. Too much time had been spent sifting through imperfections, mistakes, and depending on someone, or something, to consistently reassure me that "everything will be okay." Because of this, 'happiness' tends to run out, like toilet paper, and running to the store to buy more becomes an everlasting goal. Such dependence jeopardizes the ability to truly recognize and appreciate individuals for who they actually are.

One summer on a sleepless night, I phoned my new neighbor and pal to keep me company until I got sleepy. It was uncharacteristic of me to trouble someone I had known only for a few weeks at such a late hour. Luckily for me, he was still awake. I was tired and weary, but I could not sleep. Insomnia... a life-long problem I had never fully resolved; nor had I accepted sleeping pills as a solution. We decided to go for a walk and wandered into the woods behind the dorms on the other side of our isolated college campus. The multitude of lamplights throughout the campus was blinding at this time of night, and although there was nobody around, the light made me feel exposed and vulnerable.

Squish... squish. Crunch... crunch...crunch... were the gentle sounds my feet made as they compressed the earth beneath, then broke and shattered the dead leaves and fallen twigs, step by step. Thump. Crunch, crunch. Squish, squish.

"Are you okay?" asked my

tall, slender-but strong-companion, with a gentle face, and whom I could not see. He stretched out his arm, "Do you need to hold my hand?"

"No, thanks," I replied, "I need to teach my eyes how to see in the dark." Thump...crunch, crunch, squish, squish. "I'm okay! Keep walking I can follow." I quickened my pace in an attempt to disguise my inelegance. I was afraid of the dark, yet I did not turn back.

I had always wanted an older brother--- someone to protect me, to guide me, to teach me, to introduce me to cool, fun people I'd typically be too shy to approach, and to motivate me, so that I did not have to do these things myself. He would be an archetypical role model: handsome, strong, keen, benevolent, patient and would not pose as a competitive threat which an older sister would most likely do. I would strive to become successful so that he would be proud of me. However, circumstances deemed me to be a first-born, and for a decade, I was an only child. Being the first-born meant being the first to test the water. It meant taking the first bite of a completely foreign dish and deciding whether ordering it was a good choice, or a huge mistake. It meant setting a standard. Taking these risks instilled such fright, but perhaps it is, in fact, "our light, not out darkness that frightens us."

If my friend had not accompanied me, I still would have taken a walk around campus, but the thought of walking through the woods would have even crossed

my mind. I feared getting attacked, lost, left behind alone, beaten up or that probably no one would notice that I had been missing. I did not know my neighbor too well, but I knew that I wanted to know and to trust him. All I understand of him was that he was a few years older, a PH.D student, a linguistics teaching assistant, a Japanese tutor, and a computer and video game nerd, was toned and fit, and had a girlfriend. What I derived from these facts was that he was wise, diligent, patient, perceptive, confident, and caring. I assumed these characteristics about him, although I had not really observed his true nature to prove whether my assumptions were correct, or if I had only assigned these traits to him because that was how I wanted to (needed to) see him. I was afraid of asking questions, and mistook my assumptions for belief, even though I knew no matter how often I question the truth, the answer will always be the same.

Squish... squish... thump. I sighed, "Mud. When did it rain? Yuck. I was not paying enough attention to where I was stepping and was concentrating on where my neighbor was in front of me. I was already shackled by my dependence, and I even got a slight pang of anger towards him for not warning me of softer ground. Scrape... crunch... crunch. It was so dark that I could no longer see my guide. Vertigo had hit me.

The mind began to ask questions: What was I doing? I could not believe that I was venturing through nature's blackout on unfamiliar terrain without a working cell phone, and with a stranger, nonetheless! Who was my companion, anyway? What kind of person was I to trust someone I barely knew to take me into the woods after mid-

night? I became lost and sequestered within my own thoughts so that I no longer knew who I was, and because of this, there was no way for me to really know or trust my neighbor... or anyone. I could only assume identities and assign only the traits that I wanted instead of actually paying attention to the facts of the current reality.

Since my neighbor had come out to keep me company on this sleepless night in a lonely town, I already expected him to do everything else with me, for me, even though he may not really want that. I expected him to have identical interests; to see the movies that I wanted to see, to listen and enjoy the music that I would want and to be my companion at social gatherings because he struck me as such a people person. Hence, I could meet people through his social efforts. Likewise, everything that he did I would assume into my own identity and I would act the way I assumed would make him like me most. If he did not comply with my standards or expectations, I would become disappointed, hurt, betrayed and practically fire him from the position of being my best friend. But he wasn't even my best friend, yet. He was just my neighbor-friend. Truly being able to see at all really vexed me at this point.

I had to close my eyes for a few minutes and refocus. It was so dark that they had felt like they had been closed, anyway. Instead, I willed myself to touch, not just with my hands, but with all my senses. How acute the human sense of touch can be! I was able to feel infinite spatial dimensions. Every now and then, there was a slight breeze that brushed the bangs from my eyes and hit me like an external adrenaline rush. As

Long as I kept track of my hair after each breeze, it became easy to figure out from where and when I came. The fresh air entered my nostrils, filled my lungs and replaced all the New York City smog that crept in over all these years. I did not need my inhaler. A wonderful perfume complimented the night, comprised of birch, tulip, red oak, white oak, flowering dogwood, and beech. From the distance, and up close, I heard little concertos from little green string quartets and crisp operettas sung by winged creatures of gold, blush, and red- I could not see these colors, but I knew that they were so. The bass came from toads, percussion a la frogs. Our footsteps hymned an avant-garde melody. The black monotony of my untrained perception was no longer, for my ability to color nature had at last disinterred from within me.

I even forgot I was walking. It was a pleasant surprise, then, when we stumbled upon an open circular field fenced in by tall trees. This I was able to see, for the brilliant white light of the moon was no longer obstructed. We were in an open field. My mind muted the sounds, but I could see the music. A star waltzed from Pegasus to Aquarius, and another from Scorpio to Orion. My eyes had adjusted and no longer ached from straining. When I saw myself, I noticed that I too was full of color. I was wearing a yellow and red sweater with green and purple pajama pants. Albeit, I could not be mistaken for one of the plants or the animals because of my distinct physical appearance, still I felt harmonized with my surroundings. It was no longer me and everything else. I was one individual part of the whole, and contributed to visual and auditory

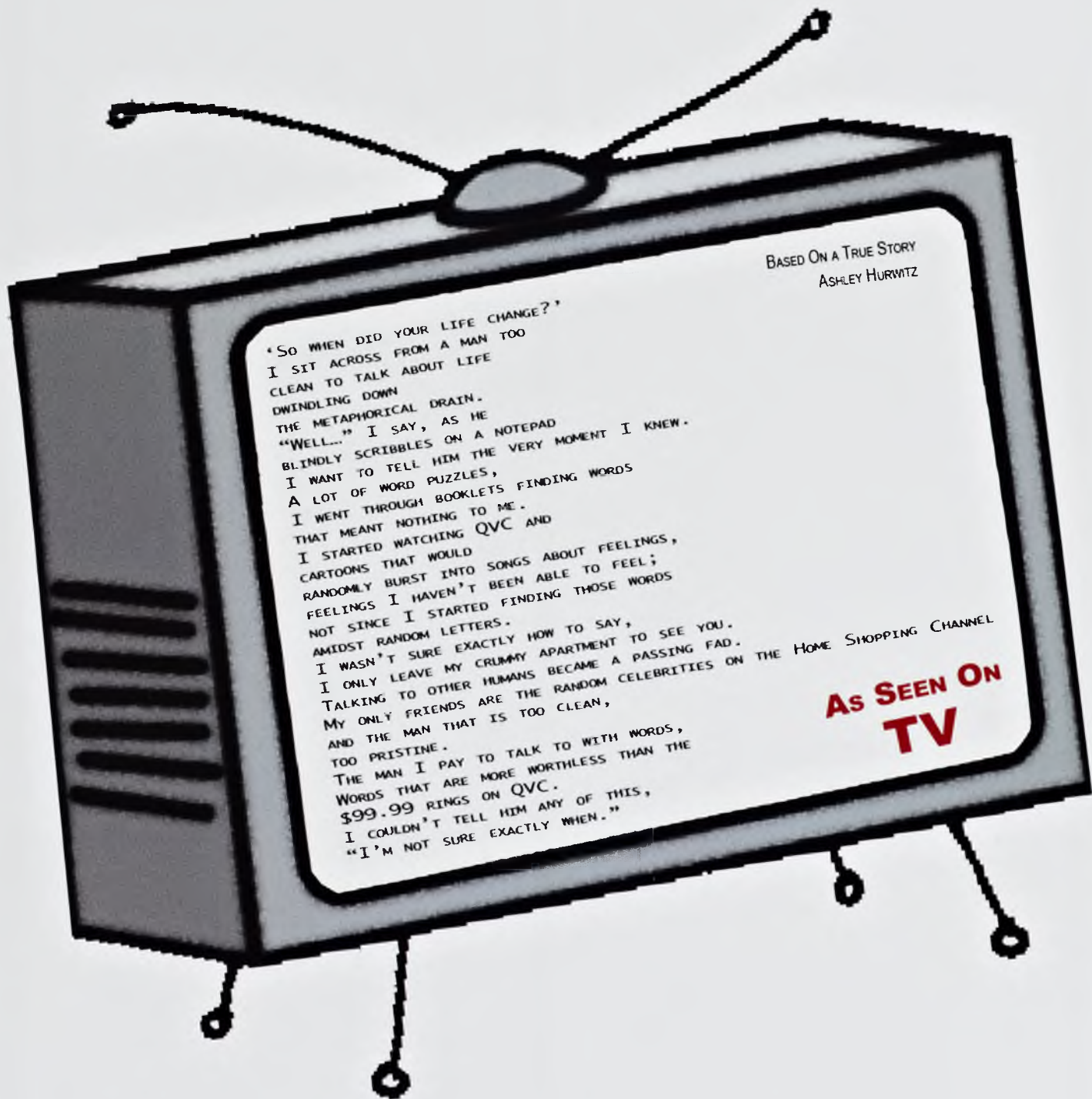
symphony of that night.

Beside me, my neighbor had on a blue sweatshirt and black pants. He caught me trying to observe every detail about him and looked at me warmheartedly, and with a gentle smile.

"I don't want you to get lost going home," he said, "so just let me know when you are ready and I'll walk you over."

Several months later, my neighbor and I had encountered the greatest joys of each other's company, friendship, and love, but not without just as many fierce squabbles. The truth was older brother not necessarily super-heroes. They are not always selfless and protective. Sometimes, they even ditch you to hang out with their friends or refuse to play with you. They say means things intentionally, or not, and there is always an exchange of annoyance between siblings, regardless of gender, age, or birth order. If an older brother is human, like me, then why depend on someone whose structure of potential for achievement, and downfall, is the same as my own? The true hero is one's own individual self, and the heroic action that follows suit is the appreciation and love for another human being, thus fostering a true connection between individuals and cultivating a relationship in which the good in each other is mutually brought out further.

It was through our actions during that midsummer's night, and concurrently still, that I was able to spontaneously realize our true nature and discover that, although it is susceptible to forgetting its true nature and focusing instead on the setbacks mistakes may ascertain, humankind is already lacking



I SUPPOSE NOT

"Brad's at it again," Graham says nonchalantly.

Deacon nodded somberly, watching with only a minute amount of pity for this small ninth grade girl Brad Summers was bullying out in the courtyard. Apparently Summers didn't get the memo that bullying was for elementary children, not seniors on the cusp of graduating.

"You probably want t' help her."

"Nah man, your apathy's been rubbing way hard on me. We can turn him in before the period ends."

Lunchtime was supposed to be relaxing, not frayed on the edges with some dumb legal adult pushing around a tiny freshman for her wallet and cell phone. "She'll grow up to be a chipped cog anyway. It's not worth it."

Graham shook his head and settled against the picnic table's top. "So damn pessimistic."

As if he hadn't said the same thing for the last couple of years, once he learned there was a word that covered some of Deacon's personality traits. Deacon didn't mind. Rather, he didn't care. Graham could call him anything he wanted, but it didn't infringe on their relationship. The same went for Ebb, but she was a girl; anything heated she'd say, she would mean, until either Deacon made a sidelong apology or Ebb apologized herself. What a waste of energy.

They weren't alone in the upper side of the parking lot. There was always that one group of friends who sat on the grass under the hallway windows, whose stray

conversations got rather loud on occasion. Deacon often scoffed at their trivial matters: who was dating whom, how hot was that actor or actress, or,

"Danny, just ask her out already!" Ugly gossip of a shallow life. Just more wasted energy. They couldn't see down the hill like Deacon could, from his perch atop the metal fence-pole, where his view of Summers was obscured only by a couple of leafy branches from old and young trees growing up the slope. But only if he turned his head; Graham had to twist and prop himself on his arms to see, which Graham wasn't bothered to do for long.

Deacon fiddled with the spork from his tray, idly bending it with his teeth in a mindless exercise simultaneous with his sky gazing. They had twenty minutes left until their classes started again, German for Graham and Algebra for Deacon, though if Graham were serious, they'd be leaving five minutes before to inform the seniors' AP that Summers was roughing up kids again. Deacon's good deed for the week, as Graham might say, which was very unsporting; like Graham had any room to talk. Graham's highly obnoxious do-gooder persona had been washed away in middle school, thanks to Deacon, but that year apart, as Deacon excelled ahead to ninth grade while Graham marched forth to eighth, had balanced Deacon's indirect influence and his naturally positive character.

It was just one more cog Deacon could fix in this horrible machine.

"Dee?"

"What?"

"Are you ever gonna fall in love?"

Deacon exhaled and tossed the spork into the metal trashcan; his tray would follow soon. This was a frequent topic, mostly stemmed by Deacon's 'ranting' (Graham called it "venting as passively as possible") over his parents constant badgering of him to get a nice girlfriend. Graham liked to laugh at it and wonder who were really the stranger ones: Deacon or his parents. Deacon found it aggravating and several times expressed his desire to castrate himself to end the issue. Ebb hadn't really liked that idea, when she heard it.

"Wouldn't it hurt?" she had asked, and Deacon, in turn, had waved the notion aside.

"All pain goes away in time. I'd give this type a couple weeks."

"Maybe," was his answer, like always.

"I'm telling you, the chances of me finding a girl who I can actually tolerate are depressingly low." He looked down at Graham and smiled ruefully.

"C'mon, you know me. How many girls do you think could see me and respect my thoughts on sex and all that bull-crap, eh?"

"I hear some girls don't mind weird guys."

Deacon scoffed.

"So why don't you have one yet?"

Graham stared at him up over the rim of his wire glasses, pointedly say nothing, least of all incriminating. Deacon's habits included poking holes in logic and reason, something Graham had found himself the victim of. His abstinence pleased Deacon; cogs should-

n't always have to defend themselves, especially over something as trivial as relationships. Graham was learning, willingly learning.

"-Okay, I'm going, I'm going!"

The loud junior got up and stalked inside, and after a moment his giggling girlfriends and snickering guy friends all jumped up to follow. Deacon rolled his eyes. Idiots. He could tell what just happened: they'd all been bugging the loud one to ask out some sophomore and he finally cracked. It was disgusting and very much none of their business, but "friends" are apparently entitled to dig their claws into your personal life like harpies. What was the point of interjecting yourself into someone else's problems when it came to biology?

Their malleability was gone; people like them conformed to the bleak standard of repetitive motion and dull thoughts. At least he could save Graham and Ebb from the dreadful fate, to expand their minds with more expressive and outward thinking. They would see the bigger picture even if it killed Deacon. These were his friends, the two who trusted him with undiluted information. After school, he'd have to remind them of that. He was, after all, their teacher.

He sensed Graham shift about.

"Dee."

"Mm?" Deacon gave the door the juniors disappeared into one last ounce of a baleful glare before giving Graham his entire attention. Graham still had that pointed look, maybe to hide pensive or decisive thoughts. "What's on your mind?"

"You really see people as all

one body, right?"

"Always have."

"And you still don't hold another person's preferences against them?"

"More or less; you know there are exceptions." Deacon frowned.

"Why?"

"Dee, my parents moving to Vermont in August."

Geniuses in fiction never behave normally. Nothing was ever a shock, or a blow to the ego. They acted like everything had been handed to them in advance, with no hint of surprise or being startled by an incredible revelation being put into their hands, big news that fizzled under two words: I know. Deacon wasn't fictional, and he had every right to say,

"What?"

Graham thinned his mouth.

"I know I should have told you sooner--"

"You should've!" This... changed too much. It was May; there was no time to prepare--

"How long have you known?"

"They started making plans in March." Graham was flush.

"That's not all I wanted to tell you though."

"This part better be good news!" It was like ice in his heart. Lose Graham? The thought was a painful strike to the chest. Deacon had the sudden, overpowering urge to grab both Graham and Ebb and run to the edge of the world. All Deacon's hard and subtle work on Graham would be washed away on the tide of social reconfiguration. His thoughts would regress to the point of being just another urban vegetable; he'd be refashioned and fit back into the machine as the same cog everyone else was.

Graham'll be utterly--

...touch...

Thoughts of Deacon didn't usually cut themselves off like that, but he'd never really had that particular kind of moment to reference against. So he stared blankly, dumbfounded in so many ways because he had concluded and accepted that there was no place for him in the neck of the woods, largely due to having never felt attraction but also in no way helped by the pressure of his parents. But he'd never thought about it in reverse.

"...I'm going to report Brad now," Graham murmured, without a shred of eye contact, and was already walking away from the scene of his crime before Deacon could reign in any sort of input on what just happened. His fingers tickled his cheek cautiously. Deacon couldn't fool himself into thinking that it wasn't real. He was all about the reality, the false as much as the true. But that... that was new, a footnote to pour over, a foreign reality... a simple little kiss on the cheek.

Graham was moving away in three and a half months. Graham might like-- like him. It was like sabotage to his system.

He sat there listlessly until the period bell rang.

**WRITTEN BY:
JANUARY KAYSER**

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The propellers began to spin and the sound of rushing wind was everywhere. The plane began to shake. Overtaken by fear, I held onto the arms of the chair. Five thousand feet in the air and I thought, God, please don't let this plane crash. Please protect this plane so we will not die. In the air, I was still overwhelmed by apprehension. My mom nudged me, "Esther, go and look out the window."

"Wow! This is so cool," came out of my mouth as I glanced at the world below me. I went back to my seat feeling peace. I was anxious and excited at the new world that awaited me.

I landed on American soil July 3, 1998, a day I would never forget. In the cab on the way to our apartment, I looked up at the square brick house and thought, how strange. I couldn't believe my eyes; I had never seen such a small apartment in my life. Could five people live in one room? Yes, we were all going to share one bed, three people at the bedpost and the other two at the end of the bed. After placing our bags in our room, we set out to find dinner. Along the clean street, the people looked and sounded different. Walking along, my sister asked, "Mommy, where are we going?" My mother just shrugged her shoulders. At an intersection, my sister and I stood there and gazed at the machine with lights, like it was gold. What was most amazing about the signal was it told you when to walk and not walk.

I asked my mom, "Mommy, do they have crossing signals in Nigeria?"

She responded, "Yes, they just don't work."

Still following our mom, my sister called out, "Mommy, look, a white man!"

My mom turned to her, "Toxie, keep quiet, that was rude."

In my head I was thinking, *Wow a real white man, I'm next to a real white man. He kinda looks like Bruce Willis.* After the man walked by, my mom said, "Now he is probably

thinking what kind of bush people are these?" We all started laughing, I was so happy. We finally stopped in front of a dingy stand that had a small store behind it. My mom looked inside and ordered something.

"Mommy, what are you doing?" to which she replied, "Ordering Chinese food."

"They have Chinese food in America?"

My mom, looking very tired, said,

"You'd be surprised."

Walking home, the smell of the food was tantalizing. I couldn't wait to get home and eat. My mom served the food and I thought, what is this? My two younger sisters

said, "Just eat the food, it won't hurt you." Seeing everyone eat with pleasure pushed me to try it. The food was so good.

"Mommy, what is this?" I asked.

"Pork fried rice with BBQ ribs, mixed vegetables, and white rice."

"What are these things in the packet?"

"The yellow one is duck sauce, the black one is soy sauce and the red one is hot sauce."

"Hot sauce!" shouted one of my sisters.

"It's like fake pepper," my mom replied.

"Only in America," I blurted out. "Is this duck sauce made from real duck?"

My mom just shrugged her shoulders.

"Ahyamha!" yelled my sister.

We all decided that we would not eat the sauce made from duck. After dinner, we all went to bed, tired from our long trip.

I woke up not knowing where I was until I remembered. I looked outside and it was still evening. I kept thinking how great this country was, but I missed my dad, my brothers, my sister, my aunts and uncle and my best friend. I did not want to be in America. I wanted to go home where I knew everyone and everything. I said, "God, please let it get better, I know today was fun but I miss my home." Those small words gave me the strength to get through the night. I felt that everything would be alright. It was a good day and feeling better, I went to sleep.

"A Good Day"

By Esther Akinwumni

"THE ABYSMAL MAN"

BY: DARREN WEBER

MAN ISN'T JUST A BEARD, OR A DEEP VOICE. HE ISN'T INDECISIVE AND HE DOESN'T HAVE A WINTER BUSH LONG-UNTRIMMED. HE IS BOLD AND EXPERIENCED WITH A WILL FOR FULFILLING AMBITION AND A SENSE OF OBLIGATION — TO THE LOVE OF HIS SUBJECTS AND HIS HEART'S DESIRES. HE'S ALWAYS HUNGRY FOR MORE AND IS YEARNING FOR THAT NEXT HUGE LEAP. HE'S DETERMINED AND HE CANNOT GO BACK TO CARELESSNESS.

WHAT MISCONCEPTIONS LIE OUT IN THERE IN THE WILDERNESS THAT WE CALL A JOURNEY TO MANHOOD? KIDS USUALLY AREN'T READY FOR SUCH A TREK, MOST MEN RARELY ARE THEMSELVES. A CHILD WAKES UP TO CAP'N CRUNCH AND KEEPS A FILTHY, UNKEMPT ROOM INSIDE A HOUSE PAID FOR BY A WORKING PARENT OR GOVERNMENT-FUNDED CHEESE. A MAN WAKES UP TO TASKS, WHETHER IT BE A GOOD BOWL OF THAT SAME CEREAL, FOLLOWED BY A SHAVE AND PERPETUALLY SITTING IN BUMPER TO BUMPER TRAFFIC, OR A DAY OF JOB-HUNTING WITH A SIDE OF VIDEO GAMES USED TO DROWN OUT THE MISERABLE FAILURE CAUSED FROM SAID SEARCH.

PEOPLE TEND TO SUMMARIZE MANHOOD AS A SCHOOL-BOUND, PUBIC HAIR-SPROUTING, FACIAL HAIR-TRIMMING, AND VOICE-DEEPENING HARDSHIPS RANGING FROM PUBESCENT YEARS TO THE DEMISE OF TEENAGE ONES. RUDE AWAKENING CAN OCCUR DAILY IN THE LIFE OF A CHILD OR MAN—ONLY THOSE WHO DIFFER WITH RESPECTS TO CONSEQUENCES GRANTED FOR DECISIONS MADE. CHILDREN MAY EXEMPLIFY BOLDNESS, FUELING COURAGE TO BECOME DARING AND ADVENTUROUS INDIVIDUALS, BUT THESE IMAGINATIVE, BOUNDLESS POTENTIALS MAY ALSO CAUSE WET PANTS. OUTCOMES LIKE THESE SELDOM PROVE FRUITFUL FOR CHILDREN FOR THEY LACK A SENSE OF MATURITY TO GUIDE THEM TOWARDS LIFE'S NECESSITIES.

A CHILD IS HUNGRY AT 7 P.M., 3 P.M., 8 P.M. AND EVEN 11 P.M.. A HARD-WORKING BLUE OR WHITE COLLAR MAN IS ONLY ABLE TO SATISFY UNRELENTING HUNGER AT 7 A.M. AND 5 P.M.. THE FAMOUS "FIVE O' CLOCK SHADOW" INDICATES THE OBVIOUS NEED TO SHAVE AT THE CONCLUSION OF A MAN'S TYPICAL WORKDAY, IT ALSO FORESHADOWS THE FUTURE DEMISE OF THE CHILD'S CAREFREE, NON-CIRCUMSTANTIAL AND RIPE MIND. THE SHADOW FOLLOWS THE CHILD'S EVERY MOVE, REMINDING HIM OF MANHOOD EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.

A MAN NEEDS STABILITY TO STAY AFLOAT;
A CHILD NEEDS TO STAY AFLOAT TO BE A MAN.

"UNTITLED."

By YANA LEVITSKAYA

HE SHOWED HER.
HE HELPED HER.
HE CHANGED HER.

SHE BECAME THE WOMAN
HE COULDN'T CONTROL.

IF HE TRIED
IT WOULD BACKFIRE.

NOW SHE IS IN CONTROL.
SHE WILL SHOW HIM.
SHE WILL HELP HIM.

AND SHE WILL DEFINITELY CHANGE HIM.

SEPTEMBER 20, 2005

HOW COULD YOU?
USE MY OWN WEAPON
AGAINST ME?

I WAS THE ONE
WHO SEDUCED YOU.
THE ONE
WHO PULLED YOU INTO THIS GAME
WE PLAY.

BUT IT ALL BACKFIRED
AND YOU SEDUCED ME
INTO DOING
WHAT YOU DESIRED OF ME.

WAS IT WORTH IT?
DID IT MEAN ANYTHING?
HOW CAN I TRUST
YOU WILL COME BACK?

I KNOW YOU HAVEN'T HAD ENOUGH

SHE SITS IN THE DARK
AND SHE WONDERS
HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

LOVE DRIVES YOU TO MADNESS
YOUR HEART CONTROLS YOUR MIND
THAT IS WHAT LED HER TO THIS CONCLUSION

SHE GAVE IT ALL UP TO HIM
THE ONE THAT SHE THOUGHT SHE LOVED
BUT THEN REALIZED

HER SITUATION
OR RATHER

DEEP FIXATION
SO DEEP THAT IT COMES PRETTY CLOSE
JUST A FEW STEPS FROM LOVE

TRUST IS ONE OF THE FEW
BUT SHE TRUSTED HIM
ENOUGH TO GO THIS FAR

SHE GAVE INTO TEMPTATION
SHE GAVE INTO SEDUCTION
SHE GAVE INTO HIM
AND SHE LOST HER PRIDE.

YET SHE GAINED MORE
THAN SHE LOST.

SHE TOOK A STEP CLOSER
TO HER FUTURE

SHE MATURED
SHE BEGAN TO SEE CLEARER
THAN BEFORE
SHE COULD FINALLY SEE HERSELF
IN THE LIGHT
HER TRUE SELF WOULD FOREVER SHOW
AND SHE OWED THAT TO HIM.

"Mask Transparency"

Poem by Evan Perez

"I (Eye)" Art by Anthony DePrimo

All things that was once so
simple,
Slowly start to become hard to
understand.
A path that was once easy to find,
Due to its clear
waters,
Yet dark setting,
Of swaying
branches,
Of the willow
trees,
Are now being
covered by that,
Of falling cherry
blossoms leaves,
That covers this
once clear body
of water.
Floating on top,
Watching grey
clouds,
Pass by.
Life feels so
agonizing,
Never knowing
what it is,
To be alive,
Till only know
what it means when you are close
to dead.
Hide yourself through these masks,
Thinking you can live without
knowing the truth,
And go by each minuscule minute,
Changing and rearranging,



Your personality,
To fit in with those people you call
friends.

I didn't need to wear this mask,
I chose to wear it,
Through my own
free will.

A mask to hide
those feelings,
I thought I
shouldn't have,
To walk a lonely
path,

For I chose to
learn what it
means to suffer
for a cause.

Yet this mask,
One that is embed-
ded itself into my
skull,

Is starting to
break,

And has started
to fade away,

Slowly revealing a
facial expression,
That is uncommon
these days.

A single tear running,

With a smile on my face,

But with sadness within these
eyes,

What am I now,

When I don't have a mask to fall
back on anymore?

A Letter from the Damned

I lived a life like any man. I lived, I loved, and like all, I died. But, I lived a wicked life, a life devoid of what many take for granted. I may have loved, but I never felt love nor had it returned. I was a festering wound laid bare for all to see.

I was a mean miser of a human being without a single redeemable feature. As I grew older, I only grew meaner. At first I hated my loneliness, but soon I embraced it but I still hated it; I despised it and it made my heart turn black. And so I delved deeper into my seclusion.

I started to lash out at those around me. But even around my closest friends, I felt alone and hate brewed and simmered deep within my heart and I treated them in way they did not deserve. I lashed out at people for the smallest reasons. I could barely keep my seething ball of rage that I had transformed in to under control. I would fly into fits of rage for hours; I would brood as if a dark cloud fell over the entire world.

But as I had known, my actions would have consequences. My friends whom I had held dear to my heart, for the love of my friends was the only love that I had known; it could take no more and then I was truly alone. I had driven them away as I have all who could even like me, let alone love me. And it consumed me, no longer could I even stand myself. The hate I felt towards others grew, but could not compare to the hate I felt towards myself.

Something had consumed my very soul, the living, breathing, God given soul that inhabits all of us, that allows us to be who we are. My very humanity had been twisted, turned, torn and perverted into something entirely new. I had ceased to be the good person I was and had been reborn an Evil man. But after my soul had been consumed, I no longer felt love of any kind. I fell into the deepest despair. The Evil that I had allowed to consume my very soul now consumed my being, my body, and the very blood, flesh and bone that I was made of.

Like all men, I did die, perhaps not directly by my own hand, but I did play a major part in it. It had been a brutal, violent and most undeserved death and I saw what came after I had left this Earth. I stood before Saint Peter himself, there in front of the Heavenly Gates, which Dante had written about so well. Saint Peter after a time said to me, "Your soul has been judged and has been found tainted and unable to enter Paradise, instead your soul has been condemned to Hell until the End of Days."

And that is my tale. I do not expect you to feel any pity for me nor would I ask for it, for it would be most undeserved. Instead, think about my story and heed this warning! Do not be like me. An old miserable miser of a man who knew no joy or love; but to be happy, be good and most importantly Love. No matter what for, for when you stop, only Eternal Punishment awaits you.

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