Pathos, Fall 2007

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Pathos Literary Magazine

Edition 4 Fall Term, '07

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About Us:
Pathos is a student group at Portland State University and funded in full by the Student Fee Committee. All writers and artists are PSU students and works were chosen anonymously by a submissions committee. To submit your creative nonfiction, short fiction, poetry, or art e-mail your submissions to pathos@pdx.edu. For specific submission guidelines visit the website www.pathoslitmag.com. We are currently looking for volunteer staff writers to go around town interviewing local writers and artists, do open mic and book reviews, and write articles that otherwise pertain to the PDX/PSU arts community. If interested please submit a sample of your writing to pathos@pdx.edu
Pathos
Literary Magazine

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Debra Gwartney has had many jobs before coming to Portland State. She worked as a correspondent at Newsweek for ten years, worked as a general assignment reporter for The Oregonian, and taught at University of Oregon. She decided to pursue teaching because “The idea was that would teach half time and write half time.”

Having a background in both journalism and creative nonfiction, Gwartney brings to the classroom a strong knowledge of both fields, implementing skill sets from both districts of thought. She expressed the importance journalism school has had on her creative nonfiction skills, “I felt journalism was a great training ground for me” because of the economy of language learned in journalism school. In discussing her time at The Oregonian she said, “I ended up doing a lot of stories about children dying...it was a weird time in my life. I just found out how much you have to steel yourself for the stories when you’re a journalist and plow ahead. It served me in lots of ways not only in writing and thinking about structure but also thinking about what can I handle in hearing about it and writing about it.”

When it comes to creative writing, she fully understands the difficulties of being a writer, “What’s so hard about being a writer is that so much of it is being about rejection where you send out this under little story and you get an rejection back with no word except for this awful little form. It took me many years to not be crushed by those but it’s just part of the whole big difficult ball of wax that is writing.”

While rejection is obviously a huge part of being a writer, she had some tips for young writers just starting out, stressing the importance of entering contests, “Enter a few contests. The pool is a lot smaller for a contest than it is for a general submission. So your chances for getting read carefully are way better. And winning or even just being a finalist in a contest is a great thing to say to the next school. In discussing her time at The Oregonian she said, “I ended up doing a lot of stories about children dying...it was a weird time in my life. I just found out how much you have to steel yourself for the stories when you’re a journalist and plow ahead. It served me in lots of ways not only in writing and thinking about structure but also thinking about what can I handle in hearing about it and writing about it.”

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Gwartney’s book, currently titled “Live Through This” because her daughters were all big Courtney Love fans, is due to come out next summer.
Take Your Insanity to The Next Level!
Self Publish!
Sean Davis

Being a writer is a neurosis. You might as well believe yourself to be Christ because unless someone is there singing your praises you're just a loon. What does it mean to be a writer? A writer is a person that has an inexplicable drive to create a story, a drive that will barely fit inside of you. You are who I'm talking you. You the one reading this article, I know you're a writer or you wouldn't be here.

Unfortunately being a writer isn't enough, unfortunately we also need validation. I've been there at three in the morning with an empty bottle of wine or two banging at the keyboard screaming at the rejection letters wallpapered all around me. Why can't these publishers and agents realize my genius?

I know you've been there too. What is the answer? Publishing your book. This is the opus of our day; how to get published. I spent years trying to do this.

I didn't know the correct format to put my manuscript in for the first couple years. The publisher and agents didn't even bother reading my stories. They barely took the time to stuff my self addressed stamped envelope with a form rejection letter, not signed or even stamped with a signature. After that I bought books and books on query letters, cover pages, one page synopsis and every other thing. The next year the rejection letters were full sized and some were even signed. The year after that I started to get reasons for why they didn't except it by some. We can't take a chance on an unknown writer. Your subject matter isn't popular with our target demographic. You really don't have the credentials to justify our fiduciary investment.

The first truth you come to as a writer, there are many but the first one is that you can't let rejection get to you. I understood that since fifth grade, but when you look down at a list of every available lit agent and publisher in the Writer's Market and every one has three check marks next to it this really gets to you. The rational mind would have come to the natural conclusion that I was a crappy writer and give up, but I've already told you that I'm insane so I decided to publish my beautiful opus on my own.

It was a very difficult process and it cost a lot of money to do it right but it was completely worth it. I only sold the book in Portland bookstores and online and I received emails from Europe on how much they loved it. I was interviewed by local newspapers and radio. I even got to do a book reading in the Pearl Room of Powells downtown and in my opinion nothing I've done impressed the opposite sex more than sitting at a book signing behind a line of people with my book in their hands.

So if you have the time and money raising abilities to turn your mental illness into the ability to substantiate yourself and impress chicks, or guys depending, then I'll tell you how:

NOTE: There are many ways to self publish. Most include going through some sort of web based group out to fleece you. I looked into many of these and found them all charging too much for things you could do yourself cheaper, an idiot tax. There may be a super deal out there but I don't know where it is. I'm simply telling you how I did it.

First and foremost you must write a good book. This is essential unless you have tons of money. If you write a good book and get your friends excited about how good it is they will help you in your nefarious plan of self publishing. You will need them.

There's always free cheddar in the mousetrap: Money Raising. What's the cost? Well that is the number one question and it is up to you. There are too many variables for me to give you a quote. How many copies are you going to print? What size do you want? How many pages is your book? Do you want a four color process cover? What weight paper are you going to use? How legit do you want to make it? Call around to local printers ask some questions and get a quote. After you add all this up you come up with a number. If I were you I would divide that number in half then add it to the original number and that is probably just right.

Just try to come up with a figure that matches your faith! No way around it. You're going to have
to put in as much dough as you can yourself. There is no way you're going to get people to invest without investing in yourself. Take that money and put it into a separate savings account. I actually started a Limited Liability Partnership with two crazy friends that believed in my book that much. All you need to start your own publishing group is some dough, a Tax Identification Number and a letter of intent from you and your partners. The Tax ID Number is free, but there are many websites that would love to sell them to you, be careful. Don't go to a .com go to www.irs.gov. The letter of intent you can write out by hand. We did ours on a napkin from the Barely Mill and suddenly it was a legal document and we had ourselves a bank account and P-Town Independent Press was born.

**Just don't call it Somethingpolooza.** Take a second job. Sell blood at the plasma centers. Car washes. Bake Sales. Stripping. Guilt relatives into supporting the arts. I did them all. We also held fundraisers. We took some of our money designed flyers, distributed them, and booked the downstairs at The Goodfoot and we packed the place. The odds are if you live in Portland your friends are artists and musicians. Have your band play or your friend's band. Buy some raffle tickets and raffle off paintings, homemade T-shirts, CDs and anything else. We always made a couple hundred bucks every time we did it. We did it every month. Different venues charge different amounts to rent their places out but we found The Goodfoot worked with us the most that's why I mentioned them.

**Going International.** We raised enough dough to proceed. The next step was deciding how real we would make this thing. We decided to go all the way and buy an ISBN. Honestly, I'm still not sure exactly why we needed it but all the other books on the planet have one so we jumped on the bandwagon. It stands for international standard book number and they all come from the same place; www.bowker.com. Again there are many companies out there that want badly to sell an ISBN to you but they all get them from Bowker. It cost us ninety-five bucks in 2004 but I've seen some sites offering them for as low as 55 bucks.

**Dressin Her Up.** What the hell do you do with an ISBN? Register with the Library of Congress and get a barcode. Every professional book is registered with the Library of Congress. The only reason I can see is when the world ends and alien anthropologists come to excavate the ruins of the human civilization your book will live in some extra terrestrial database for all eternity. At least that's what I told myself. I found out later it is a copyright thing. That mailing yourself a copy of your book thing works too. Back to the barcode, we shopped around and got a deal for forty, but like I said now-a-days there are a half dozen websites offering both ISBNs and barcodes for 55 bucks.

Of course I designed my own cover. I spent weeks on it, making it perfect and changing small things over and over again. Then I showed my friends and it was systematically rejected. Luckily you can't throw a rock in Portland without hitting a graphic designer. We had a friend we went to art school with make the cover. She actually got paid to design graphic stuff, she was a pro. She did a great job and had something nice to put on her resume. I still like mine better though. She had two other designer friends that formatted the guts for us. This step should not be overlooked. InDesign can kick your ass if you don't have a formatting gladiator friend.

**Gutenberg? Yeah, The Guy From Police Academy, Right?** The printing business has changed since 2004, but there are still a number of local places that will do private jobs. They throw the guts of your book on the docutec now instead of the press. The cover they do on the presses. The docuteces are just fancy high output printers. It cost us 2400 dollars to print and bind 550 copies of my book. There are places on the East Coast that will do it cheaper than that and they seem friendly enough. You could even ship your job to India now. I wish I could say that we decided to print it in Portland because we were outraged by the immorality of outsourcing, but the reality of it was that I didn't want to send my baby that far and let strangers fuck it all up and not have anything I could do about it being so far away. I'm a hands on type of guy. I wanted to be there to pick them up hot off the press. I'm glad we did it that way. I wouldn't have traded the excitement of picking up the boxes of my book for anything.

**Stars of the Small Press Section.** Get the book into Powells. Each store has their own small press book buyer. They give you sixty percent of your cover press. Then they proceed to cover the barcode.
you went through all the trouble of buying with their own barcode stickers. Books on Broadway will sell your books as well. The bigger chains won’t take them unless they are sent to their corporate offices and okayed. I can’t tell you the chances of that happening. I didn’t try. I kept it local.

I’m Fergalicious! So now that every Powells in town has bought ten copies each and a handful of other local shops have bought ten each I still have 450 copies left. What do you do other than soil your jeans? Book release parties. We did one every month until people started saying, wait a minute, this is the same book you released last time. Now we’re down to 300 books. Now what? We started hitting the open mikes. I would read a chapter in between bands at any bar, pub and coffee shop I could find. This is another time where I had to use the first truth of a writer. The coffee shops were nice enough until I had to listen to the hack that came after me, which coincidentally the guy that read before me thought I’m sure. The bars like The Bitter End, Roots Organic Brewery, and Dots were friendly enough. The people would eventually stop talking and some would even listen. I would sell about three to five every time. There were other places it just didn’t work. Once in a while I would get into screaming matches about the benefit of literature with the less cultured patrons.

If you don’t sell all your copies in the first year or at all don’t worry about it. When you do sell them all you’re sorry they are all gone. The important thing to remember is to put the money you make back into your bank account. That way, if you’re crazy enough, you can do the whole thing over again or maybe pay back any investors.

You Did It Yourself and You’re In Good Company. Publishing your own book won’t necessarily get you a national book deal. In fact the chances are that it won’t, but I don’t think that’s the best thing that can happen to a writer. Everyone I give the book to wants it signed and even if they’re being nice it still feels good signing your own book. The best part of all of it is getting the emails from weird places. I’ve gotten them from Ohio, Florida, California, Idaho and even Italy and Greece. I still go to the small press section of Powell’s to count how many copies are there and even years later when someone buys one or two it makes me smile. Remember, James Joyce printed 300 copies of The Dubliners himself after being rejected by just about every publisher in Europe. He only sold 100. Hardly anyone bought Walden after it was published, leaving Thoreau with a couple hundred copies of his own book. He was quoted as saying “At least I have a library full of my favorite author”. I’ve used that one many times.

Now you’re in the know and even if you don’t go through all this trouble to print a couple hundred copies you should still do something. Print it out at school and bind it with duct tape then leave it at a coffee shop. Write it out on a roll of paper towels and copy it. Send us some of your writings. Share the word, brotha. That’s what being a writer is.
Dorianne Laux’s “Facts about the Moon”

Dorianne Laux’s latest collection of poetry, Facts about the Moon, is a slim but powerful volume, the product of a poet who has little left to prove, but much to probe. Forgoing the desperate, aching feel of her previous works, such as 2002’s Smoke, here Laux explores more domestic territory—marriage in mid-life, childhood memories, home ownership, and what could, in the hands of a lesser artist, be called “getting in touch with nature.”

I first came upon Laux when she was invited to give a reading at my high school. By then a nationally respected poet, she came off more like a benevolent, no-bullshit aunt—unpretentious, sharp and wise, but not severe. This remains more or less the tone of her poetry here, especially in the third section of the book, which addresses girlhood, both from the inside and as a grown woman looking back. Laux teaches Creative Writing at University of Oregon and there is, in fact, something didactic about her way with words. It’s as if she has freed each of its connotations and scrawled it on a blank board. Using these delicate, concrete pieces, she slowly unravels each scene or sensation.

This allows a strong, individual momentum to develop in each poem—so much so that if I happened to land a few pages ahead of my spot and glanced at the first few lines of a poem, I was unable to pull back until I’d finished. Nowhere is this force more evident than in “Facts about the Moon”, the book’s deeply weird but completely moving magnum opus. At once a dirge, a love song and a bitter criticism, the poem stars a personified moon as a mother grieving the loss of her delinquent son. It’s a perfect encapsulation of how Laux’s poetry functions on the specific and detail-laden and strives, all the while, to pull you toward a greater whole. Many of her poems dissolve into infinity, concluding with scenes like the following, from “The Germans”:

“It’s as if she has freed each of its connotations and scrawled it on a blank board.”

“...I never wanted to know, an iron gate opened that could never be closed, the uniformed men filing through. Followed by this one with the brick-red face who hoisted me up to look over the fence, all the way to the sea.”

This zooming-out effect is perfect for moving from there to here, for pulling the universal out of specific moments. It fits with the perspective of the book, which has no temporal center, but shifts from current life to memory and back. At times, though, especially compared with Laux’s previous work, the lack of immediacy seems a drawback for the book. The blunt power of her words seems to come into full bloom when she is allowed to ramble a bit more, to be a little more personal. This collection highlights the poet’s interest in the passions of domesticity as well as the elegant simplicity and lyricism with which she treats her subjects.
Interview with Peter Fogtdal

Sean Davis

I was fortunate enough to be able to interview Danish novelist Peter Fogtdal. In my conversation with him I found that the undeniable drive we feel when a person strives to be a writer is an international trait, in fact I would say it knows no borders at all.

Fogtdal is heading out on an international book tour to promote his 11th published novel. The first English translation of one of Fogtdal’s novels will be published by Hawthorne Press in 2008, the same publishing house that has had recent success with Monica Drake’s Clown Girl.

Fogtdal was born in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1956. He went to school at California State University Fullerton and was educated as a dramatist. Out of all his novels his personal favorite is entitled The Whipped Cream War, which won him The French Ambassador's Literature Prize (Le Prix Literaire des Ambassadeurs) in 2005. This award was a major accomplishment. He told me that it was as important to him as selling tens of thousands of books.

Fogtdal never had any doubt that he was going to be a writer. He returned from the states to Denmark and found himself with two short stories and a novel. He shopped them around with little success. A friend of his told him that the one national Danish television station had an open call for sitcom writers. He gave it a try and to his surprise he was chosen. Unfortunately the sitcom wasn’t received well by critics or the Danish audience. This was only the beginning of the rollercoaster for Fogtdal. For the next 20 years his popularity as a writer would hit highs and lows. He never gave up writing and when I asked him why his eyes drifted out the café window as if the answer was out in the rain he said, “I have no idea. Don’t ask me that because I don’t know. Maybe we all know inside what we will be someday and inside. I am a story teller.”

Fogtdal achieved national notoriety as a radio personality. He was one in a four person sketch comedy act; a sort of Danish Monty Python. His popularity was a mixed blessing because as he sold thousands of copies of his first book he felt disappointed because he had so many more radio fans. In the literary world he did exceptionally well but he was unable to see it because his experience in mass media put his perspective on a grander scale. “I sold two thousand copies, that’s great for a first novel but I thought it was doing horribly.”

2008 promises to be a very good year for Fogtdal. The Tzar’s Dwarf was translated by Tiina Nunnally, who is considered the top of her field for translating Danish writing. Not only is Fogtdal hitting the American audience, he has finished his latest book and sets off on an international book promotion tour on December 1st, 2007.

“Conflict is what drives the story”, that’s what he tells his students and that’s what he told me. He writes about spiritual matters, fate, and faith. “There must be something at stake.” The irony of this wasn’t lost on me; the writer’s story is driven by conflict and story but this simply mirrors the writer’s life. I asked him again if he always had the drive to be a writer and he looked at me and smiled, “To be a very good one, I’m already a writer.” He went on to tell me that he knows he is getting better because he has been getting better at letting go. Sometimes the writer has to realize that he or she is not the only one writing the story. You have to let it go where it will and not be afraid of cutting out some parts even if you believe that they are the best parts, “The hardest part is killing your darlings”.

I
Portland Open Mic Calendar
Natalyia Pirumova

Haven Coffee- Tuesdays, 7pm
3551 SE Division St.
(503) 236-6890

In Other Words Bookstore – “Dirty Queer X-Rated Open Mic” – every second Friday, 6:30pm
8 NE Killingsworth St
(503) 232-6003

Proper Eats - Wednesdays, 7pm
8638 N. Lombard
(503) 445-2007

Tony’s Tavern – Mondays, 8:30pm
1955 W. Burnside
(503) 228-4574

Alberta Street Pub - Wednesdays, 8pm
1086 NE Alberta St.
(503) 284-7665

Backspace – every second Sunday, 7pm
115 NW 5th Ave
(503) 248-2900

Chaos Café and Parlor - Thursdays, 7:30pm
2620 SE Powell
(503) 546-8112

The Green Room – Mondays, 8pm
2280 NW Thurman
(503) 228-6178

Featured Open Mic:

Ladd’s Inn - Thursdays, 9:30pm
1204 SE Clay St
(503) 235-7831

Open mic night at this smoky, homey bar consists mostly of acoustic guitar acts and spoken word. On the night we visited, there were two separate renditions of Rolling Stones songs with altered lyrics, one severely drunken man rambling about justice, and a jovial older guy playing a song that involved a lot of gobbling. The atmosphere is cheerful and low-key. The sign-up list is on the chalkboard by the pool tables.

Do you know of any regular literary events around town? Email us at pathos@pdx.edu!

The staff at Pathos Literary Magazine hold monthly open mics, but they change by term. Check the website www.pathoslitmag.com for updated dates and times.
High School Reunion
Ellen King

the most impressive collections of abs have all melted into puddles.
tell us something about the process, life stuff—marriage.
suds and soda chaos.
photographs of various people.
thinking back to when we first met.
how the front yard is coming along nicely.

from grace-filled lives
the stone-damaged mothers, irrelevant
between washing the dishes,
every step tripping.

the Queen who had always been a good, fast, cheap date, now tagged the Last Resort.
the skinny girl born to love her, a finger play has—been.

the one-eighty curve ball who got his first job doing under the table Vegas entertainment, kicked out during the third dance song,

tossed a crust of sandwich to a lone seagull.
not-so-secret wimps nestled in big-city features,
hot water heaters for friends.

in a sewn up prototype with cat hair lining—a basket case. He is also a boy in the pages of Time: Salvation Son of the Church of Mars.

a minute of silence for Chuck and Sandra, both with something simple: gas burners.
Bob who “tried” one summer (good Lord, the guy can change the conversation 180 degrees in a second—animal rights, taxes, cavemen exhibits...
the Big Lesson: back up your hard drive, Man).

the time-stamped Soundtrack.
the next ten years laid out just like a map.
celebrating all we’d learned and had yet to discover...

all that something about the process, life stuff.
In the background a redheaded teenage boy plays his own unique rendition of “My Girl” that sounds better than the original. His ability in music apparently drained all other talents including dressing himself—tie-died suit jacket paired with a lime green t-shirt, black slacks ending in white tennis shoes. Bernard notices that the atmosphere of the tiny café outside of his new apartment building is more receptive of this attire than his own. He’s only twenty-six, but as the youngest professor at the small town’s large university he feels as though sweaters, collared shirts and ties are the only sure path to gaining respect despite his department dress code being sweatshirts and jeans. Before selecting a seat at the bar counter, he has to remind himself that he belongs here—that most of these people are closer to his age than his colleagues.

A leather briefcase gets flung on to the counter next to him as he picks up his decaf latte. His hand shakes and the coffee winds up all over the briefcase. The woman attached to the handle laughs.

“It's okay. The damn thing's seen a lot worse than that.”

She grabs some napkins from the dispenser between them, offering him one silently for what fell in his lap. Her hair is short and gelled to look permanently wet. Her pants are deep blue cargos adorned with unnecessary snaps. It all seems tied together and he’s about to write her off as a leftover from the decade of punk until he notes the Birkenstocks on her feet.

Briefcase clean, she pops it open to reveal a laptop. She orders a cranberry smoothie before mauling the keyboard in front of her with the tips of her fingers. Every move she makes is without seems. Her head sways from shoulder to shoulder depending on what question she has to ask of her writing. As he engages his peripheral vision to peek at the screen, he notices that despite seeming to answer questions in her mind to her satisfaction, there are enough of her indicators in her prose that he wonders whether she is accomplishing anything or not.

Her hands are extremely small, ringed, and tipped with short nails. There are white scars on the knuckles reminiscent of cat scratches or an encounter with a very violent bush. Bernard wants to ask her the story behind them.

His gaze settles somewhere lower than her neck but higher than her stomach and lingers there awhile before he is aware that the typing has stopped.

“Hey there,” she says.

He expects to be slapped. In fact, if he could he’d slap himself. He knows she is a student. If she files a sexual harassment complaint, he’ll never teach again. He didn’t spend years on end taking too many credits and spending too many hours alone studying to be undone by a woman who, if compared to the myriad of the tiny-waisted girls on campus, wouldn’t rank in the top fifty percent. But upon working up the courage to look in her face, he sees she is smiling.

“Can I help you?” she asks, black-rimmed eyes peeping from behind her sloppy bangs.

“No. Sorry.”

“Okay.” She laughs slightly before reading over the black words that exist only hypothetically as electronic code.

He can’t keep his eyes off her. He’s tried, but for whatever reason, she’s irresistible. He tries blaming it on her lips that seem to take up half her face. He tells himself that because his field is sociology, he is doing nothing more than observing her in context of the environment as a whole. But he can’t even hear the kid anymore who’s moved on to some bluesy tune. She occupies his entire frame of reference, which wouldn’t bother him so much if he only knew why.

She is peeking at him from the sides of her eyes. They are brown, but even in the quickly dimming light, he can tell that there is more to them than a single color can describe. He has to do something. He can’t just stare at her especially now that she knows
“What are you writing?”
“I work on the gender column for the school newspaper.”
“Amanda Hynes?”
“Yeah, that’s me.”
“I’m impressed.”

“Thanks,” she says. Her eyes close as she mutters the word, but she does not look away. There is security in her gaze—an ability to accept compliments that few women possess.

He remembers her inspired column on her experience with bisexuality. She argued what Kinsey has stumbled upon sixty years ago—that sexuality was not a matter of black and white, but that everyone fell into some gray area. Bernard had been intrigued by the idea that if marriage had become an institution that served an emotional function rather than a biological or economic one, then it should follow that the attraction in relationships should be moving away from the physical and toward the intellectual. Upon recognizing that this was unfortunately not the case, she blamed her closed-minded society and the man-on-woman myth. She admitted to having sexual relationships with both sexes based solely on attractiveness, but relationships in the purer sense were about something that was more than skin deep. She did not claim that her experiences were everyone’s nor did she attempt to tackle the biological factor. She stated simply that this was where she was. Take it or leave it. You didn’t have to agree and she’d be back to facts next week, but we all should know that when we check out another guy’s ass while holding our girlfriend’s hand, it might be because we saw something in his face that spoke to our souls.

“Can I read it?” Bernard asks, pointing at the screen.
“No!” The laptop closes with a snap. “Sorry,” she explains. “A work in progress. I hate anyone reading anything but the final product.”

“I hope you don’t want to write for a living,” Bernard says. He giggles at his own joke.
“I do,” Amanda says seriously.
“Oh.”

She watches him back. Bernard pretends not to notice her, but he’s failing as miserably as before.

“It’s about divorce statistics,” she says. “I’m trying to convince people to marry later.”
“So you support marriage as an institution?”
“No. But I can’t change people’s minds about that. I can just make them wary.”
“That’s a cynical statement for someone so young.”
Amanda smiles. “I’m not that young. And besides, I’m still waiting for some guy to ride in on his white horse.”

“Or girl?”
“What?”
“Your column…”
She stares blankly.

“About sex being more about intellect.”

“I enjoyed your lecture on rape culture,” Amanda tells him as she scrolls through pages of text. “Were you in one of my classes?”

“No. You were a guest speaker in my Intro to Ethnic Studies class last semester.”

“If you were there, you were surprisingly quiet. You strike me as very opinionated.”

“I am. Silence shows my support. The subjection of minorities pisses me off about as much as archaic social expectations.” She considers this statement. “No, more actually.”

“So what you’re saying is that you’d rather get married than let white drug dealers off easy?”

“Something like that.”

Half a page is gone in a millisecond but begins to reconstruct itself only slightly slower. Bernard notes that the rings on her fingers are expensive—
all sapphire set in sterling silver. Each one is taste­ful and delicate. None of them would normally be paired with cargo pants. On the middle finger of her left hand is the crown jewel—at least five carats and obviously an antique—the heirloom that inspired her collection. Whereas before he believed her look to be planned, he now thinks he might be mistaken. She has her favorite pieces and if they don’t match, what does it matter? This is either an example of careless nonconformity reminiscent of the hippie era or proof that despite her academic talent she is about as self-aware as a kindergartener first learning to dress herself.

Bernard decides there’s only one way to find out.

“When do you think you’re going to be done with that?”

“Soon,” she says.

He senses that she has lost interest in him.

“Would you care to come to my place afterwards?”

The expectation is that she’ll finally slap him like she should have half an hour ago.

Instead she says, “Sure.”

Bernard marvels not only at actually having committed an act of sexual harassment, but at having it well received. Though she never looked away from her writing, he has no doubt that Amanda knew exactly what was implied by the question. In fact, as he reads over her shoulder, he sees that she is merely making notes on where she wants to go.

“Stop,” she tells him.

“Are you serious?”

“I told you not to read the work in progress.”

“I meant about coming over.”

She closes the laptop again.

“Professor Gait,” she begins.

“Bernard.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Never mind. Bernard, then. I am no stranger to strange sex. In fact, it’s been awhile and I think you’d be a good time.”

“That’s it?”

“Should there be more?” she asks. The laptop goes back in the briefcase. Amanda was right. It looks exactly like it did when it came in, even if the stains are a little more pronounced. “I’ll follow you.”

“It’s my apartment, then?”

“Unless you want to be caught by my roommates....”

Bernard nods his head, consenting her point.

“I live right across the street. Let me go tidy up and you can join me there in, say, fifteen minutes.”

“Sure. What number?”

“6 X.”

She wanders over to the counter to order another smoothie.

Walking out of the cafe, the first thing he thinks is that it is probably over a hundred-twenty degrees in the asphalt parking lot. The second thing is that he is about to violate a section of his contract. Romantic affairs with students were forbidden. One night stands especially so for obvious reasons. Bernard takes a deep breath of hot air and dust and wonders when he became the kind of man who puts his career on the line because he finds a random woman—a girl—inexplicably sexy. For, he reluctantly concludes, Amanda is just a girl trapped in a woman’s body even if she is willing to fuck him. What if she has none of the experience she boasts about to the whole campus through the printed word? What if she exaggerates to prove a point? Bernard does not want Amanda playing Mena Suvari to his Kevin Spacey—bare breasts begging to be licked despite the rose between her legs having hitherto not been plucked. Still, the anticipation of physical contact begins to wash over him. He has no doubts that she will walk up his stairs and run her hand over his mantelpiece before asking for directions to the bedroom. If it were not for the sun sitting at a thirty degree angle from the zenith, Bernard would bet his life that he would be nursing rug burns and cleaning cum off his leather couch in the morning.

Here’s the problem with the mind—that which should conflict fits nicely within the same space so long as it does not take physical form.

He lets himself into his second story apartment. Picking up the dishes from his living room surfaces, he throws them all into the kitchen sink and closes the folding doors. The towels on the bathroom floor go into the hamper in his bedroom closet. Even though the rest of his house could use a maid, his bedroom is immaculate. Bernard wonders if he leaves it that way for occasions like this. Not that he’s ever had one before.

A knock, knock, knock on the door forces him up from the chair in the corner where he sat trying not to bite his nails. He trails his hands behind him,
leaving sweat streaks on the white walls. The blood pounding in his head, playing the song of the little drummer boy, stops him from hearing her let herself in.

Amanda hangs her coat on a bare nail and drops her purse on the floor. She does not hesitate—as he knew she wouldn’t. Hands start pulling his dress shirt out of his pants, nails leaving bright pink scratches when they make contact with his skin. She pulls each button through its hole and leaves a line of kisses down his stomach. This should be erotic, but it’s too mechanical. This exact scene has been played out before with another man as the male lead. For some reason, the idea of Amanda going down on multiple men hardens him faster than monogamy ever could.

She stands as her hands fiddle with his belt buckle. Her weight is pushing him farther toward the wall. Before they make it there, he trips over her sandal. As they meet with the parquet floor, his teeth sink into her fleshy bottom lip. Bernard savors the taste of iron. She moans—pain facilitating lust.

Bernard slips out from under her, grabbing her hand to help her up and head for the bed. They reach the room and she strips quickly, revealing a body he had not expected. Her stomach is not firm and her ass and thighs are clumpy as the orange pulp at the bottom of a glass. He is surprised he notices this considering that there is something far more interesting to stare at. A bonsai tree has planted itself on her left hip. Its roots disappear into her pubic hair and run down her leg to the knee. A gnarled trunk twists its way to above her bellybutton where it forks. Foliage and branches support each perfect breast and circle each brown nipple.

“I got it to cover the scars from my breast reduction surgery,” she says. “They were faint anyway, though.”

He tries to imagine her with bigger breasts, without the tattoo. He fails.

“How many hours?”

“The surgery or the tattoo?” she asks.

There is blood trickling down her chin.

“The tattoo.”

“About twenty.”

Standing there, exposed, she is not beautiful. Then again, beauty was not what attracted him. It was confusion, wonder, awe, and a gallon of ink under her skin did nothing if not intensify that initial interest. The pause in their play had not taken more than seconds. It took a lot less than that for their bodies to collide again.

Bernard wakes to see that it is only seven. Such a long day in such a short time. He knows that he is the only person in his bed. He had not really expected her to stay. The light is on in the bathroom, but she is not there. He gets out of bed, naked and aware of it like never before. The carpet feels softer between his toes. On the mirror, Amanda wrote him a message in toothpaste. See you on campus, Bernie. He knows this is inevitable. He’ll see her first, follow her with his eyes, remember what it felt like to brush his lips against hers. When she becomes aware of him, she will smile but other than that there will be no recognition. There does not need to be. Time spent with Amanda is like a good satire where delicacy is harsh and anger is the gateway to love. She is interesting. She provides perspective. But she cannot be lived by. Nor does she expect to be.
He left in search of Cockaigne in order to escape a prison. This is why he left. This stretch of road is long and flat. He walks along side of it. In the distance behind him there is a dot on the horizon, but he doesn't see it. He doesn't see the car speeding beside him. He doesn't notice until it skids to a stop, and the driver speaks.

"Do you need a lift?" the driver asks.
"Is there a town nearby?" he replies.
"Maybe...seven miles this way, hop in."
He gets in the car and takes a look at the driver. He's scruffy looking, probably middle aged. Before putting his foot on the gas he takes a sip from a flask, and it's apparent he's already sloshed. He begins driving towards the town at a high speed.

"You want some? It's cheap whiskey."
"Sure"
"Here you go, pal. You have a nickname?"
"No I don't."
"My name is Newborn Brother."
"What a strange name..."
"Where you from?"
"Oregon."
"Never heard of it! Why are you here?"
"I'm not quite sure...you really never heard of Oregon?"
"Honest to God. You have a story about where you're from?"
"It's too unorganized and complicated right now."
"Oh I love stories, I love stories. I have a good story. You want to hear it?"
"Sure."
"Okay, I'm about to tell you, are you ready?"
"Yeah."

"There was once a man who had a great desire to be God. For years he tried, and then one day his mind left him. His gonads fell off and he became pregnant. His chest expanded and he became God. He is father to all that is and ever will be, and through this he can surely be no man."
"...Is that it?"
"Men can't have children. That's it. Well I'm going to let you off here. Remember to never throw a pibble in jest. Remember that. Also if you meet Manroot tell him I agree with everything he has to say about people. Now get out of my car."

He gets out and he's already in the small town. The sun is starting to set. There is a bar on the corner across the street, as he crosses over to it he notices that absolutely nobody else is outside. He goes up to the bar and walks through the door.

It feels as though it's raining in this room. It's not bad though.
It's nice.
The music is soothing.
He walks up to the bar.
"What can I get you?" The bartender asks.
The bartender is simply a large frog; that is the best way to describe what he is. As he thinks about how strange this is he realizes he doesn't mind. Not even a little bit.
"A shot of whiskey and a pint of your cheapest beer please."
"What?"
"A shot of whiskey and a beer?"
"Huh?"
"A shot and a beer..."
"I'm terribly sorry, sir but I'm afraid I don't speak English. We have whiskey and grog, would you like some?"
"...I'm confused."
"Here just have a bucket of grog on the house, I'll never be able to speak your language."
"...I won't say no."
"Complete gibberish, but I see something of value in your eyes, enjoy the drink."

He takes a sip from the bucket of grog. It tastes like warm water and alcohol. Looking around the room, he gets the feeling that every individual under its roof is not an individual, but merely a shell that encloses a much more complicated web. A very strange feeling. Sitting near him at the bar is a sharp young man, with glasses, a clean shave, and a nice haircut. He's reading a book called Werde Meine Frau. Our main character decides to spark up a conversation.

"Do you speak English?"
“Yes I do, quite well. It is important to know English, some say it is the most widely used language on this apple.”
“...What is this place?”
“This is a bar, a station with quantities of rotgut for us to soak in and savor. Now let me buy you five shots whiskey.”
...I won’t say no.
“Magnificent. Do you enjoy stories?”
“I suppose.”
“Very good. I must ask that in return you listen to my story.”
“Okay.”
“I’m afraid that before I can begin I must tell you a little about myself.”
“That’s fine.”
“Well, basically... my desire and inclination to study has been an undeniable fact for my entire life, one which my family had failed to acknowledge. I spent lots of time in childhood thinking and not enough time sleeping. I had an unmistakable interest in computers, and the fact that both my parents are engineers might have contributed to that. Let me be more concise. When I was six I had a very good appetite, although I tended to ask for more than I could actually eat. Lunch was my favorite meal and I often requested a bedtime snack. I did not nap, but I was told to go to bed early. Six-year-olds need ten hours of sleep each night. In order to sleep more completely I was read a bedtime story. My age of six was a very important year because of this. Would you like to hear the story I was read?”
“Let’s hear it.”
“Very well. There was once a boy named Corporal Wigwam. He had the drive to fight the Gods. He believed in working hard to get ahead, a true devotee to the American way. At age six he decided to never sleep again, in order to remain as productive as possible. Countless hours of attentive study, endless appetite for reaching the dreams he never had while others lay in their unremarkable comatose state. He acquired all human wisdom, and then all the wisdom in the universe, and eventually he knew all that is and ever will be. However due to his lack of sleep his health faded. He died before reaching age seven.”
...That’s really the story they read you?”
“It helped me sleep well at night.”
“That...that makes sense, actually.”
“Here take a few more shots on me. How are you feeling?”
“Really drunk.”
“Splendid, do you smoke Cannabis?”
“Yep.”
“Let’s step outside.”
“Okay.”
They walk outside and stand in front of the bar. The sharp young man pulls out flask and a large marijuana cigarette. They pass both back and fourth taking shots and drags. Eventually a conversation ensues.
“So, what brings you here?” The sharp young man asks.
“I’m not quite sure...”
“Well, why did you leave home?”
“Something about... I barely even remember now... something like Bastille.”
“Ah, Bastille, a fortress in Paris used as a prison. Built in the fourteenth century during the Hundred Years’ War. It was stormed and destroyed on July 14th, 1789.”
“Yeah.”
“Well, I advise you to never sit with one part of your body in the sun and one part in the shade. Your journey seems to be neither that of a hero or villain. Not a journey of love or hate. As a prisoner you should simply seek freedom.”
“I see... well, do you know where I should go now? Or what I should do?”
“Do you see that dirt road down there?”
“Yeah.”
“I advise you to walk down that road. You might not know why, but just do it as a favor to me.”
“Okay.”
“Good, perhaps we will meet again.”
“Wait, I never got your name?”
“Astray Ardor.”
“What?”
“You know, like the famous singer?”
“Not really.”
“Oh, yes, you’re English, you must not have heard of her. Well I must be going now, I wish you luck on your travels.”
“Yeah, thanks, thanks for everything.”
And like that the sharp young man was gone, disappeared into the night.
Our main character takes Astray’s advise and stumbles down the dirt road. He walks for maybe three miles. The night sky is starlit and the moon is bright and full. Something about this town is so
peaceful, yet so surreal. Eventually, being in the inebriated state he's in, he collapses near a river in the forest. He lays in the soft grass, and recalls an excerpt from a poem, although he can't remember what it's called or who wrote it.

Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it therefore less gone?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.¹

With that, he falls asleep.

She's an elegant coat rack,
with a flower in her hat,
and two smooth poles that
drop like stilts to the floor.
The chrome forms a puddle
draped with wool at her feet.
Several men ask her to dance.
she declines on principle:
the thought of their hands in her pockets,
the thought of bending at the knee.
She slides outside and this is where
she blossoms, this is where she sprouts
some leaves her arms poke through
the sleeves and become branches
of manifold green. They whisper
when the wind blows.
ever holding fast to form,
now they glow with borrowed light.

¹Edgar Allen Poe
long time blues
Chris Cotrell

I look at me and say
i can't sing the blues

look at me
and say
i can't sing the blues

maybe looks like i don't
get the same right
as you

maybe that wasn't
my stepdad
hanging
his little dick
in my face
one night
in kahului
and
telling me

i was a faggot

maybe i wasn't there
in albuquerque
four bedroom house
stucco adobe
one room for dogshit
one room for storage
one room for the kids
and one for the junkies

maybe that wasn't me
one night
smoking a cigarette
outside my new job
in winter
in the rain
when the cops came by
bloodied my nose against a wall
handcuffed me
and pulled my shirt up
to check for tattoos

look at me
in the eye
and tell me
i can't sing
the blues
maybe
i didn't stab nobody
in a new mexico alleyway
when nobody tried to steal
my foodstamps
and a bag of bread

maybe
that wasn't me
frying paste
made from
water and flour
in a kihei kitchen
after day five
without food
and hallucinating

maybe
i wasn't the one
had to fight
everybody
and everybody's
brother
cousin
uncle
sister

because i wasn't born
wearing the right skin

maybe this has been
privilege

maybe it looks
to you
like i can't sing the blues

but i've been singing my whole life
and it has never

been up to you
While walking to the drug store today I realized something both funny and rude: I wasn’t walking at all. I was driving.

Within seconds my body was oddly convulsing and sweating in reaction to the news. It was as if the world had suddenly made no sense and my body was reacting in kind with an almost pubescent resistant frenzy. It took me no time at all to realize that some truly grizzly circumstances—something apocalyptic—would have been necessary for me to actually have trekked the .7 miles to my local Walgreens. Some chemical reaction fired within my head, some unforeseen, automatic behavioral spasm had me believe that I was walking the few blocks down 137th. Walking!

As if the Allies had lost the war against the Nazis, I felt a part of a warped but very credible alternate reality. Seconds! Only fucking seconds of complete upside down, scary shit-in-your-pants fantasy. I wondered if in those moments I had hit an abandoned tabby or a blind child. The sweat beaded on my forehead. My hands shook and my left foot wobbled on the clutch. Not even the fifth setting on my AC with the supportive blast of the recycled air could cool me off. My pits swelled with hot, unstoppable gallons of sweat. I was on the verge of passing out. How could I have walked it? How could I have even imagined it actually taking place?

Should I have declined the half-blackened banana my mom insisted I eat?

“There’s only one more left. You can’t buy more than six bananas and expect to finish them before they go bad, Derek.”

She was right of course. How could I expect to eat more than six bananas before they took on that dark, almost evil exterior. That was almost one and half bananas a day. That didn’t seem natural. Oh but the taste was fine. Mushy and gray on the inside, but not intolerable. Not toxic. Not magic mushroom high. Not let’s-forget-what-I’m-doing and think I’m walking to the drug store, instead of what I’m actually doing—namely, driving my white 2000 Saturn SL2 down 137th, ten above the speed limit, air turned up to its fifth and final setting: No, it couldn’t have been the banana. What could it have been then? Think, Derek. What could have prompted such flagrant disrespect for the real?

My god. This could be it: I’ve finally lost my mind.

I reached the parking lot. Three dozen cars were parked outside the drugstore, even though an identical competitor sat across the street. Did I miss the news of a grand re-opening?

Inside, the place was empty and white. Only a fat man in a blue faded polo and flipped up sunglasses stood in front of the bored cashier. He was deciding between a king-sized pack of Reese’s Cups (extra value, forty percent more. FREE.) and a seemingly misplaced party bag of mini-Snickers. Where was everyone else? What I came for was on a brightly labeled end cap. I was going to save a dollar today. Good news.

“Would you like a bag for your shampoo?”

The cashier asked, almost philanthropically.


“Have a nice day. It’s another sunny and beautiful one.”
You know the story:
Cat meets dog, dog bites cat, and the cat dies.
Hitler makes up his mind to invade Poland; before breakfast.
Einstein remembers those crazy dreams he had about Physics.
Hitler meets Einstein on the Astral Plane; they "do lunch".
Further down the line the mortal coil straightens out like a Phone chord pulled taught. It becomes very hard to hold on.
We look at each other one last time, over French toast, and she weeps.
But I was ready for it, expecting it. I saw the whole thing unfold
Like Winston Churchill's napkin.
Free Agents
Jonathan Snider

A sticky haze hangs over everything. Jones and I occupy a booth, slouching under a layer of smoke.

"I love this song," Jones says, gazing through the mist of numerous cocktails. He's adopted the role of toper in recent months and it fits him like an ill-measured suit or a latex Halloween mask.

Lacking an apposite response, I remain silent. I just blink slowly because I'm drunk and blinking quickly is not an option. Also, I don't care about the song or whether he likes it.

"Who is this? It doesn't matter because I fucking love it," Jones says, voice booming on the profanity.

"Aren't you glad you joined me?"

I empty my glass.

"You're feeling better already." Jones holds my neck in the bight of his elbow. As a woman in a skirt walks by he shakes me and grunts, "Eh?" He doesn't take his eyes off of the woman. Jones has been coming here since his wife left him.

My throat tightens and I swallow preemptively.

"What's wrong with you, boy," he says. He wags his head. "Be back." He stands and follows the woman to the dance floor, thrusting his pelvis with the systolic pounding of the music.

I stay behind like some drunken anchorite.

A woman comes to the table and picks up our empty glasses.

"Another, please." I say raising my eyes deliberately.

She gives me a long look, then accedes. In a moment she returns with whisky and too much ice. I gulp the contents and my stomach spasms.

Jones circles the woman on the dance floor.

I narrow my eyes, attempting to focus, and my head bobbles with the effort.

Jones returns after the next song, preceded by a torrent of profanity. "Bitches are begging for it tonight."

My head lolls and bitter second-hand smoke fills my mouth.

"Fuckum. They'll be here when you're ready. Let's go back to your place and smoke."

I turn toward him to answer because I feel a heave coming on.
Parade at The Dalles
Eamon Ffitch

The posters read "Death to the Dark Grey Feeling"
And clung like cowards to every local wall and pole
So of course we hat-and-spattered down into town
Early like; while those damn heavy clouds still slept
Right down on top of us.

The whole town had turned out, as they say,
Lining Second Street then back around and behind
Blessed and warm twenty-four-hour fast-food kitchens
Where no single spatula flipped no burger for no one.
Later it was called seven o'clock.

Steam rose from the cat-and-mouse cathedrals while
Far off across the diamond-roughed plain the natives wept
But back in town we heard the faint rat-a-tat-and-honk of "Louie, Louie"
And recognized the danger of mixing champagne with grapefruit juice
But by then it was too late and here it came.

They crashed like waves across a beer-commercial screen
with a hollow persistent shuffling of left and right and left.
Then the slow cars and elbow elbow wrists and small cars came.
Moose, Elk, New-Age Custodians of Light; children dressed as
Elements of the Great Pyramid of Food.

We trembled with Romance through hours of minutes and seconds
And rejoiced the steady pitter-pat and red-white-and-blue.
Above us ten-thousand Gods scratched their heads in wonderment
For nothing in the mashed-potato-sky really comes close
To that High Whistle and Saturday Morning feeling.
Ingredients
Josh Gross

Scene one.

Lights come up on the Immovable Object standing centerstage. The Unstoppable Force enters and walks downstage towards the audience.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. It is said that all drama comes down to the unstoppable force meeting the immovable object. My name is [actor's name] and for this evening's performance I will be playing the part of the unstoppable force.

(Unstoppable Force steps aside and motions for other actor to step forward. Other actor politely refuses and stays put.)

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Fine. Have it your way.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
And I am in the role of the immovable object.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Are you ready?

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Yes.

(Unstoppable Force tries to shake Immovable Object's hand. I.O. politely refuses eliciting an eye roll from U.F. U.F. Squares up to approach the already solidly planted I.O., then starts briskly walking towards I.O.)

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Comin' through.

(I.O. stays put.)

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Move.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
No.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
What do you mean no? C'mon. Move it along pal.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
I mean no, I cannot.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Look, pal. I'm the unstoppable force, and that means you gotta clear off so I can get by.

(U.F. hands I.O. a business card.)

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Your credentials appear in order. But unfortunately I still cannot comply with your request.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Look, buddy. I'm getting right sick of this. Scram. Vamoose. Beat it.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Sorry, sir.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
What do you mean sorry?

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
I mean I apologize. I am unable to fulfill your request. I am unable to vamoose, as you put it.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
You're not sorry. If you were really sorry, you'd get out of the way.
IMMOVABLE OBJECT
You're entitled to your opinions on the subject sir, but still, I must not vamoose. Vamoosing is not allowed.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Not allowed? Not allowed? That's a load of crap if I ever heard one. Not allowed by whom?

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
By definition, sir. I am the immovable object. Therefore, it would be most improper for me to move.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Improper? Improper? Oh please. Live a little. Life's a party and it's time to play Twister. Come on! Just take one little step to the side for me.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Despite your spirited yet borderline illiterate attempt to sway me, I must remain resolute, sir. If I did play this Twister of which you speak, then by moving, I would no longer be immovable. It would defy the laws of physics to claim otherwise. It's entirely possible that that paradox could cause the immediate and total devastation of all physical reality in the known universe. And that, sir, is not something I'm willing to risk. And so I stand.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
You really buy that? All that brainwashed, title-dictates-behavior B.S.?

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Well, as you, the "unstoppable force," are throwing your full weight into getting me to step aside, then yes. The evidence certainly does point in that direction.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Ah that's hogwash. Grade-A nonsense if you ask me.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
I didn't. But I shall make a note of it so I am not required to consult you in the future, should the nature of hogwash again become the topic at hand.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Oh please. I know what it says on my business card, but really I'm the master of my own destiny.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Clearly.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
No really. I'm like a shark, always moving, always on the prowl, always dangerous and alluring to an audience.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Sharks die if they stop moving.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Not those sleeping sharks. They nap. They nap all the time. Whenever they feel like it even.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
How glorious for them. A genuine marvel of nature. An animal, that sleeps.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Look, I don't stop because I don't want to.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Yes. You've made that quite clear.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
You don't believe me? I can stop any time I like. I just don't want to.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
I'm sure that you can.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Why don't you believe me?

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
I've just said several times that I do.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
But you didn't mean it.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Figured that out all by yourself, did you? Might be something to you after all. Perhaps you attended shark graduate school by osmosis and neglected to mention it in our initial interview.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
You know what, I've had just about enough of your attitude.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
I'd imagine that you have.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
What's that supposed to mean?

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Exactly what it sounds like, sir. That I imagine you would find my mannerisms quite vexing. It's simply your nature. You are the unstoppable force, after all.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
See, there you go again, trying to label me. You don't know me. You don't know a thing about me.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
I know you think you're a shark.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
A sleeping shark! With big teeth. Big teeth that I just may use to kick your ass.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Ignoring the obvious logical fallacies of your threat to kick me not in, but with teeth, I regret to inform you that I still am unable to help you.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Why the hell not?

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Trust me when I say that nothing would please me more than to take a course of action that would bring this discourse to an end, but as I've explained several times, by definition, I am unable to move. And there's nothing I can do about it.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
See man, that's a defeatist attitude. The world's your oyster.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
We are awash in nautical metaphors today I see. Quantity does always seem to trump quality these days, doesn't it.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Look, I'm being straight with you here. We have a common goal.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Do we?

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Yes. To forward the plot.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Curious that you use the term forward in reference to my objectives.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Well it's true.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
It most decidedly is not.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Oh yes it is.
No, as I've already explained I am immovable. Since forward is a direction, it indicates movement, of which I am incapable of engaging in.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Okay fine. You don't have to like it, but this play has to end somehow, and the only way that can happen is if you move.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
You would see it that way wouldn't you.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Oh god, you're impossible.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Yes. Well, immovable really. But close enough for colloquial purposes.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
(Desperate...)
Please?

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Oh, well, since you said please; no.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Oh come on! This is getting ridiculous!

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
No argument here.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Oh what, you're agreeing with me now? Doesn't that violate some kind of immovable object union by-law?

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Sir. To be quite honest, I'm getting quite worn by your heaping abuse upon me for my station. As I've stated before, I am the immovable object, not the movable one. For me to move is simply out of the question. I didn't make things this way, I'm simply acknowledging that they are so. If you have a problem with our relationship, I'd suggest you write a sternly worded letter to your English professor detailing your complaint.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Look. Get out of the way.

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
For the last time, no.

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Goddamnit, MOVE SO I CAN GET BY!!!

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
WHY DON'T YOU JUST GO AROUND?

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Oh. I guess I could do that. Couldn't I?

IMMOVABLE OBJECT
Yes.

(U.F. takes a step to the side and sees the clear path ahead of him/her. He/she smiles awkwardly at I.O.)

UNSTOPPABLE FORCE
Um...as you were, then. Carry on.

(U.F. walks forward and exits stage area. I.O. puts hands in his/her pockets and glances around the stage with a slightly lonely look on his/her face. I.O. picks one foot and dips it to the stage, testing what it would be like to take a step, but ultimately not doing so. I.O. whistles to him/herself as the lights go down.)

The End.
A performance by Shepard Fairey Night. With the launch of Pop Short Film Festival an exhibition from young photographer Alissa Anderson, will be sure to ignite all the

Galleries Traditions

Even if you first, you don't find a girl who you're not

Yeah. Sometimes you start.

EDM, will be at things, hitting rock music

It's generally got an attitude of sex being a good thing. Not a

Promised land. — Lance Kramer
It wasn't my first time at Nowhere Saloon, but it was my first night bartending there. Dad had brought me there as a kid and showed me his bar. It wasn't that he was proud; he just had no place to keep me.

The place was a poop hole; my words not his. Nowhere Saloon was on the outskirts of an outskirts town. Its layout was decrepit and proved its disgust level in the can's quality. To this, I was given the reigns.

"Job's simple," Dad said. "You open up; hit the lights and the power. There's no food and you don't serve tables. They come to you and you give them their order, and I could care less if you talk to them. Then bathrooms, sweep, turn out the lights, cut the power, and lock up. I'll count the money and you pocket the tips. Easy peasy."

As a kid I was fascinated by the place. The customers were giants and I looked up to them. There was the slanting pool table which Dad said "kept the carpet from flying away." The booths were stained like the tables. The dartboard was shredded and the stools had tears. And the lights buzzed as the drinkers were. On my first day the bar looked exactly the same. I guess some things can only deteriorate so much.

"Damn kids are slumming it," said the codger in front of me. "When I was a kid—not as pretty as these ones mind you—I worked the fields for pops and sailed off in the Navy. Nothing in the world could explain guttural war to these fucking brats. I'm forced to hate pansies, but I know the value of knowing. I just know there ain't shit worth teaching that I don't already know."

The codger was there with a drink in hand when I opened up the bar. I did a double take, but he said some geezer let him in. He might have meant my dad, but the dollar in my tip jar reassured me that he was a paying customer. I don't think Dad picked me for the job because I was courteous, and I think he thought of me as a little wet behind the ears. But I didn't know how to make it through the night with cuss-ers, drinkers and smokers when I was against all three. Seeing the old folded up man on the bar stool made me realize that I had better acclimate fast.

As for danger in "that part of town," my father assured me that they would behave. "Besides," he said, "there's always old Ilene."

Ilene was Dad's double barrel shotgun that was as old as Charlton Heston. Dad shot a man in the leg once when the guy tried to heist the joint.

"What do you call a man who's been shot in the leg?" He asked, already smiling. "Ilene."

I laughed respectfully every time he told it. There were so many things wrong with that joke. And my dad for that matter.

"No fucking way," the codger said. I looked where he was pointed and saw the four college kids come to the bar. "This ought to give me a laugh." Who knows what he was saying—beyond being a mumbler—he had been laughing for no reason all day.

"Um, yeah," the first college guy said.

"Tell him!" the first girl said. "Yeah we've been waiting for some service—"

"Some fucking service," the second girl said.

"And—" the second guy was cut off by the codger.

"Sporting your college on your shirts—while being cheap advertisements for your university—do kind of single you out as douche-bags."

"Right," said the old crone from the end of the bar.

I scoffed at his audacity, but didn't join the cruel conversation. Such vile anger in his words as he cussed with every breath. Hell hath no idiocy like an old drunk.

"You spoiled whiny bitches," he continued.

"You get paid to read and write, and no better than any bum on the street could. The least you could do is recognize the world you're in; recognize that this kid," he pointed at me, "is a working individual—not some mama's babies—and respect his fucking bar as he tries to put up with slackers like you. You wanna drink, come up like you got a pair."

"Right," she repeated.
I felt admiration for his words then, not just because he threw a back handed compliment my way. "Now," he started, rising his voice along his words," tip the man and get the fuck out of here."
The two girls huffed and puffed and blew themselves out of the bar with one of the guys. The last of the four actually brought out his wallet, put a dollar in the jar, put another, and followed up out with his tail between his legs.

I looked deep into the crevasses of the codger's face. His visage was a cat's toy. The way he pulled at his cigarettes it would seem reasonable that he came out of the womb with one, smacked the doctor instead, and asked with a grunt for a light. In some sick way he became my hero.

"Right," the woman at the end of the bar said again. She was his chorus. At a closer look she was a skeleton dressed in rags, a white wig on her head, and lipstick strewn across her teeth. She scared the poop out of me.

In walked an anomaly. A burly giant dressed in a three pieced suit came to the bar and sat a seat away from the codger. He was wearing butt-kicker boots of the ancient style poor hidalgos or five-o'clocked-shadowed-villainous-cowboys wore. Time sped up in the upcoming exchanges, and I had no time to process.

"Whiskey," he said, "neat." "It's better on the rocks," the codger said. He had spun the stool to face the giant who didn't reply. "You look like corporate America's uniformed shit," a laugh. "But looking at those shit-kickers I wonder. Maybe you're some sociopath with an Oedipus complex waiting to snap." The giant didn't even look at the codger.

"A whiskey drinker should know better than to play dress up," the codger went on. "There're monkeys and gorillas out there. You're another fucking monkey and no fooling me cause I know what you are."

Then the beast looked over to the codger and calmly said, "Ever think you know too much for you own good?"

"Right," said the old crone down at the end. "Shut your fucking trap," the codger screamed. "Aint no prissy company man going to stomp on me. Fuck him and he'd have to eat those kickers if I didn't have a beverage in hand."

"Left," the crone screamed back. The codger didn't have enough time, and he took the blade in the giant's left hand straight across the back. Luckily it just slit through his jacket. The codger stood up and faced the giant who was already up. Though it was fast forward I could have swore that the codger gained a foot in height and twenty pounds in muscle. "Beer me lad."

Without thinking I gave him a beer; even popped the top for him. With a flash he broke the bottle on the bar and held the jagged remnants against the giant. They stood there like Spartans ready for battle.

"Mother," I commanded, "Fuckers." They-looked my way and found old Ilene pointed at their nostrils. "Back off you pricks, before you lose face."

They shuffled their stances and made it to at ease. Then they must have seen that I was close to tears, because they both roared with laughter. The giant sheathed his blade and the codger dropped his broken bottle.

"Two whiskeys, boy," the giant said to me. Still facing the giant, the codger told him, "I dislike you."

"Better make 'em doubles then."
My fingers unstuck from Ilene and I put her down. As I put my heart back into rhythm with a shaken will, I was certain that I was the only one here that was anxiously awaiting last call. Though I would have to come back tomorrow, and they would be here waiting for me.
Hope Rise High Cora
Sean Davis
Thoughts on Law Enforcement
Jenifer Wills

Cops are sharks; undulating through rush hour, in and out of traffic lanes, chasing the scent of blood let by bags of weed tucked in the stuffing under car seats and attacking the dangling legs of prostitutes parked, sucking cock or fucking a lonely school teacher.

Cops are wasps shaken up in their saliva nests, released in streams to swarm the streets in search of chiva balloons tucked discreet in the gums of illegal Mexicans and to circle drunks in the gutter singing songs of lovelessness on certain streets where taxpayers don't want to see that sort of thing.

And although the side of the bright white cruiser says: To Serve and To Protect, I nonetheless feel afraid when he says, 'You know we're going to have to search your panties don't you? We're most certainly going to search your panties.'

More than remains
Gary Burns

With a desk and a beer
I'm here again, one year later
You're asleep with an earlobe covered
Spiders trapped in the light bulbs
I leave empty and darkened.

No, don't arise, let me buzz
In and out like a fuzzy red bulb
On your Christmas tree, now in February
A host to the late night holiday
A family cat for the foot of your bed.

Traditional and public domain
More than remains of a crumbled stomach
In me – big sister heroic
Will you discover the snores
Familiar from the songs we've dreamed?

I am so much more forgetful presently
But unsullied are my memories such that
They always stay remembered
Bearing the sway of the same fruit
From a limber tree, with the dearest anxiety...

Drinking later in the night
No light to favor my reach in your fridge
Another brews while I briefly hear Salvation hummed in a songbird voice Underneath the stereo's noise (did I?)

As the frozen shadows shudder
Or the small wings of silence flutter
It's here in my head, away from a bed That I comb deep for feelings
Bright, believed, the only parts of me asleep.
Knoch back stick around, the kids clamor and lurch with their mouths and hands, thrusting, swallowing. Her stick husband thing covers his flesh with light cotton. She crams them out the door and feels urine moisten her pants.

She floats up the stairs; singing on the wrinkled flaps of her brain is her name "Sandra" and the fleeting essence of her life, sensations and her recollections of events. She turns locks in doors to feel the spinning motion, to feel that she was winding up a vast machine of which she had wrested control away from the others.

She enters her son Richard's room and pushes his army men and trucks into the center of the room, and then stuffed bears and blankets. It burned. All of it. She controlled it as the fabric disappeared and when it was a pulsing pile of plastic, she put on the gloves and began to craft it. It resembled a small melted man who had laid down to rest. She flung its stinking mass on his bed.

And then Ruth's room to remove the head of each doll, and stuffed them in a pillow case; their silent suffocating faces mouthing through the fabric. She ripped up boards in the floor and flung down the bodies.

Over the next couple of hours she transplanted the flower garden to her and her husband's bed until it was covered in mud and reaching gasping roots. She watered it with her own urine. Then she went downstairs to welcome her family to their new world.
He wanted my navel.
I had my eyes on his pinky toe.
He marveled at my appetite.
"Where does it all go?" he'd say,
poking my belly. As for his toe, I liked
the way it curled down, like a China man
forever bowing, "Ni hao."

So we met on the corner
where the junkies get clean needles.
He brought the proper knife.
I had misplaced mine
in the move.
(Why do spare keys
seem to always lose
love?)

But I brought the needle
and thread. He doesn't sew.
I don't either.
But at least I know
how to be precise,
even when the blood
begins to bubble up
through the pin prick holes.
I remembered his hands
being much steadier
when he'd help me onto
his motorbike.
But now his hands were shaky,
wet, clasped around the knife.
Did he lie?
Was this his first time?

I was lying on a bench, my hair
hanging over the end.
I didn't flinch,
and I've developed extraordinary
breath control.
It felt cold
where he cut in—
Autumn air racing
into where it's never been.
It didn't quite slide
like a birthday cake slice
but more like an envelope opener
going through a tire.
He had to do it twice.
I used the tongue
from his leather boot
to fill in the hole, steadily sewing
while looking at the clouds.

He sat on the bench.
With the knife I kneeled on the ground.
And his toe, cowering,
came off like a button mushroom
plucked from the soil, my very first try.
His hanky came in handy, blotted light
red like melted candy.
And then again, I
with the needle and thread,
this time, an eraser head.

And so our parting was done.
And now I have another one.
Next to the ears and chins, fingers,
eyes, ankle, nose, and one very naughty
grin it will go, this oh so very
polite pinky toe.
I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that the universe is an immense living creature of which our planet is one little atom or sub-particle, and that this creature's breathing is what causes the slow expansion and contraction of the universe posited by physicists.

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, actually wrote the works attributed to William Shakespeare. (Not Bacon or Marlowe.)

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that Rob Lowe stopped aging some 20 years ago.

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that the reason people hate and make fun of hippies so much is because they're secretly and subconsciously angry at the Flower Power generation for not making its dream of peace and love a reality. Instead of mourning, we attack.

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that Mark David Chapman was brainwashed by the FBI into killing John Lennon.

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that Rush Limbaugh has a large, painful vagina. (Not that there's anything wrong with having a large vagina.)

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that Donald Rumsfeld is actually a reanimated corpse and eats lizards.

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that Ann Romano, who supposedly writes the Mercury's "One Day at a Time" column, does not actually exist.

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that Williamette Week columnist Byron Beck eats cheesecake alone in dark rooms and curses the cruel and cold world.

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that Barbara Walters has purchased a gun with which she intends to shoot Rosie O'Donnell.

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that even if Barbara has a gun, Rosie will still beat Barbara's desiccated ass to the ground.

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that the real Michael Jackson was killed by a deranged white, female fan who assumed his identity almost 15 years ago.

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that anyone who hates Courtney Love secretly wants to be her. Oddly, or perhaps naturally, this is also true of anyone who loves her.

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that Brandon Boyd of Incubus is tormented by the desire to break up his band and devote all his time to being my hot boy bitch.

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that Minnesota senator Paul Wellstone's mysterious death in 2002 was not an accident, but a political act of revenge against him by Bush allies for his outspoken criticism of the Bush Administration and the Iraq war.

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that the supposed terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 were actually a cover-up for something else, quite possibly a hoax perpetrated on the American people by the ruthless and scheming individuals who hold George W. Bush's puppet strings.

I am convinced, though I cannot prove, that Richard Simmons is actually a gay hobbit. (Not that there's anything wrong with being a gay hobbit.)
The Pathetic Fallacy
Kevin Richard Jones

And, therefore, the gentian and the sky are always verily blue, whatever philosophy may say to the contrary; and if you do not see them blue when you look at them, it is not their fault but yours.

John Ruskin, Of The Pathetic Fallacy, 1856

And so it is the same with you, the plausible descriptions, hard and good, the kinship bonds and the sacrifice of one life for another, the placating rhythm of mine, mine, mine, yours, the blanket credulity of hand holding, and mild sweetnesses of the new, the new spilling, the new earth each morning moist on its way around, touched by feet, by all kinds of eyes, looking out or looking in, each a separate system, each a monument, singular and universal, pregnant with desire, wishing the cold colder, wishing the wish stronger than the effort of trying, of our incessant returning, the replay running scattered screaming down the hall, this lonely couple strolling through the mall, buying tee shirts and pants and eleven dollar sweaters, their kids the only memory of a kiss gone dispassionate, come only monthly with the credit card statement, which is no statement at all, in fact a corporate reminder of the corporeal flow, a sanitized bloodletting with periodic spikes in interest, a kick-ass trip to Disney World, the magic empire, high on Space Mountain, riding the market wave, the elevated ghost train, and back on the sofa with arms and feet safely inside the ride, click, click, click, click, the gun blast and silence, water drips cold from the faucet, channels changing in the dark, they smile and they sleep, they walk and they sleep, they sleep and they sleep and they sleep.

Peek in their rooms at night. Lock the doors to keep them safe. Leave the nightlight shining late down the hallway, azure down the stairs and out the door. Sit on the moon’s metallic ledge and watch them closely, and if you do not see them blue when you look at them, it is not their fault but yours.
Invertebrate
Jonathan Stone

Linearus: that lapidary carving etched onto the hippocampus with more definition than the words used to describe it, more divinity than a forked branch of elm, yet reveals only an opaque film of what happened before the end, before the division, flesh from flesh, warmth from softness, a touch of pressure and a migraine from the tattooed impression you stenciled into my tenderness.

Labium: edge of singularity of spirit of communion, the event horizon from which nothing escapes and returns the same, changed as vibration-signal communicating sometimes sometimes the eternal tremble moistened and sensitive to subtle touch, reactive to delicious decadence conch shell revealed smooth and pink and trembling [and

naked:
she can’t hear her own soprano tongue nor taste it like I can.

Lingua: syllables strung-out and exhausted, formed from extinct animals whose offspring are breathing their voices and scraping their tongues with quills like razors sharp enough to lobotomize even the thickest mollusk – and all you said was love.

Wash
Laura Kate James

The wind billows white cotton sheets, Amy clips clothes on the line. She’s

Three months and barely showing. You Watch her from the table through

The kitchen window. Coffee’s cold, Half empty cup in your hands, held

Too long. In pocket, you finger The diamond long meant for hers.

Amy hangs the wrinkled, wet, see-Through shirt to dry. It will still be

Damp this afternoon when you pack Your suitcase full of clothes and back

Out of the drive, ring and all. You Won’t look back or in the rearview

Mirror as you go so you won’t See Amy run out to the front

Yard with one hand on her belly, Flip-flops flying, she’ll be yelling,

Fuck you Charlie. Yeah, you’ll just keep Driving. But you drink cold coffee

Now at the table, and make a List of favorable baby names.