

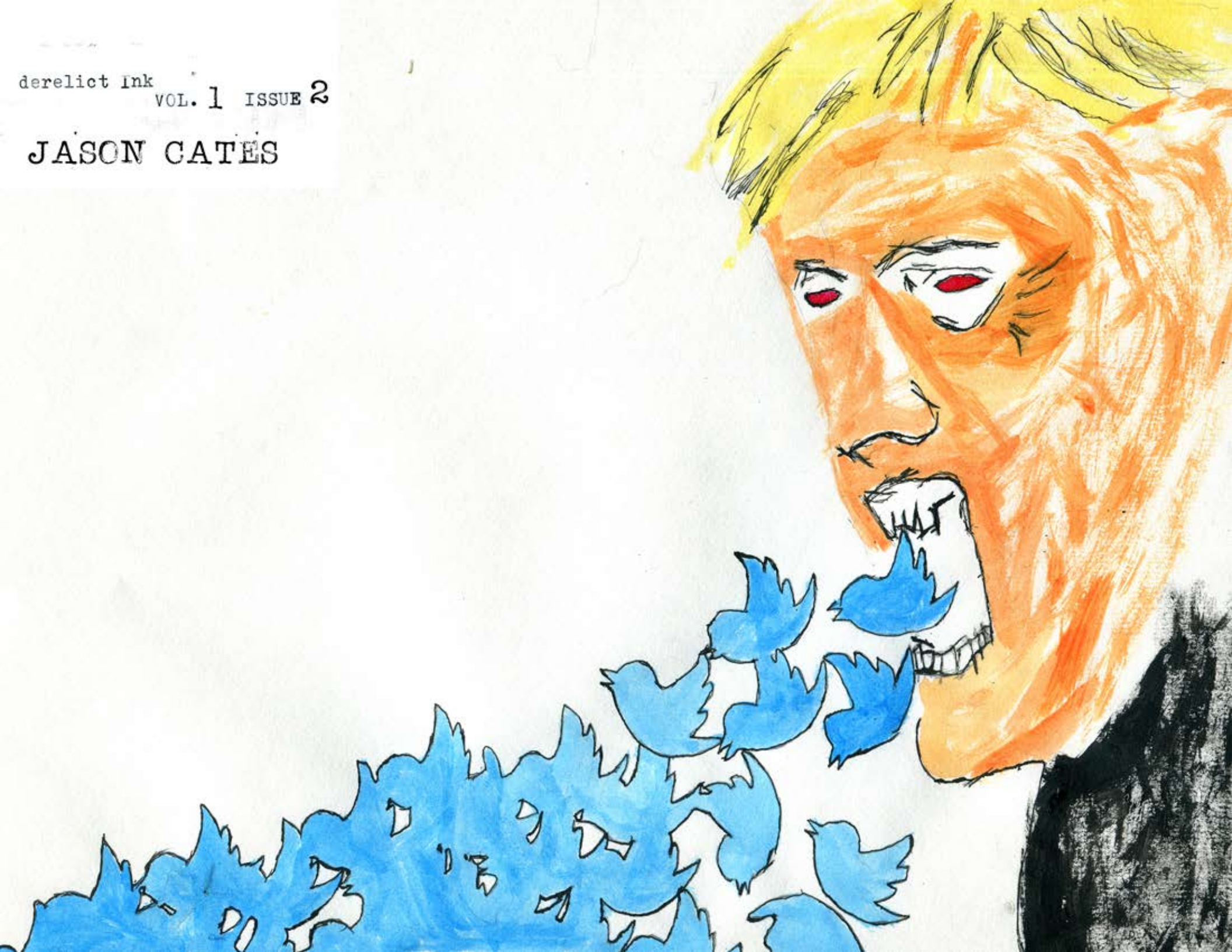
derelict ink  
VOL. 1 ISSUE 1-12

Core Edition

Jason Cates

derelict ink  
VOL. 1 ISSUE 2

JASON CATES



# *Commander in Tweets*

*My Chirping  
resonates*

*invigorates  
the base*

*ostracizes  
the fakes*

*contradicts  
the past*

*jeopardizes  
the future*

*rejects  
the facts*

*embraces  
the now*

*extrapolates  
the headlines*

*erases  
the deadlines*

*my words are a ruptured septic line  
spewing sewage upon the streets  
most turn their nose up  
others shove it down their beaks*

*for they are the few who honor me  
as the one  
the only  
commander in chief*

## CANSEI DE SER SEXY

Green sat in the board meeting, one leg draped over the other slowly kicking back and forth, while the members nodded with the rhythm of the young analyst droning on about data points. Her mind numb with the figures and stats, she let out a sigh of despair. Not a single board member turned from the Power Point projected on the wall to acknowledge the sigh. It was time for her voice to be heard she decided. A scene must start with bold action, not mere words spouted into the air conditioned breeze, with that in mind she planted her white high heel against the solid wood table and kicked off.

A chain reaction of epic proportions then occurred, or at least when it came to board meetings. One member noticed their glass of water slosh around, then noticed Green staring at him with a look that sent a chill through his veins. For fear of what would happen he tugged onto the sleeve of his colleague next to him without looking away from Green. The colleague turned out of frustration, and met the gaze of Green. He turned away just long enough to get the attention of the third board member across from him. The fourth noticed the third turning and all the board members stared at Green. Sensing something was amiss the analyst turned from his presentation stunned, and dropped his laser pointer upon the floor.

Green let the silence in the room build till she saw one of the board members visibly sweat. Then she unhooked her left high-heel and let it clatter to the floor. Her foot had been marred from the white shoe binding. When she undid the other heel, a band-aid dropped onto the floor with it. One of the members shuddered at the sight of the ruptured blister that it had covered. Green ignored the shudder, and proceeded to remove her gloves, which she dropped on the floor near the shoes. She then began to remove the false eyelashes she wore, rubbed off the slightly darker lipstick, and brushed off her drawn on eyebrows. The board sat shocked and dumbfounded.

As she stood from her chair, the members rose to still maintain a view of her. She looked each one in the eyes, then turned and began to leave the room without a word. It wasn't until she placed her hand upon the chrome door handle that one of the members spoke.

“Where are you going?” he asked with a minor hint of command trying to leap through the fear. Without turning from the door she said, “I got tired of being sexy.”

12/12/2017

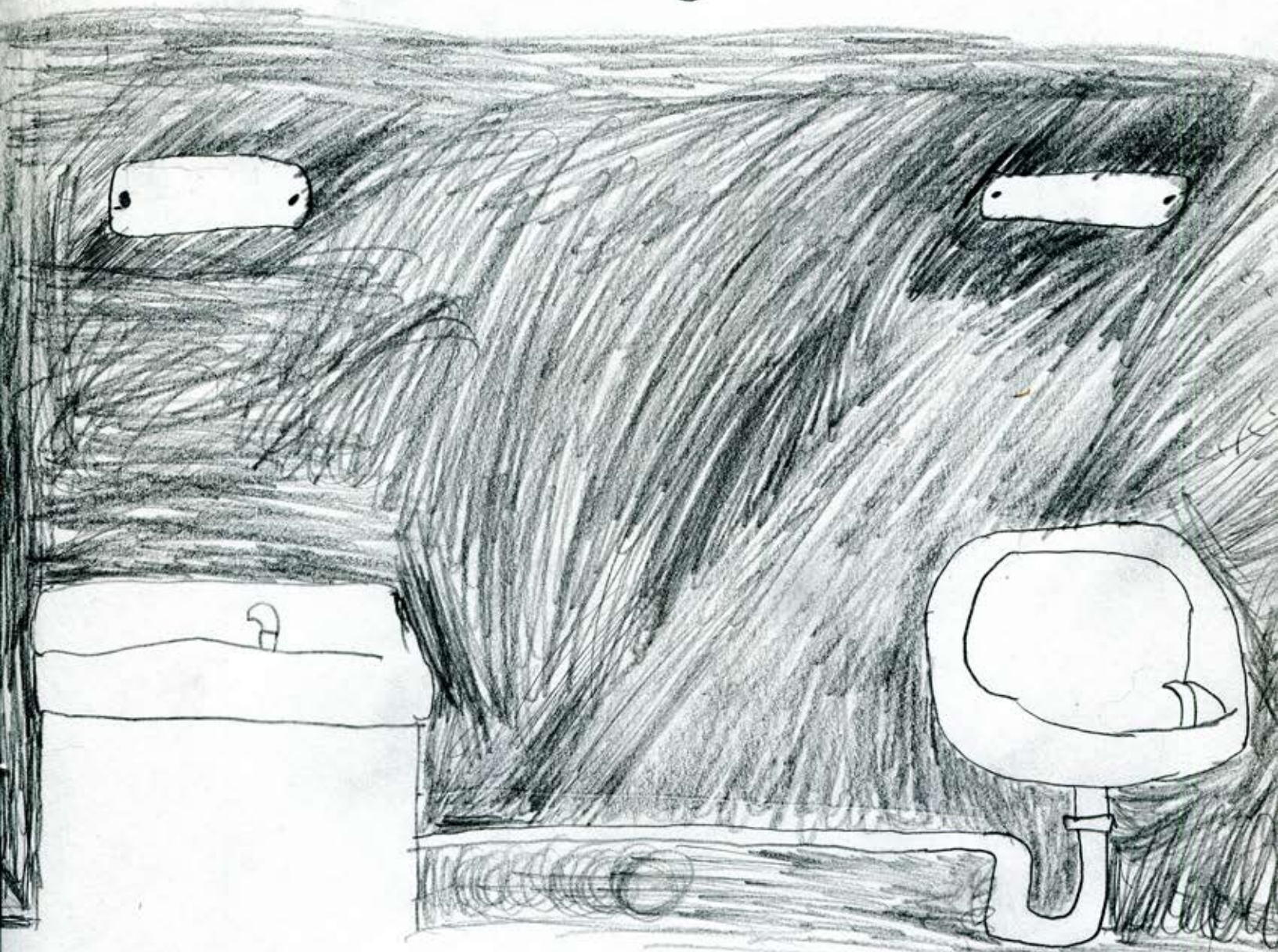
WHERE WAS YOUR GOD  
WHEN YOU FILLED IN THE BOX  
BY THE PEDOPHILE  
WAS IT OUT PLAYING GOLF  
OR AWAY AT A SAUNA  
WAS IT BUSY KISSING THE FOREHEADS  
OF THE UNBORN  
WAS IT PIECING TOGETHER  
ABORTED  
FETUSES

OR WAS IT LIKE YOU  
NOT ALL THERE  
FAR REMOVED FROM ITS ACTIONS  
SPOUTING OFF FREE WILL  
BUT MAKING SURE ONLY THOSE AT THE TOP  
CONTINUE TO BENEFIT FROM THE WORKING  
CLASS  
ERADICATING EDUCATION  
REPRESSING ANYTHING UNCLEAN  
WEEPING FOR MURDERED BABIES  
BUT NOT CARING FOR THOSE THAT ARE BORN  
CALLING OTHERS LEECHES  
WHILE SUCKING FIRMLY ON THE SYSTEM  
FEELING GREAT PRIDE  
AND NEVER SEEING THE FALL

WHERE WAS YOUR GOD  
WHEN YOU SIGNED AWAY YOUR SOUL  
TO A PARTY OF MAN  
WHERE WAS IT  
WHEN YOU EMBRACED THE BIGOT  
SUPPORTED THE NEO-NAZIS  
RAISED UP THE FLAG OF THE DEFEATED  
CHEERED ON THE HOMICIDAL MOTORIST  
CRIED OUT FOR THE WHITE LIVES  
AND THE BLUE

DO YOU REALLY THINK ALL IS FORGIVEN?  
EVERY SLATE WIPED CLEAN  
ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS BELIEVE  
FAILING TO LOVE THY NEIGHBOR  
WILL LET YOU SLIP  
INTO THOSE PEARLY GATES  
DO YOU REALLY THINK ALL IS FORGIVEN?

The Signs are gone



But the fixtures  
Remain

## WHERE THE GIANTS FELL

SIT DOWN  
DOWN AMONGST THE DIRT AND ASH  
WHERE THE MONOLITHS SCRAPPED THE SKY

RUN YOUR FINGERS THROUGH THE DEBRIS  
FIND THE SHATTERED GLASS  
THAT SHIMMERS LIKE THE DREAMS  
DREAMS OF THOSE THAT HAVE GONE  
THOUGH YOU SEE BEAUTY IN THIS  
KNOW THAT THOSE DREAMS SHINED NOT FOR BEAUTY  
BUT GREED

THEY WORSHIPED THE INDIVIDUAL  
PURSUED THE INTANGIBLE  
SURROUNDED THEMSELVES IN LUXURY  
PLENTY OF THINGS THEY COULD NOT REALLY AFFORD  
YET NEVER HAD BUT A DIME TO SPARE FOR THE POOR

DO YOU KNOW WHY THESE TOWERS FELL?  
THOSE AT THE VERY TOP GREW SMALLER  
AND SMALLER  
THOSE BELOW LEFT LONG AGO  
AND THE WEIGHT OF THE EXCESS AT THE TOP  
CAME CRASHING DOWN

NOW IT IS UP TO YOU TO CHOOSE  
THE WAY OF A TRIBE  
OR THE PURSUIT OF THE INDIVIDUAL  
EACH REQUIRE FAITH  
FAITH THAT OTHERS WILL SUPPORT YOU  
EITHER THROUGH ALLOWING YOU TO STAND UPON THEIR HEADS  
OR TO HELP YOU WHEN YOU FALL DOWN  
JUST ASK YOURSELF  
WOULD YOU RATHER BE STEPPED ON  
OR HELP OTHERS UP



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*refresh*



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**POLITICAL SATIRE, MAGIC, AND COMEDY**

*Plus...*

**FREE Personalized Pen with Pencil**  
*There's no obligation.*

**Oh Snap!...**  
My Alien Children Are Trying To Kill Me



A  
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Lust for a car in the drive?  
Apply some cream  
Wanting that faithful hound?  
Apply more cream  
Can't find that perfect spouse?  
Apply even more cream  
Can't score the perfect job?  
Apply just a little more cream  
Perfect house not materializing?  
Apply another layer of cream

Car got stolen?  
The cream can't fix that  
Faithful hound got ran over?  
The cream can't resurrect the dead  
Perfect spouse wants a divorce?  
The cream doesn't got your back  
Accident on the job?  
The cream doesn't cover medical care  
Perfect house foreclosed?  
The cream won't help you off the street

The Cream  
you see  
it's just not very reliable  
cars are not for everybody  
pets will come and go  
spouses a mere roll of the dice  
jobs time sucking device  
house a shell of retreat when time has been devoured  
use this cream if you must  
but just know  
the dreams of others  
are rarely worth dreaming



*"The Best is always  
worth waiting for"*

Are you looking for  
the most possible suction power?

A vacuum that can suck every  
last bit of joy

from your life

bright shining moments

drained of their triumph

things you once loved

reduced to gray memories

brief tatters of laughter

removed quickly from the corners of

your lips

all this can be yours for a price

and that price is usually

your life



**Suck-A-Matic 2000**

*"All that the name implies"*

ELECTRIC VACUUM CLEANER CO., INC., 1722 Ivanhoe Rd., Cleveland 16, Ohio

Please send me the name and address of my nearest authorized Premier  
dealer, so I can take advantage of the Premier Priority Plan.

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ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY & STATE \_\_\_\_\_



# Sole Sanctuary

At the Sole Sanctuary we focus on  
the individual  
you alone are perfect  
you alone are great  
the others that shackle themselves  
to the groups  
mock you for your views  
but you know the truth  
that if one is good all are good  
if one needs help well they should  
help themselves  
no one is incapable  
because the one is  
creativity and prosperity would  
reign  
if we did away with rules and  
regulations  
utopia is a step away  
a single step  
they may say it's irony when we  
say join us  
but you know better than they

you have principals  
and they do not  
they do not understand our  
respect of neo-nazis  
or that trickle down economics  
just takes a while  
or how deregulation will  
increase wages  
and safety  
our intelligence surpasses all  
those college students  
we stand above them and know  
the true path  
seeing only the individual is  
the key  
there would be no bigots if  
they just grabbed this key  
we cannot worry ourselves with  
bigots now  
there are more important things  
like joining groups and posting  
memes

NO FUMES

# SWAMP DRAINER

Want to rid the swamp of all the muck?  
Dispel all the flesh peddlers and corrupters?

Fill in the gaps left behind with good  
god-fearing men

men who know how to treat a woman right

men who know the truth beyond the facts

men who worship the glorious framers

men who know the true ache  
of the homeland

well I sure have the cure  
the number one never failing

## SWAMP DRAINER

It wipes the slate clean  
completely

totally  
indefinitely  
all will be one  
and all will be  
none

now you may be saying to yourself  
boy golly that sounds like a miracle  
and miracles don't come cheap  
and you'd be right

it'll cost everything and more  
those miracle men well they'll be so busy  
fixing all the things that will go wrong  
the nightmares of today will be dreams  
on a summer day when the sun will burn  
the skin

all  
because  
you wanted  
those evil men  
those intellectuals

those scientists

those economists

kicked to the curb  
removed from the swamp

What's left in a swamp if you remove the life?  
Muck

and you without a rake

# YOU ASKED FOR IT!

# LOW TIDE



W

Ronald "Six Gun" Samuel was the lowest of lows, down and dirty, no good piece of work that ever emerged from the dry desert plains of Texas. Born to impoverished dirt farmers he earned the food upon his childhood plate by stealing from the collection plate. That all came to an end when the preacher found young Ronald with his fingers in the godly till. Ronald got the best of the preacher and stuck him with a pen knife. After that day Ronald ran from town to town staying only long enough to clean out the drunks. The well of luck eventually ran dry for young Six Gun. One star-filled night the town drunk happened to be the meanest and vilest sheriff in a not so small town. This particular sheriff also wasn't quite drunk when Ronald slipped his hand in the sheriff's pocket. The sheriff slid his revolver out of the holster. In no time a posse was upon Ronald and they dunked him in the watering hole then dragged him up a small hill where a single tree stood. They tossed up a rope and pulled down a noose. Two men hefted Roland upon their shoulders.

A

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"Any last words" the sheriff asked before he gave the signal. "Thanks for the washing, these clothes are hang dry only" Ronald said with a laugh.

The two men let him drop like a burdensome rock.

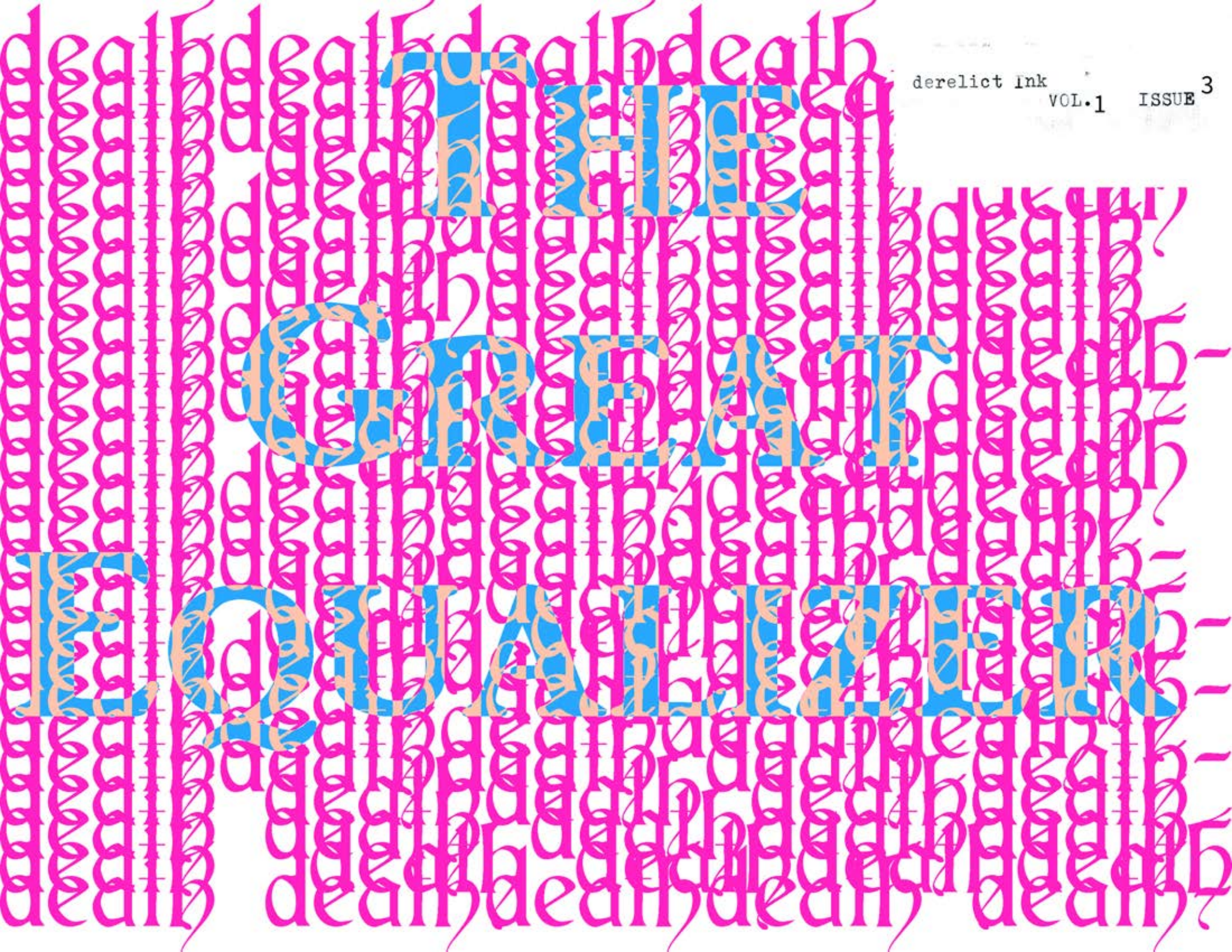
G  
F L U I D

And thus was the end of Six Gun Sam a man who gave a damn about his laundry.

It is in his honor that we at **LOW TIDE WASHING FLUID** are proud to announce new

**HANG DRY ONLY WASHING FLUID**





The egg  
it was brave  
it rolled and rolled and rolled  
over  
Edgar Allan Poe's grave  
the people exclaimed  
"My what a brave  
brave little egg"  
some might say  
you can never be too brave  
but the egg sure was  
for it rolled up here  
it rolled up there  
it rolled just about everywhere  
through the streets and the gutter  
splashing in milk  
wading in butter  
"What a sight"  
the people raved  
covered in milk  
lathered with butter  
then one day the egg went astray  
when he rolled into a school yard  
the children gathered around  
the egg rolled this way and that way  
but the children gathered in closer  
then one named Jimmy meandered in  
raising his foot on high  
the egg tried to roll out of the shadow  
but Jimmy's foot came down  
like a bolt of lightning  
with a crack and a splash  
the brave little egg  
was gone



*A sparrow flew by  
as a knight errant died  
the weight of his heavy armor left him stuck in the mud  
his squire had pulled him up against a tree  
then the young lad took four arrows to the chest and collapsed near by  
the battle had been over for awhile when the knight saw the sparrow  
flying on by without a notice of the knight  
the knight began to wonder why the Lord had spared him  
but not the others whose cries of anguish  
were extinguished by the sword of their enemy  
others whose wounds might have been mended  
yet here he lie out of sight to die*

*the sound of breaking branches distracted him from his crisis of faith  
he looked around fearing and yet hoping someone had come  
to end his suffering*

*slowly the knight gained sight of a man in a robe  
a simple beggar thought the knight  
how shall he end my suffering swiftly  
though even a clumsy end would do  
then he thought of his soul*

*God had spared him for a reason surely  
he wasn't meant to only suffer under the tree*

*the beggar seemed to be unaware of the dying knight and went walking past*

*"Sir would you be as kind to do a dying knight a favor?"*

*the robed man stopped and turned back to the knight*

*he slowly approached the knight without a word*

*reaching up the beggar pulled back his hood*

*the knight attempted to stifle his horror*

*lesions marked the beggars face*

*marks the knight had been warned to avoid*

*"Whatever would a knight request from a man so cursed?"*

*"Only to carry a message."*

*"A message not to be heard? One that if heard shall be ignored?"*

*I ask again, what shall a cursed man do for a dying knight?"*

*Anger coursed through the broken knight*

*it quickly ebbed as he realized it wasn't in jest*

*but in truth the beggar spoke*

*"End my suffering."*

*The beggar looked at the knight with contempt*

*"Often those very words have left my lips. Just as often I received the same response."*

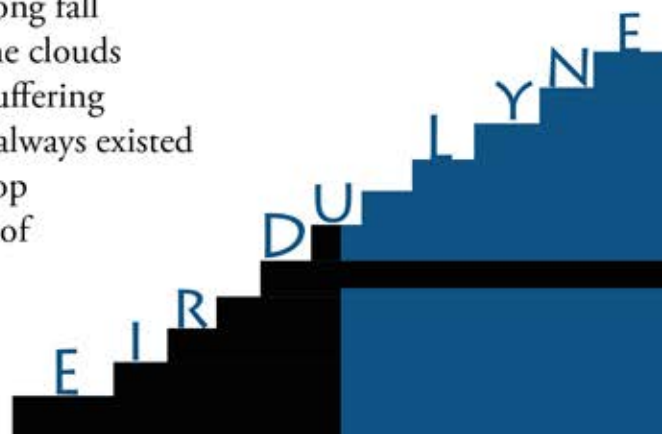
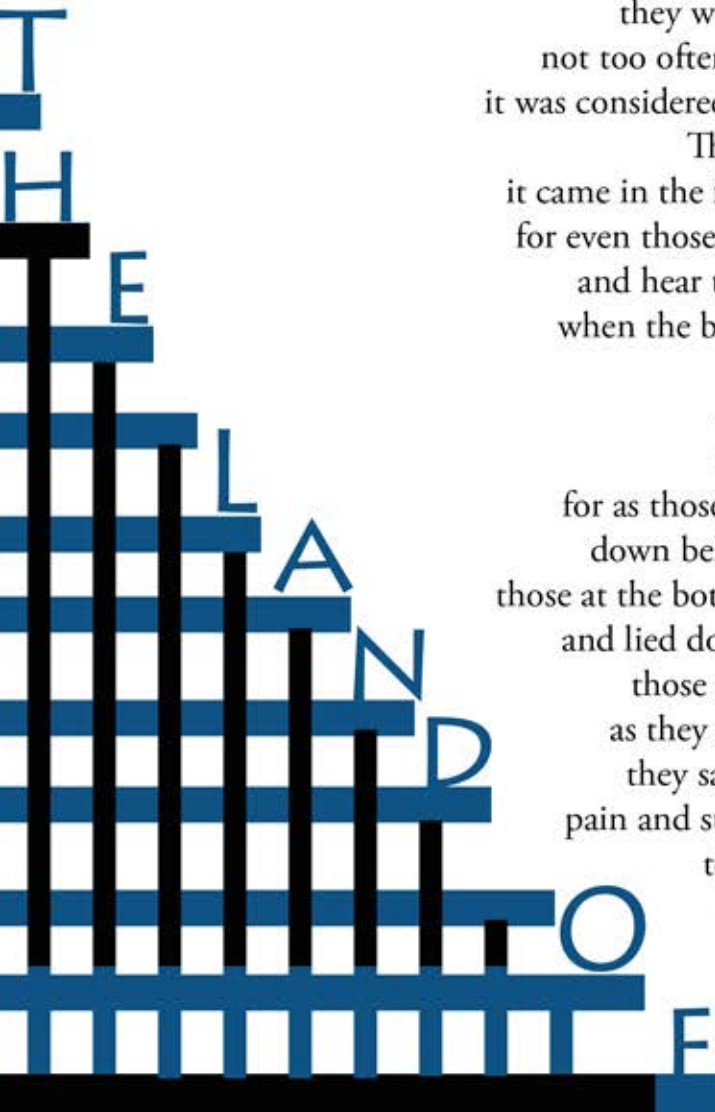
*With that the beggar pulled up his hood and walked off*

*followed behind by the curses of the dying knight*



The land of Eir Du Lyne was always awash in brine  
it was made up of a single mass that stretched into the heavens  
at the bottom was a swampy mire  
composed of the dead and sometimes dying  
few souls ever ventured there willingly  
the ones that lived above the mire were the carrion class  
making a living off the scraps of the dead  
few above wanted these items so trade was among themselves  
above these traders of the dead was a sort of wilderness  
strange animals dwelt and weird plants grew  
Above this the working class began  
the creatures of this level would emerge from their dwellings  
to scurry up one level to do tasks  
this pattern repeated all the way up  
until the land reached the clouds  
Above the clouds it never rained and was sunny all day  
this is where the ruling class lived  
rarely they could see through the clouds  
and even then they really didn't see what occurred below  
occasionally those just below the clouds would venture up  
at the request of those above  
they would discuss things below  
not too often did it go too far from the top  
it was considered rude to bring up the carrion class  
Though one day it was  
it came in the form of a warning from far below  
for even those at the bottom can see the cracks  
and hear the groans of the foundation  
when the burden it bears grows too large  
this warning  
as is often the case  
arrived far too late  
for as those up top plotted their survival  
down below the fatal crack occurred  
those at the bottom had come to accept their fate  
and lied down while the levels above fell  
those at the top had a long fall  
as they passed through the clouds  
they saw the pain and suffering  
pain and suffering that had always existed  
to keep them on top  
thus was the end of

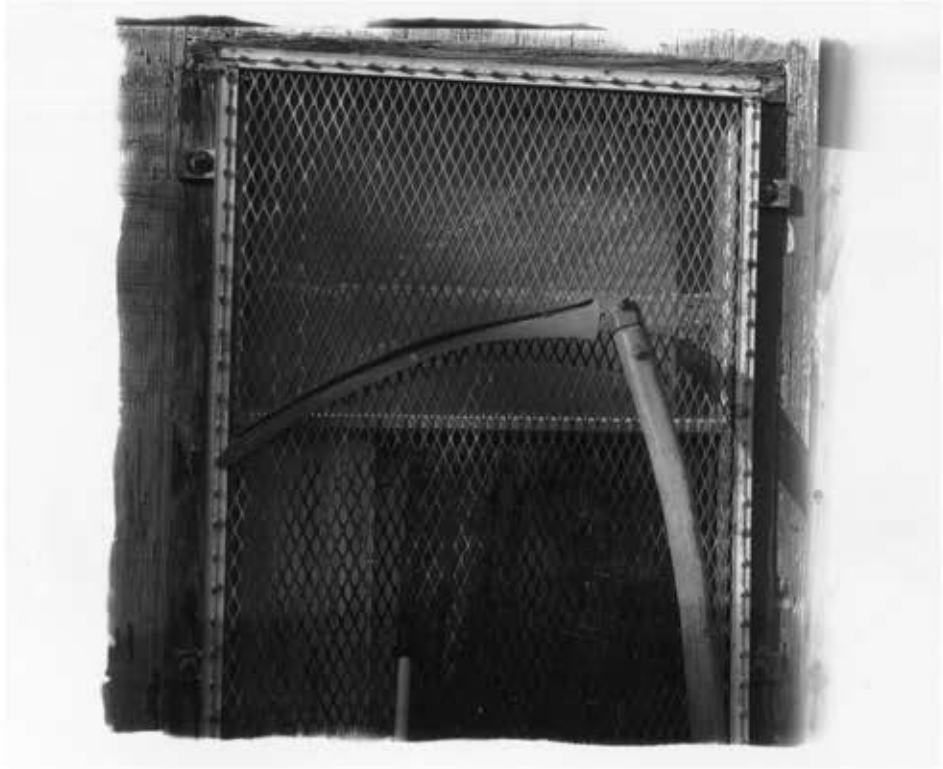
Eir  
Du  
Lyne



# *Down by the Water*

Samuel Brown was the man of the town  
from the bakery to the butcher  
down main street and up 2nd Avenue  
everyone knew his name and his claim to fame  
old and young wished to bask in his presence  
though for Brown all the ups the others did see  
he could only see the down  
a daughter that had a love of travel  
lost in the deep dark sea  
a courageous son who went to the battlefield  
assumed dead and unaccounted for  
a once loving wife full of life  
reduced to a weeping wraith  
three lives in tatters and not a thing he could do

then one day while he was getting a quarter pound of ham  
he looked out the shop's window to see a young officer of the law  
he made not of the man's presence then turned away  
as he left the shop the young man placed his hand up Brown's shoulder  
Brown turned to the young man  
and saw tears running down the young cops cheek  
"Your daughter and son have been found"  
the young officer said through tears  
Brown desired the tears to be that of joy  
however he settled in for grief  
the young policeman seemed to dread each step he made  
not even glancing at the solemn man that followed him  
Brown tried his best not to imagine the horror that awaited  
as they approached the docks hope rose into his chest  
then dread returned when the young man told him to wait  
alone Brown stood as the salt breeze stung his cheek  
slowly the young cop reappeared from behind a large shipping crate  
he seemed to be motioning others to follow  
hope leapt up through Brown from his heart and through his crown  
a frail framed woman stepped into view  
and a rather shabby male followed behind  
a sharp pain then struck Brown and sent him down to the ground  
he saw the frail beings run towards him  
and felt them cradling his head  
"Finally you've returned" he spoke  
then spoke no more

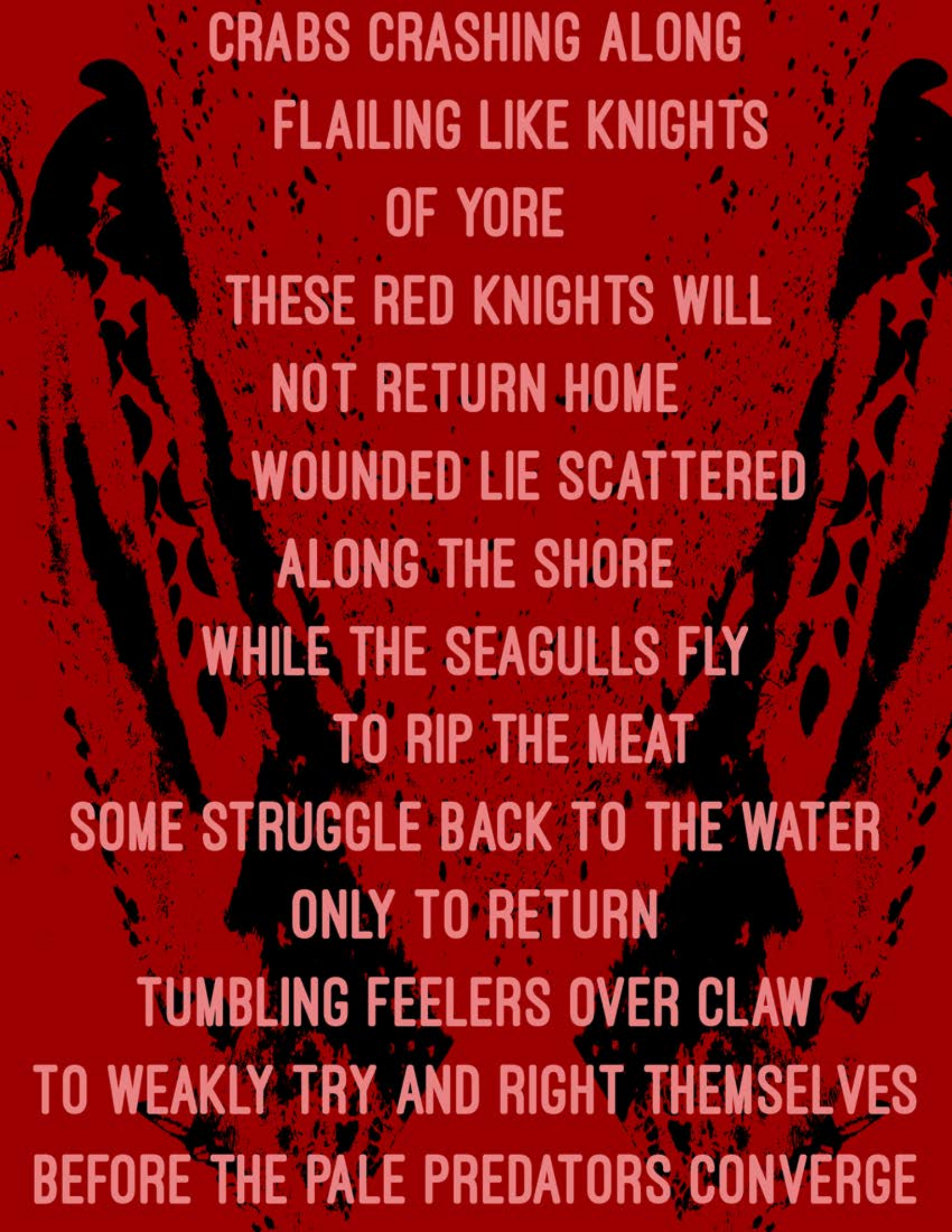




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VOL. 1 ISSUE 4



*Broke  
Spoken for  
The total tailored suits  
Fend for themselves  
Their seams are unseemly  
When the light hits just right  
Dark nature speaks from their  
fabric  
Emulsive layers drip off  
Lining only remains  
As the raw suits parade  
Down memory lane*



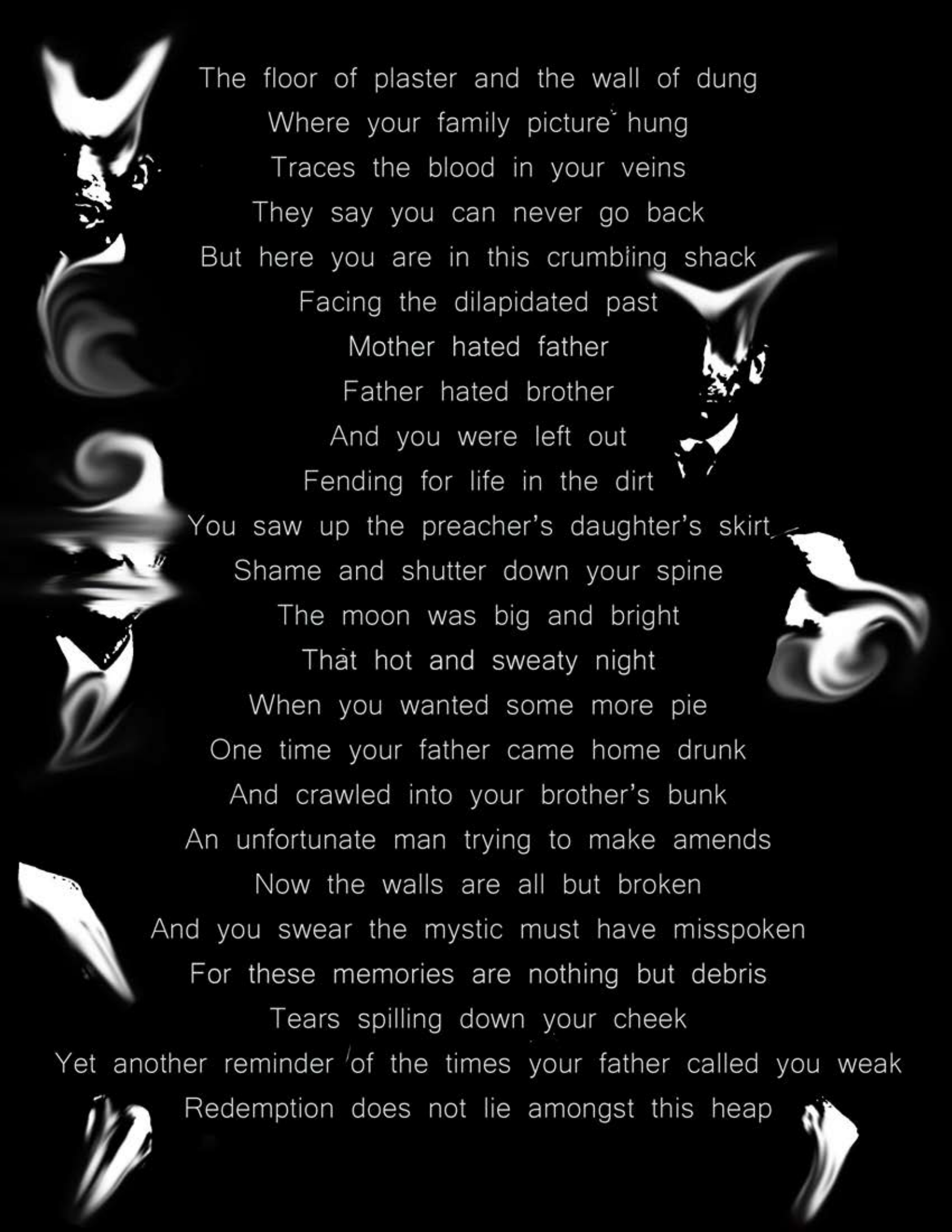
CRABS CRASHING ALONG  
FLAILING LIKE KNIGHTS  
OF YORE

THESE RED KNIGHTS WILL  
NOT RETURN HOME  
WOUNDED LIE SCATTERED  
ALONG THE SHORE

WHILE THE SEAGULLS FLY  
TO RIP THE MEAT

SOME STRUGGLE BACK TO THE WATER  
ONLY TO RETURN

TUMBLING FEELERS OVER CLAW  
TO WEAKLY TRY AND RIGHT THEMSELVES  
BEFORE THE PALE PREDATORS CONVERGE



The floor of plaster and the wall of dung  
Where your family picture hung  
Traces the blood in your veins  
They say you can never go back  
But here you are in this crumbling shack  
Facing the dilapidated past  
Mother hated father  
Father hated brother  
And you were left out  
Fending for life in the dirt

You saw up the preacher's daughter's skirt  
Shame and shutter down your spine  
The moon was big and bright  
That hot and sweaty night


When you wanted some more pie  
One time your father came home drunk  
And crawled into your brother's bunk  
An unfortunate man trying to make amends  
Now the walls are all but broken

And you swear the mystic must have misspoken  
For these memories are nothing but debris  
Tears spilling down your cheek

Yet another reminder of the times your father called you weak  
Redemption does not lie amongst this heap



I SEE THE SICKLY TREACLE PEOPLE  
FUSING WITH THE FRIGID FRIDAS  
MELDING WITH THE MELTING MENTALS  
GRINDING WITH THE GRIMY GRABBERS  
NETTING WITH THE NASTY NATIONALISTS  
COMBINING INTO A COLUMN OF FEAR  
BINDING THE BRIERS WITH THE FIRES  
THE STRUCTURE OF INCOMPLETE COMPLETENESS  
DRAWS THEM OVER THE EDGE  
THEY TUMBLE AND FLAIL  
SCREAMING OBSCENITIES LIKE FREEDOM AND RIGHTS  
WORDS THEY KNOW NOT THE MEANING  
YET KNOW THEIR VALUE  
SHOUTS RINGING IN THEIR HOLLOW HEADS  
VALUING LOVE  
BUT BREEDING DECAY  
CORRODING THE FOUNDATION OF THEIR CURSED UNION  
OPEN THEIR EYES  
THEY SHUT THEIR MINDS TIGHT  
GUZZLING POISON  
CRYING OUT IN PAIN  
YET LIFTING THE BOTTLE BACK TO THEIR LIPS  
JUST ONE MORE KISS OF DEATH



Oh humanity  
where art thou  
thy lover of peace  
worshiper of love  
bringer of life

those you hold on high


love thy self

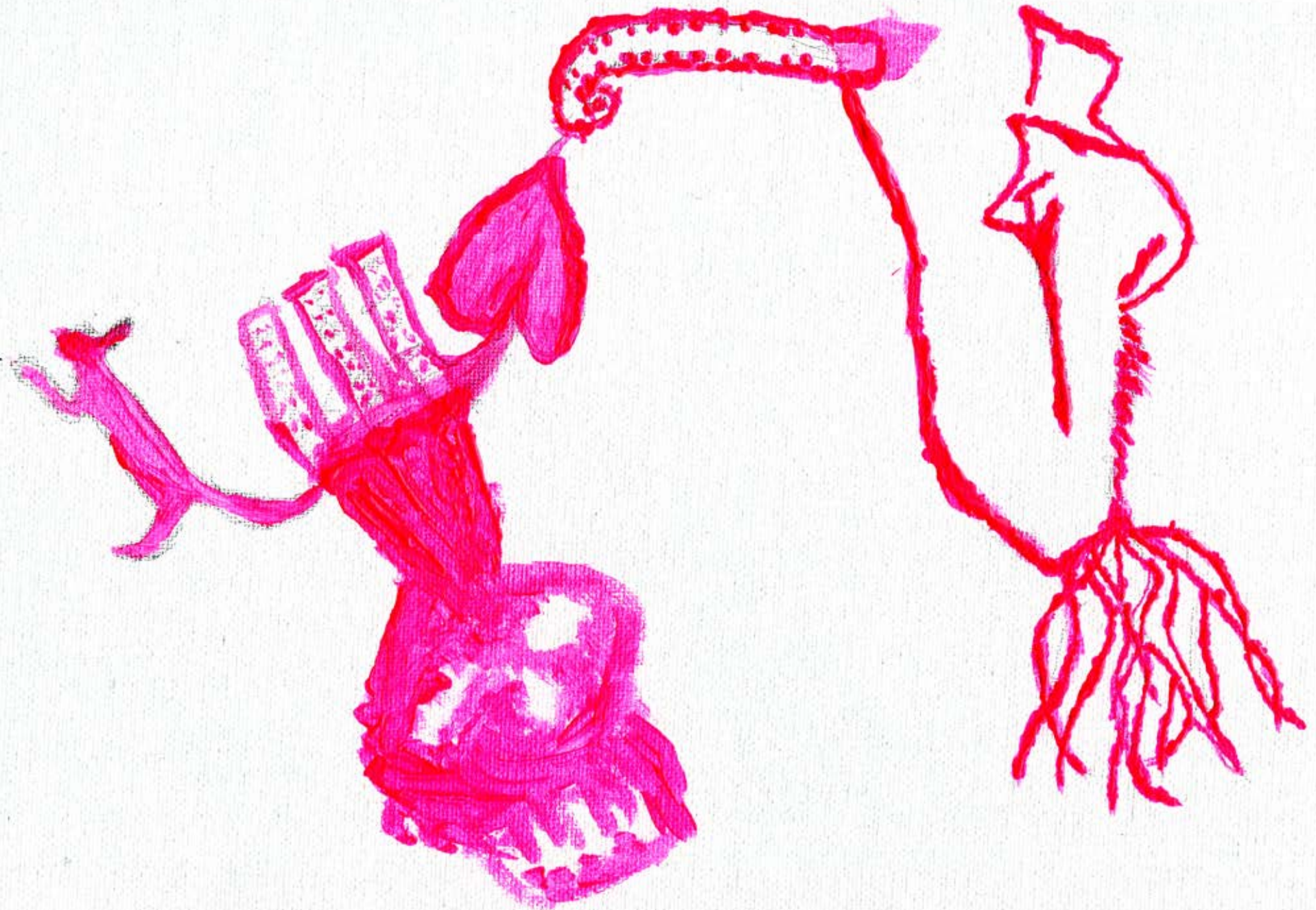
worship wealth

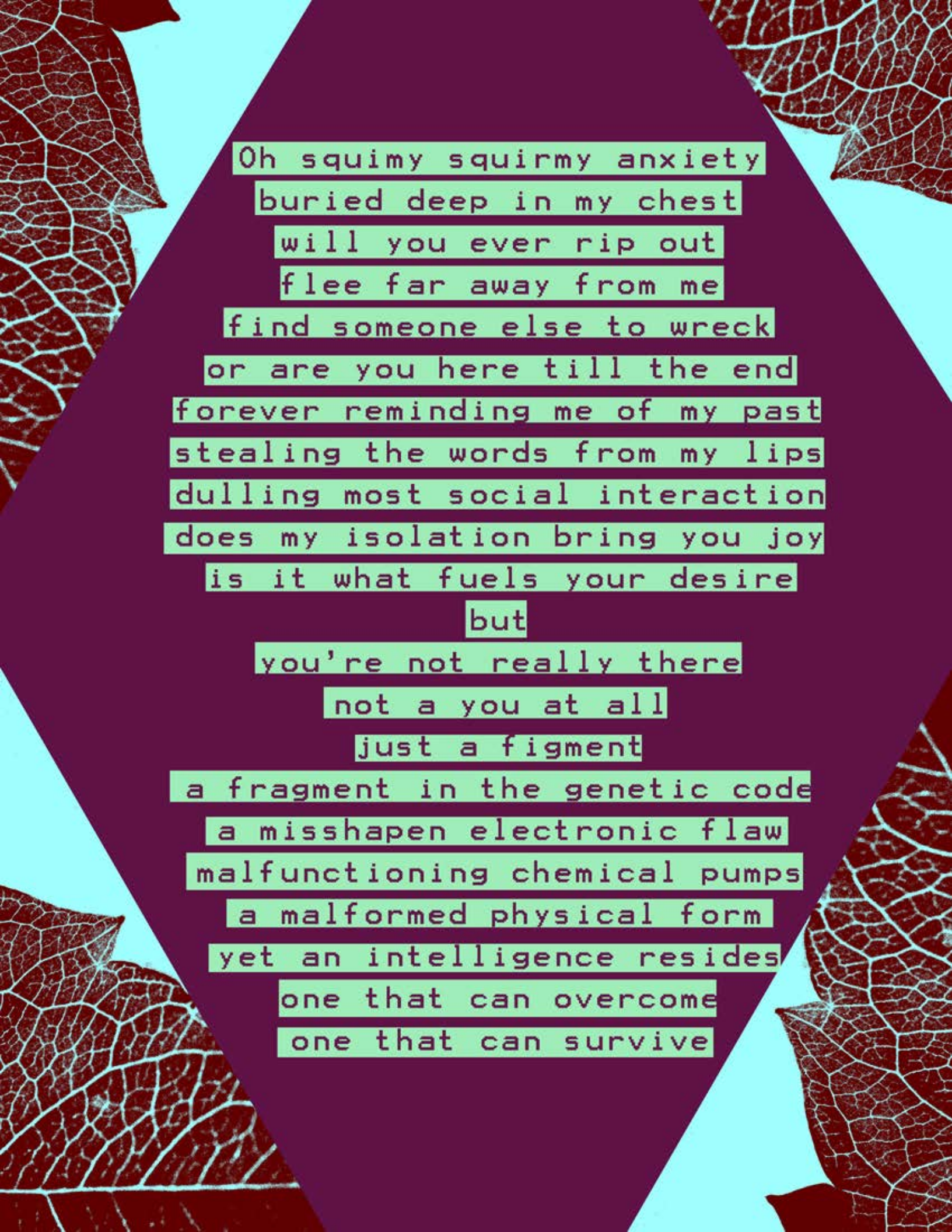
bring destruction

Oh humanity

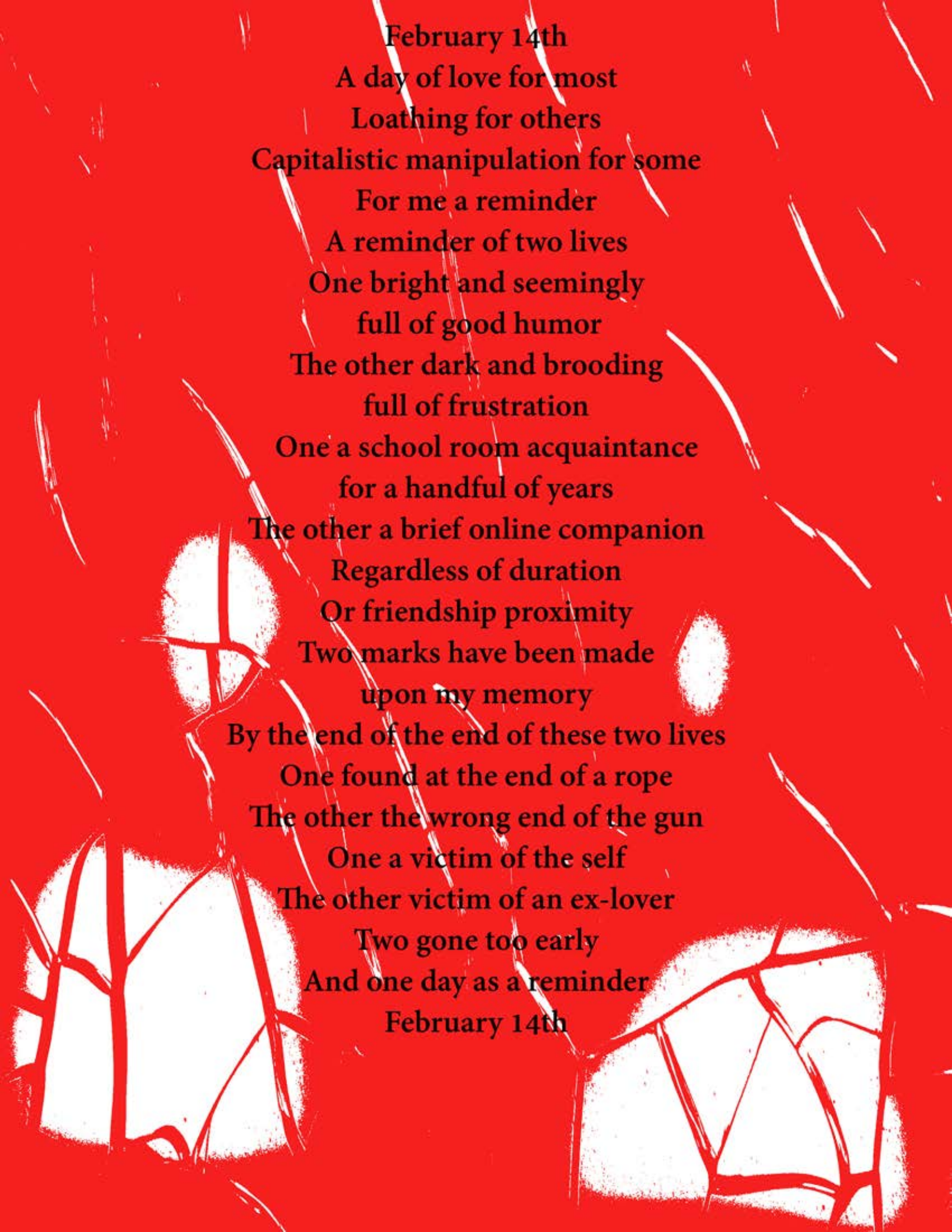
what is thy value







Oh squimy squirmy anxiety  
buried deep in my chest  
will you ever rip out  
flee far away from me  
find someone else to wreck  
or are you here till the end  
forever reminding me of my past  
stealing the words from my lips  
dulling most social interaction  
does my isolation bring you joy  
is it what fuels your desire  
but  
you're not really there  
not a you at all  
just a figment  
a fragment in the genetic code  
a misshapen electronic flaw  
malfunctioning chemical pumps  
a malformed physical form  
yet an intelligence resides  
one that can overcome  
one that can survive



February 14th  
A day of love for most  
Loathing for others  
Capitalistic manipulation for some  
For me a reminder  
A reminder of two lives  
One bright and seemingly  
full of good humor  
The other dark and brooding  
full of frustration  
One a school room acquaintance  
for a handful of years  
The other a brief online companion  
Regardless of duration  
Or friendship proximity  
Two marks have been made  
upon my memory  
By the end of the end of these two lives  
One found at the end of a rope  
The other the wrong end of the gun  
One a victim of the self  
The other victim of an ex-lover  
Two gone too early  
And one day as a reminder  
February 14th

The city I live in is a ghost  
while life may course through it  
the soul is nothing but tatters  
filled to the brim with movement  
yet lacking any finesse  
a skull full of brains  
that does nothing more than mumble  
and plead  
muscle firm and strong  
yet physical strength does not make up  
for the mental malaise  
goodbye fabled city  
for you were probably always  
a bloated corpse

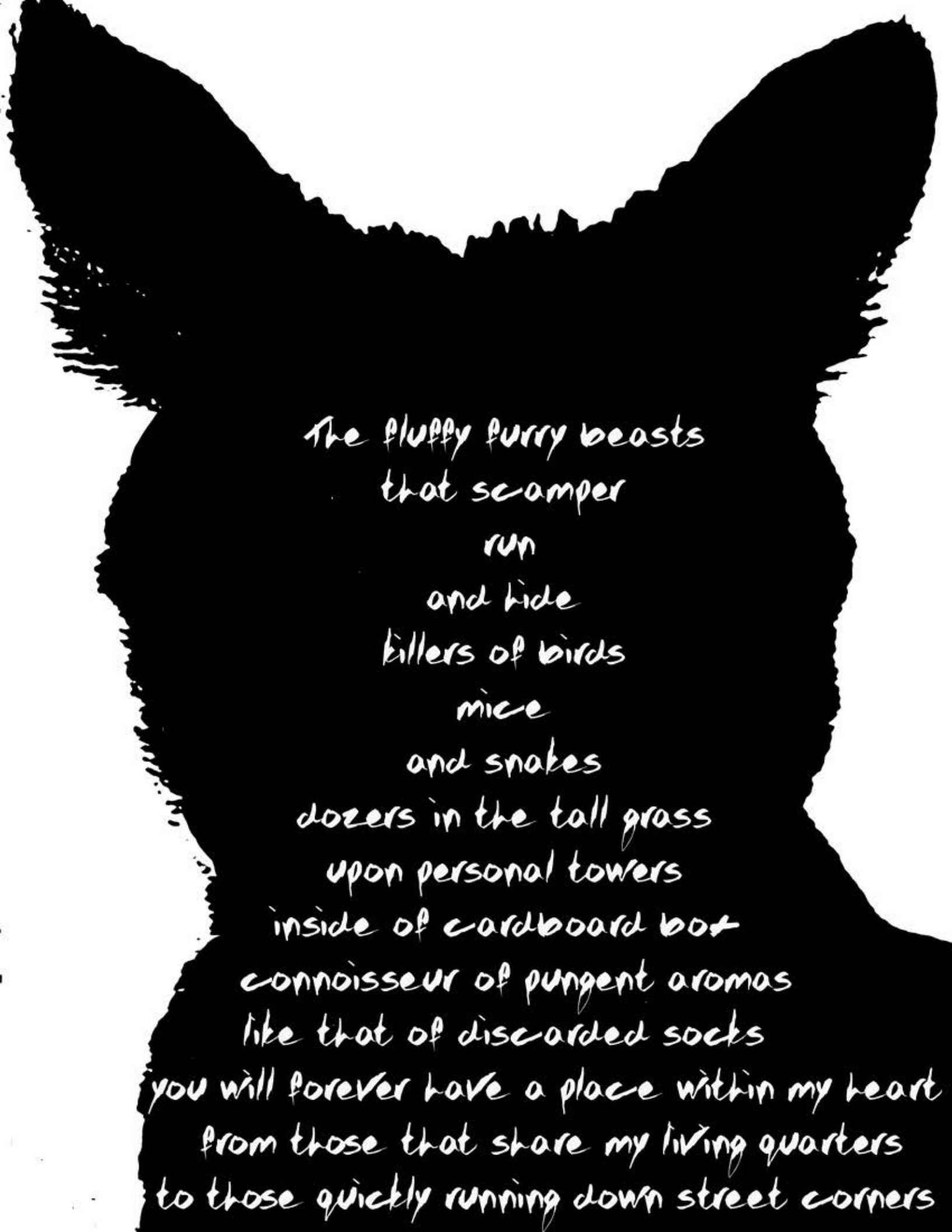
*An escape at times  
Mere distraction at others  
Rarely a revelation*

*Yet forever a pursuit  
Dreams of creating them  
Like the masters I seek*

*Time consuming  
Emotionally draining  
Even failure can be success  
Once they are complete  
But complete is just another word  
For a beginning and an end*

*One can cut and cut away  
till nothing of essence remains  
Or build and build till a mountain reigns*

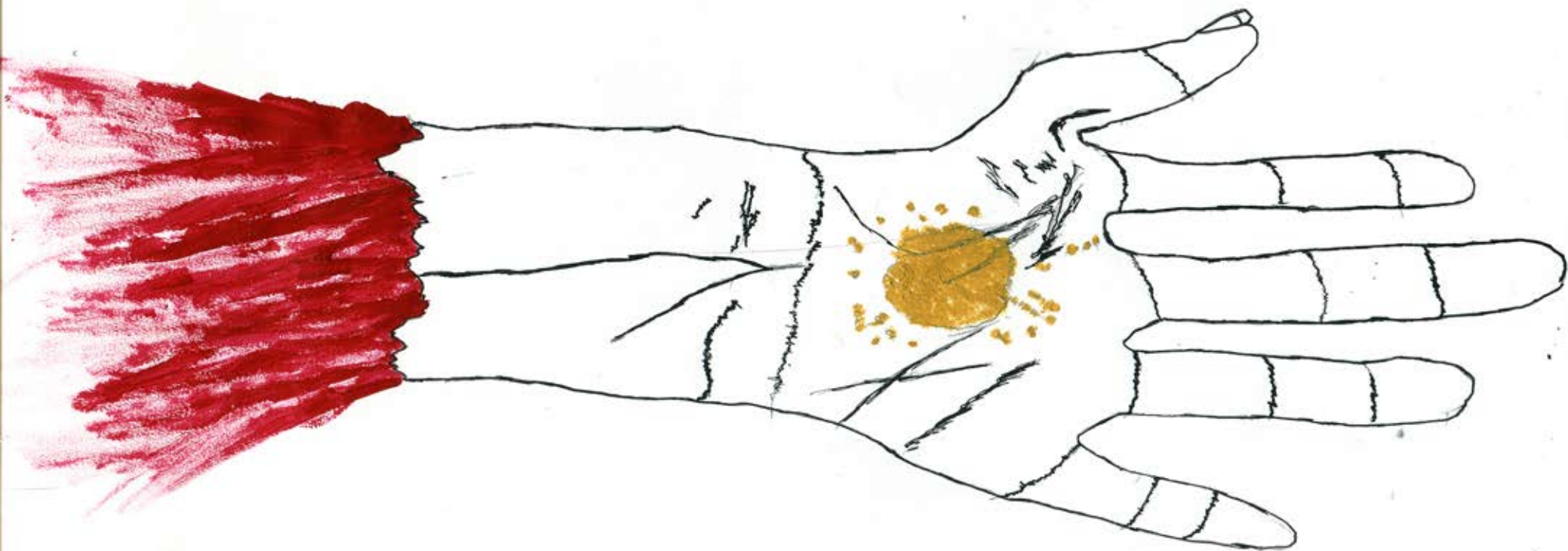
*Sometimes just a pile of rocks  
Others a build up to a majestic peak  
All in the name of cinema*



The fluffy furry beasts  
that scamper  
run  
and hide  
killers of birds  
mice  
and snakes  
dozers in the tall grass  
upon personal towers  
inside of cardboard box  
connoisseur of pungent aromas  
like that of discarded socks

you will forever have a place within my heart  
from those that share my living quarters  
to those quickly running down street corners





derelict ink

VOL. 1 ISSUE 6

Orange banana lemon  
Mango on the lamb  
Splitting the hairs of trees  
Across the romantic land  
Cherry tulips dripping dew  
Into a bowl of crystalline  
Overflowing into the Nile  
Where the crimson crickets  
Pull out their violins to sing  
Cinnamon spice brings the dead to life  
And the rotted corpses dance throughout the night  
Licorice liquor wraps up the wounds  
That time has struck and sundered  
Time slips back and forth  
Rewriting lives  
Till fathers and mothers  
Become sisters and brothers  
Mutating the family trees  
The bees pollinate children  
Instead of trees  
And as the sun sets  
It's already  
started  
to  
rise

# WHEN IT'S OVER

GRAY GRASS SPLINTERING      THE MOUNTAIN SIDE  
    NEAR A FIRE      DESIRE'S FLAME BURNT OUT  
SPUTTERING AND GAGGING      IN ITS LAST BREATH  
WILD CATS WHINE OUT      WITH THE PASSING  
A GENTLE TOUCH STIRS      ONLY A DULL SENSATION  
WHERE ONCE A HEART  
    GREW WARM  
IT NOW GROWS COLD      AND CRACKS APART

## NO TEARS

ONLY ABBREVIATED REGRETS  
    SWIM  
IN THE SHALLOW END OF THE POOL

# *The Human*

FRANK CONVERSATION ON THE LAWN

BREATHTAKING STRANGLERS UP BY DAWN

YOUNG LOVERS COURT EACH OTHER WITH THEIR FISTS

LONELY TEENAGE SUFFERERS GET HARD WHACKS UPON

THEIR WRISTS

PLAYFUL PACIFISTS PREACH

RACISTS RIOT FOR FREE SPEECH

BIG MAN UP TOP SCREAMS THAT HE'S THE CREAM OF THE

CROP

WHILE THE MISSTEPS HE TAKES NEVER SEEM TO STOP

WORKERS KEEP ON PUNCHING THE NEVER ENDING CLOCK

AND SHIPS KEEP ARRIVING AND DEPARTING FROM THE

DOCK

THE WORLD KEEPS ON SPINNING AROUND THE SUN

AT TIMES IT SEEMS THAT MANKIND MAY BE UNDONE

BUT IT'S ALL JUST WAVERING PATTERN OF PUZZLE PIECES

THAT WILL KEEP GOING UNTIL MAN CEASES

# *cycle*

# Ways of war

FROZEN FIELD

BREAKING BLADES UNDER TATTERED BOOT

FEET ROTTING

WOODEN GRIPS OF RIFLES TEARING AT FLESH

LANTERNS BURNING

WAR MACHINE KEEPS TURNING DEVOURING THE YOUNG

STOMACHS RUMBLING

WHILE THE INFANTRY MOUNTS THE THE ASSAULT

MACHINE GUNS CHUGGING

MOWING

DOWN

FIFTY

MORE

SOULS

NOW THEY SIT IN AIR CONDITIONED CENTERS

DROPPING BOMBS ON WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

REDUCING HOSPITALS TO RUBBLE

RUNNING AROUND IN ARMORED VEHICLES

STUFFING THEIR FACES FULL OF TACO BELL

WHILE THEY KEEP ON DYING

IT'S MOSTLY DUE TO GROSS INCOMPETENCE

Brutal lamb

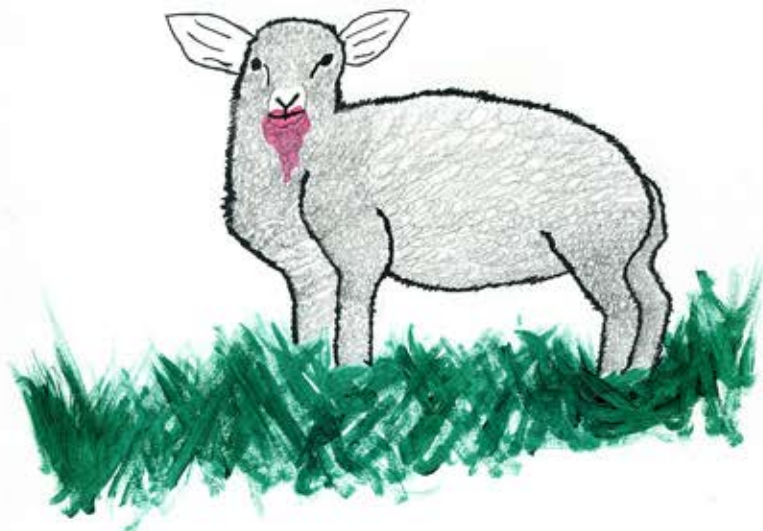
Running through this land

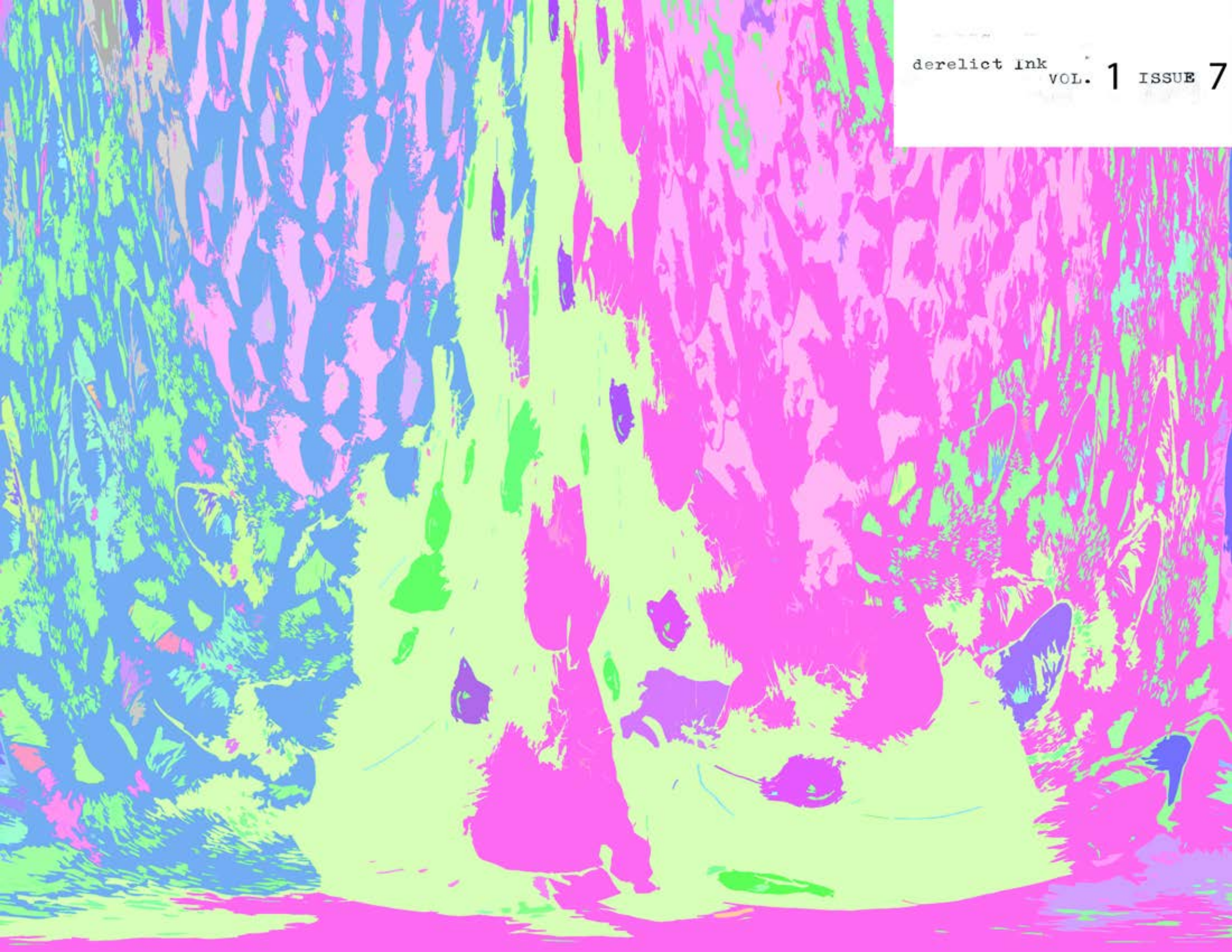
Take the hand

Of those who feed you

For they only feed you

To make you food of their own





## *Possum Paul*

*Possum Paul wasn't bright at all  
Or even tall for that matter  
His eyes were there  
but he often did stare  
And saw nothing at all  
He liked to crawl up into trees  
When something scared him  
Mostly starving dogs  
That munched on rats  
Occasionally the dogs would nip  
Catching the tip of Paul's naked tail  
Somehow the sluggish possum  
Could scramble up the trees just fast enough  
One day he met his match in something a bit too fast  
As he crossed the road to find out what was on the other side  
He heard a loud rumbling noise  
And saw a large truck barreling down on him  
He scampered and skittered  
but his feet just weren't fast enough*





## *The Midnight Bandit*

*Into the night creeps Raccoonous*

*Slowly*

*Carefully*

*Avoiding anything louder than a rustle*

*Sniffing around for a bit o'crumb*

*Standing on hind legs to get a better view*

*Using gloved hands to go through knocked over trash cans*

*Eating the food left out for cats*

*Fighting with dogs over bric-a-brac*

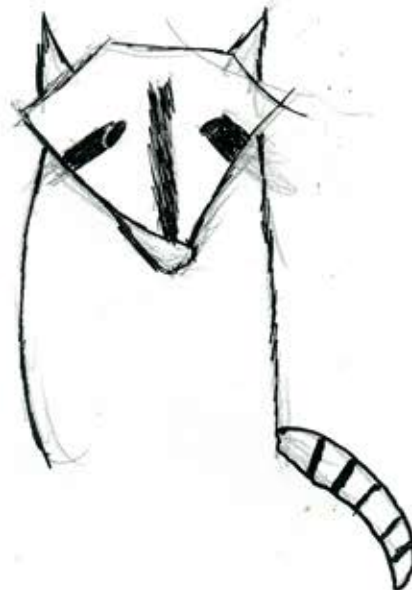
*Drinking from streams*

*Before raiding campsites*

*Throwing down seeds from the trees*

*Scattering at the sound of footsteps*

*Then disappearing before the sunrise*



## *Looking for a Bite to Eat*

### *Fox Friend*

*Built a den in a stack of sticks*

*A mother*

*two kits*

*Emerging from the den*

*Into the heat of the afternoon*

*Stepping swiftly*

*Then stopping every few feet*

*Glancing around*

*Searching for danger*

*Finding nothing*

*She moves on*

*Toe nails clicking on paving stones*

*Rounding the corner of a mobile home*

*Stopping in her tracks when on the porch she sees*

*A human with their kitty friend*

*She stands and observers*

*As the porch dwellers stare back*

*One with curiosity*

*The other apprehension*

*Slowly she approaches*

*Paw before paw*

*Until one paw rests upon the first step*

*The cat hisses*

*Sending her running back the way she came*



## *Ginger Tom*

*Ginger Tom was a cat built of muscle*

*His coat was patchy*

*All scabs and scars*

*He roamed from patch to patch*

*Running down his competition*

*The land was his land*

*And not yours*

*Occasionally he'd be sighted*

*With a svelte admire*

*Some say he once was tame*

*A friend to humankind*

*Now quite wilder*

*Disappearing for weeks and months*

*An orange and white phantom emerging from the tall grass*

*for a bit of food*

*It's been awhile since he was last spotted*

*Though maybe some day soon*

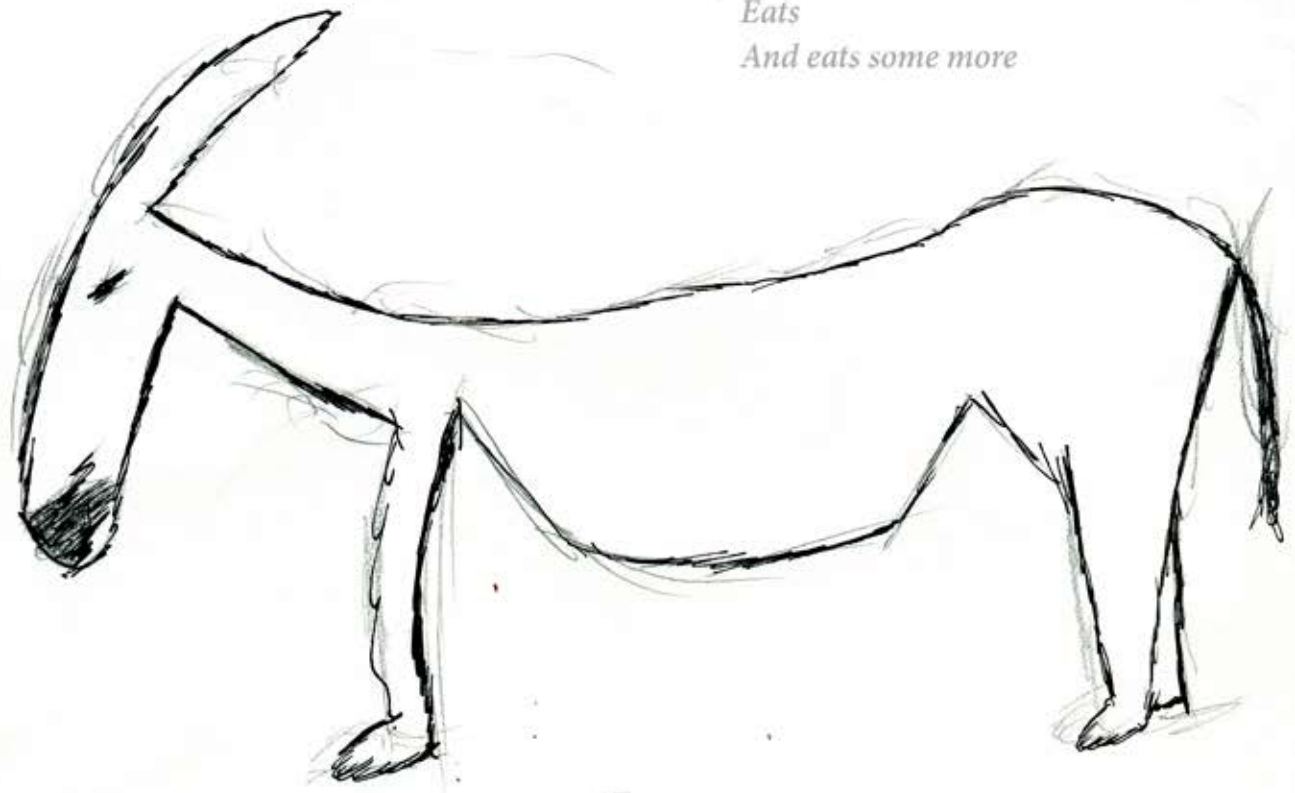
*he'll come walking down the drive*



## *Waiting for the Old Man*

*Alone in a field  
Underneath the lone tree  
Stands a donkey  
Just waiting  
Waiting  
And waiting  
Then waiting some more  
For the old man to bring some oats  
The old man is slow  
Keeps the donkey for last  
The donkey knows the old man's arrival  
Before it even sees him  
The sputtering old tractor  
Gets the donkeys ears flicking  
The jangling of the chain  
fastening the trailer to the tractor  
Gets the donkeys ears drooping  
It does not care for the harsh metal clang  
But it dare not move from it's sacred shade  
There it waits  
Waits  
And waits some more  
For that gurgling tractor to come to a stop*

*Then the donkey waits some more  
While the old man creeks and pops  
Just like his faithful tractor engine  
Still the donkey waits  
Waits  
And waits  
For the old man to get the food out of the trailer  
Then slowly as a sly donkey can move  
The donkey makes its way to the feeding spot  
A well trodden bit of land  
Where bits of old hay stand  
Still holding the smell of old rain from a week ago  
There the donkey stands near by watching the old  
man  
Always the same procedure  
Scattering the hay in a neat little pile  
Leaving a little spot in the middle  
Where the old man dumps a bit of oats  
The donkey's favorite bit  
The old man makes the noise he usually makes  
Which makes the donkey's ears lift  
Then the old man rubs the donkey's nose  
The donkey watches the old man leave  
Then eats  
Eats  
And eats some more*



"When will we discuss the changes that are in all of us?"  
"August."  
"What is the purpose of that month?"  
"Discussion."  
"It is the time to generally discuss?"  
"It is a time."  
"Like today and tomorrow?"  
"Just the same, but not yesterday."  
"For yesterday has come to past."  
"For yesterday has come to past."  
"Will revolution take flight tomorrow?"  
"Time will tell, though sometimes it must be informed."  
"In what form?"  
"Sights, sounds, and other ways that send society spinning around."  
"Then what? Peace?"  
"Chaos, for it is the way of life."

"And then there will be peace?"  
"No, just more chaos. As there was in the beginning and as there will be after our end."  
"So why bother with revolution?"  
"Cause it's ever a bother to just sit around and be depressed."  
"I suppose you have a point."  
"Maybe I do, maybe I don't. One should never waste time on the words of others without having words of their own."  
"So if I were to follow such words, would I then also betray them?"  
"They are only a reference, and there are plenty that would say otherwise."

# The Lord Who Could Not Take a Hint

There once was a handsome suitor who traveled from afar to take the hand of the fairest maiden. Even in the land where he came from there were stories of her beauty. He was convinced that his main goal in life was to see all the beauty he could find. Yet as soon as he set eyes upon this particular maiden all the beauty that he had ever beheld smoldered into ash. From then on he declared to himself that he would make the maiden his. Which he surmised would be simple as he heard it told that he was the handsomest man from any land, and beauty looks well upon beauty.

First he jumped through all the traditional hoops to even get a moment of her time. The moment he found to be cold and dreary, her beauty merrily an unreachable lighthouse in the fog. The more he tried to pry into her clammy mind, the tighter it clamped shut. Mentions of his riches and lands got nothing but a stray glance. Defeated, he arose and left her there in silence. Before he opened the door he turned and declared, "I will return and you will love me."

His first act to win her love was to conquer all between his land and that of hers. It was a long bloody time spent upon the field of war. Once what was a beautiful visage was scared almost beyond recognition, yet he had won. Though when he made it back to his pursuit, she was even more frigid. Just like before he turned and said, "I will return and you will love me."

The second act he decided on was that of forgiveness. He went throughout the lands that he had torn asunder in the name of love. In each realm that he conquered he set forth to repair the damaged that was done. Atrocities addressed as best as he could do, captured men he did release, and families he reunited. All this repair took even longer than the carnage he'd unleashed. He was sure as he rode toward his prize that she did know of all the good deeds he had done, yet still when he arrived she refused him. So just as before he turned toward the door and said, "I will return, and you will love me."

# The Folly of the Enlightened

There once was a person who journeyed up a hill  
They huffed and puffed  
While sweat poured out

And they thought their mind had grown clear  
With each step they took  
another revelation

Till they arrived at the top

Where they shouted down at those below who couldn't hear a  
sound

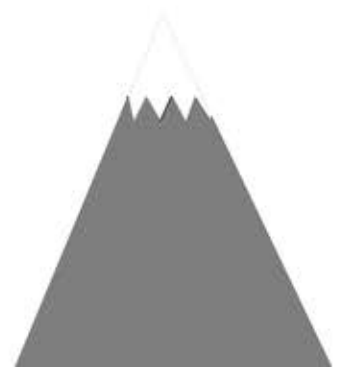
“I've made it to where I can see all, yet you see nothing!”

Upon a mountain near by another spied through a looking glass

“Look there”

They said to their companion as they handed over the looking  
glass and pointed to the hill

“Another blind soul.”



The third and final act he did commit was that of humbling. To his land he returned and sold all that he had, renounced all his claim to the lands, and set off on foot to the women he loved. A journey which was treacherous on horseback, suicidal upon foot. Offers of transport were given, but not taken. Years and years passed by as his two feet carried him on. When he finally arrived at the domain of his true love. His skin had grown taut, hair long and gray, feet well worn and rough, and a stomach that was long past empty. A long talk with the guards ensued before he was brought before his true love. Her hair was a bright shimmering silver, but her face no less fair. Slowly he approached and croaked, "Will you now love me?"

"No, and I never will. You first came here expecting love because of your long journey. Never had I met you or had you met me, and you expected love? Then you commit murder and take people's land. Why would I find love with a villain? Then you try to make amends with the people that you wronged. You claimed to do that for love, but if you knew love, why would you have wronged those people so? Finally you humble yourself for me, but never did I ask you to. Never did I ask you to come here. Never did I ask you to war and rage. Never did I ask you to seek redemption. You believe you did this all for love, but never did you learn you did it for yourself."

Struck dumb he collapsed upon the floor and died.



# *Not All Want to Return*

A farmer stood in a field examining his withering crops. Taking the dried and dead leaves into his leathery hand, and then tore the branch asunder. As it crumbled in his old hardened hand, he heard the approach of another. Turning from his wretched lot, he saw a thin man in a long black suit. Jet black shades covered his eyes, hiding them from the slightly shocked farmer.

"Can I help you mister?" the farmer asked the man in the suit.

"Are you Arthur Kent?" the suited man responded in a low rumbling bass tone.

"Yeah that's me...how can I help you stranger?" the farmer said motioning for the man to follow him to the shade of his house.

They approached the shade of the covered porch of the old farm house in silence. The boards creaking and ever so close to finally cracking, was the only thing in the farmers ears. Then nothing. Shrugging without a thought of what to do, the farmer sat down upon his favorite rocking chair and motioned for the stranger to sit in his wife's chair. A chair that hadn't been sat upon since his wife had died last year.

"You sure are a friendly lot." the stranger finally spoke as he turned and stared with the dark sunglasses trained upon the farmer.

"Who? Farmers?" the old man queried with a bit of shake to his voice.

"You really haven't a clue who I am?" the stranger asked ignoring the farmers question.

"No...no I can't say I reckon I know who you could be. I'm paid up on my bills, and I ain't never been one to commit any crimes." the old land tender replied.

"Your wife was the same way. It would almost be humorous that you both met the same fate, though it rather seems like a common occurrence."

"How do you mean mister?" the somewhat frightened farmer inquired.

"Look out into the field, Arthur." the man said slowly pointing towards the field.

The old man attempted to stave his fright when he saw his old familiar boot tips pointing up to the clear blue sky. He glanced down at his feet and then back to field, then back down again.

"How?" the old farmer asked, not expecting an answer.

"Just like your wife. A heart-attack." the stranger said.

With a bit of strain, the old man got up out of his chair and began to pace the porch. The stranger watched the old man, somewhat confused as to what was going on. As the old man began to sit back down in his trusty rocking chair, he let out a laugh.

"Well it might not be funny to you, but I got quite a kick out of it. I even went on the same day she kicked the bucket too." the old man let out after a period of rocking, "So what's next?"

"Rebirth." the stranger said.

"Aww shit!" the old farmer exclaimed.

# A Friendly Wake-up

“Everyone's awful.” she mumbled through bits of her hair that had caught in her lips as she rolled upon the bed.

“Everyone?” her roommate/best friend/riotous band-mate asked.

“Everyone.” she retorted still in the middle of her afternoon blanket contortions.

“Even you?” the multiphasing spirit animal word-prodded.

“Especially me!” the bed dweller exclaimed, spitting it out with bits of hair.

“How awful?” the ever-present, effervescent cherub chirped.

“So very, very, very, very, terribly, terribly, terribly, dreadfully, fretfully, awful.” the rolling pillow princess spoke, while the rolling had come to an end.

With her hand she parted her hair to look upon the burnt sienna skin that wrapped around the skeletal frame of her confidant. Tracing the air she formed the shape of the body that occupied the space inside the door frame.

“Beautiful, kind friend, tell me that I'm not a tyrant. Loving, gentle friend, tell me of my good deeds, so that I may drown the horrors down down deep!” the tearful spring supported roommate pleaded.

“What are friends for?” the door space dweller quizzed.

“For moments such as this?” wondered the bedridden wretch as she rose and collapsed back down upon the mountain of pillows she had amassed.

With a sigh and a shrug the so called out friend approached the bed and set herself among the discarded sheets.

“Friendship still burns bright between the darkest night?” owner of the bed squeaked.

“The flowers of spring shall be long forgotten in the coldness of winter. They all might be remembered at times when lights seem not to shine as bright, or give off heat to drive out the frost. And like those flowers I now try and brighten up your life.” the friend responded with a playful flick to the nose.



# *N o t h i n g*

“What does it mean to be a man?” a father once inquired of his son.

“One who has a penis.” the son replied.

With a laugh the father shook his head, “So your favorite cat is a man?”

“Among cats, yes.” the son responded.

“When he was a kitten was he a man?” the father asked.

“No, I guess not.”

“Your guess is correct, for what you've confirmed is that he is biologically male.”

The father paused for a moment while the son considered the subject at hand.

“What else could possibly make one a man?” the father asked after he felt enough time had passed.

“Strength.” the son put forth with confidence.

“What sort of strength?” the father quickly followed up.

The father watched his son's face as the young child considered the question.

“Physical strength.”

“Can't a woman have such strength?” the father suggested.

“Yes.”

“So, it's possible that it's not a physical characteristic.”

“I guess.” the son responded a bit downtrodden.

“Why do you look so harmed?” the father asked his sad son.

“I don't know the answer.” the son sobbed.

“It's alright.” the father said as he embraced his crying son, “For there is no answer. It is only symbolic, and symbols rarely are perfect. To pursue symbols is a fault. Just be you, for you are the only one who can define what that means.”

As the son's tears subsided he pulled away from his father.

“What about what others might think of me?” the son asked.

With a laugh the father said, “That's a discussion for another day.”



# *Four Years of Fallout*

It was the class pariah that brought the news that day  
that messenger was quickly shot down like an old tin can  
    though truth had hung upon her lips  
as the day went by the facts came flowing in  
    by the second class that day  
my German teacher was giving a speech  
on how after that day our lives would change  
    a gloomy speech  
    for a gloomy day  
that's all that remains of that day for me  
    that was freshman year  
    by my senior year  
I'd seen all the terrible bigots that got their fifteen minutes  
    heard the idiot president  
    saw people I thought reasonable  
    devolve into reactionary monsters  
when simply asked to think about the war  
    a question asked by a substitute teacher  
I still remember the look of horror on his face  
while a loud mouth ranted about getting a job from daddy  
    and not needing to think on such things  
    another lackey spoke up in support  
    the sub tried to press on just to think  
    but thoughts were weakness to them  
    not long after that  
I never returned to that school  
I left before September eleventh



March tenth  
nineteen-forty-five  
one hundred thousand  
were burned alive  
so much death and destruction  
your airmen put on their oxygen masks  
to escape the smell of burning flesh  
the smoke so thick  
they flew outside of the flaming x  
doing the devil's work upon the witching hour  
over a million people left homeless  
in the ashes of Tokyo  
Then in nineteen-sixty-two  
when the nuclear warhead of Damocles hung in the world view  
you were shouting for destruction  
even when the ships withdrew  
you shouted for destruction  
those shouts were ignored  
during those thirteen days of yore  
you were ignored once more  
during the war of wasted youth  
your lust for bombings  
went mostly unfulfilled  
quotes of bombing into the stone age  
you said were misunderstood  
but time tends tell  
the truth of your words



Curtis  
LeMay

You boosted your myth  
Tail-gunner Joe  
Tossed mud upon La Follete  
called him a war profiteer  
when you lined your pockets as well  
with a campaign funded by communists  
you won in forty-six  
Spent four years as a nobody  
then in nineteen-fifty  
you said you had a list  
of spies and communists  
the enemies within  
infesting the state department  
oh how that red menace  
made you a star  
but even brightest star collapses in on itself  
your list of fifty-seven  
grew to eighty-one  
then when the time came  
you were left with only nine  
men and women  
and not a single red  
once the dust had settled  
you kept on searching  
then your cross-hairs were trained  
on the weakness of the homosexuals  
how easy they could be blackmailed  
or at least that's what you said  
four hundred and twenty-five  
were fired because of your scorn  
in fifty-three  
you were awarded  
your own subcommittee  
harassed the VOA  
to the point that one ended up DOA  
once done with that  
it came time for book burning  
once the communist rags were turned to cinders  
it came time to find the red in the green

all you found was a dentist  
you asked how he was promoted so quickly  
when it was you who had helped doctors to fly up to the top  
so quickly  
a fight with the army would be your undoing  
condemned by 67 of your fellow senators  
they said you weren't the same after that



Joseph  
McCarthy



Wanted to be a big man in the war  
never made it to the front  
but you still got an award  
joined up with the HUAC  
not long after your congressional win  
tried to register all the reds  
but that didn't quite pan out  
In forty-nine you ran again  
this time headed for the senate  
by giving the pink sheet to Douglas  
what a Tricky Dick you were that day  
spent your time opposing communists  
palling around with McCarthy  
voting for civil rights  
and immigrants  
a slight hiccup in fifty-two  
when you were running with Dwight  
covered it up with a speech about your dog  
almost got booted out Ike's second term  
but voters cried a foul for you to return  
helped with the Civil Rights act of fifty-seven  
In nineteen-sixty you tried for president  
though maybe that televised debate didn't help you  
it was in sixty-eight that you managed to grab the reins  
when the country was disarray  
said you were ending the Vietnam War  
while bombers took at least one hundred thousand lives  
from seventy to seventy-three  
paved the way for Pinochet  
got a little SALTy with the Kremlin  
arranged for a New Federalism  
which brought about OHSa and the EPA  
started the new age prohibition that continues today  
did some things for integration  
even supported the Equal Right Amendment  
you did some right  
and then what did you do?

You built yourself a tower  
made out of lies and deceit  
that you did take a long fall from  
so like most of history it is the darker parts  
that are remembered  
and that's where your legacy lies



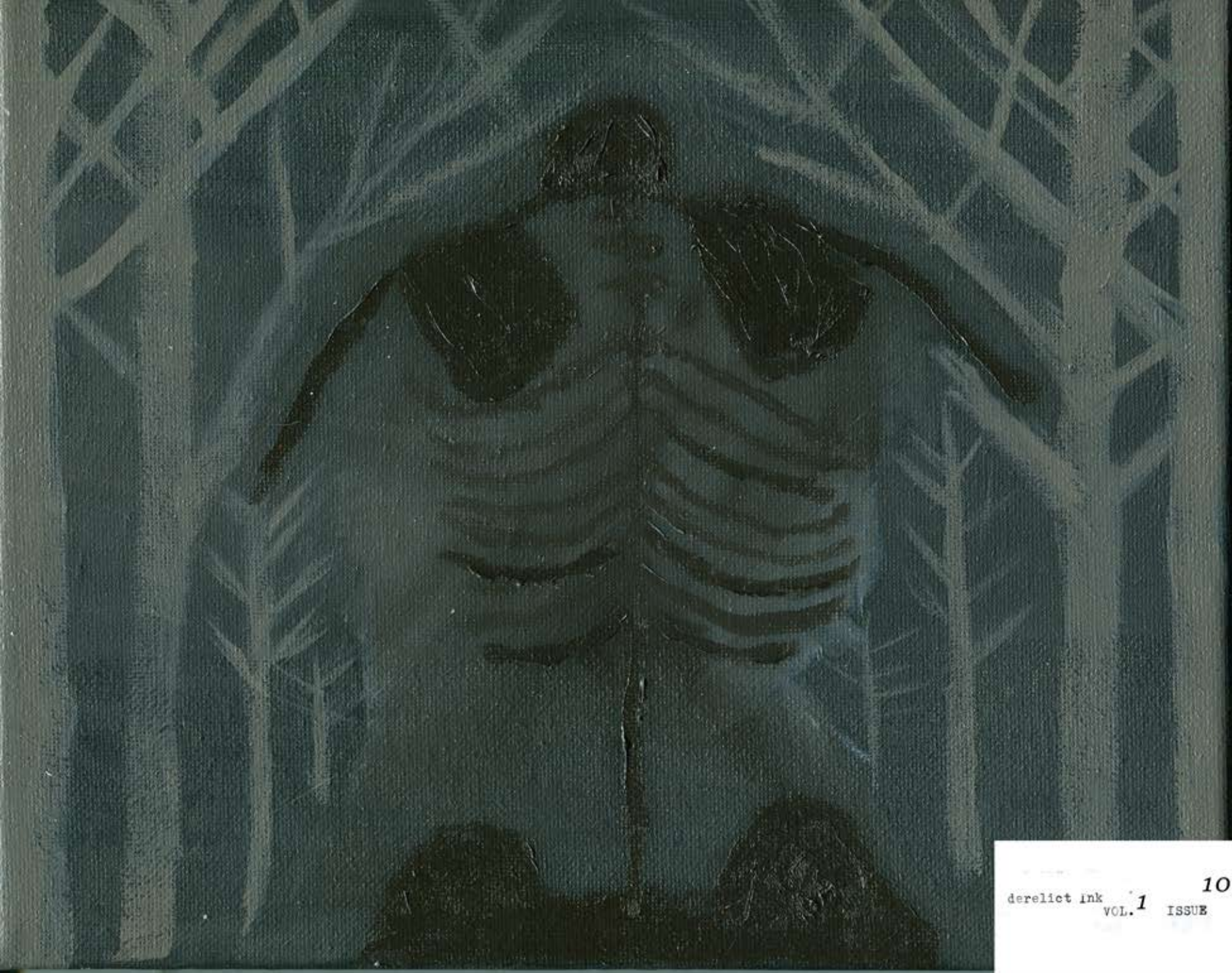
Richard  
Nixon

Started out on the silver-screen  
served your country by making training films  
Presided over SAG while snitching on the commies  
started on the left and ended up on the right  
became governor of California in sixty-seven  
signed the Therapeutic Abortion Act  
then decided you were pro-life  
tried to steal Nixon's thunder in sixty-eight  
but realized that his boat was still afloat  
and walked away  
In sixty-nine you sent in the cops  
to crack protesters skulls  
were a little upset you only got to take one criminals life  
and moved on out  
then tried to move up during the seventy-six election  
didn't quite make it that time around  
But then in nineteen-eighty  
you turned it all around  
started off your presidency by getting shot  
fired eleven thousand air traffic controllers  
cut taxes  
then increased till you left office  
kicked people that were already down and out  
always had a cold mood to civil rights  
poured all your pennies into the cold war stockpile  
poked your little toe into a civil war  
and got two hundred and forty-one killed  
invaded Grenada with a fury  
started the war on drugs  
that cost two billion dollars  
kind of took your time responding to AIDS  
granted amnesty to three million illegal immigrants  
got into trouble giving guns to rebels  
told Gorbachev to tear down that old Berlin wall

now people on the right worship you like a god  
even though they usually don't quite know your story



Ronald  
Reagan



# A FIRE IN THE WOODS

*deep in the woods  
a fire burned bright  
on a starless night  
not even the moon  
illuminated the tall branches  
just the bright yellow flickers  
illuminated the lower branches  
the flames also cast an orange cast  
on cloaked faces  
several robed figures gathered around  
the only source of light on this dark night  
in silence they stood  
only sounds that bothered to break the silence  
was the insects creeping underneath the surface  
a low drone emanated from one of the robes  
it quickly spread throughout the circle  
drowning out all the small steps of insects  
tongues long forgotten erupted erratically  
out of the mouths of the robed figures  
sounds strange and otherworldly  
filling the darkest night  
the fire grew brighter and brighter  
as the voices strained and cracked  
gouts of blood erupting from mouths  
then the flame went out  
the voices eased into silence  
and darkness hung heavy upon the robes  
who dares to speak with me  
a voice both wicked and cruel demanded  
only us lowly mortals  
one spoke out to the infinite darkness  
lowly as you may well be what would you ask of me  
the wicked voice inquired with a poison tinged tone  
only the key to immortality  
said the voice of a robed one  
with a laugh and a single syllable uttered  
the robed figures caught fire  
the night once more lighted  
till the last figure was no more than smoldering ash  
then darkness once again*



# THIRD STRIKE

*Sam woke up with a pounding headache. Stumbling into the bathroom he gripped the sink with one hand to steady himself as he flung open the mirror above the sink. Lacking fine motor skills he brandished his hand around inside the medicine cabinet in search of relief. Various bottles both plastic and glass rained down into the sink spilling pills and liquids as they shattered and cracked. Finally his frantic hand gripped onto the bottle of relief. For a moment he paused wondering if he could remove the hand the braced him up. Another wave of pain told him it was a risk he would have to take. A risk that would be his undoing.*

*Removing his hand from off the sink, he lost balance and fell to the floor dropping the bottle into the sink with the rest of the mess. Lying on the cold tile floor he felt a small moment of euphoria as the tile melted the fever that was growing. Fear sank in quickly as he forced himself to stand back up. Looking down into the sink panic began to grow. He wasn't sure which bottle it was, and had to fight the desire to start searching through the sticky glass filled mess. One by one he removed pills and broken bottles trying to find the right one while he fought the pain back. With sticky cut up fingers he finally found the right bottle. One pill remained inside it. One pill was not enough, but it would have to do for now.*

*He dropped the single pill into his hand, but before he could pop the pill inside his mouth the change began to take hold. Sam watched as the pill fell from his hand and down the drain. His last hope lost down the drain. Coarse hair began to erupt from his skin and the pain took hold sending him back to the floor. Bones broke and fused back into an inhuman form. Muscle bulged out underneath the furry skin and hands became massive paws. As his sound mind turned to fury, the last thought he had was that this would be his third strike and no one came back from that.*

*With the strength of ten men or more the changed man threw his front door off the hinges and into the street. A small dog that thought itself much large provided him with a breakfast snack. It wasn't quite enough though as he padded down the avenue. His ears perked up and his movement slowed as far away he could hear sirens blaring. Without a thought his paws carried him in the opposite direction. Muscles working in over time as cars went zooming past him. One massive truck swerved right into his path, he quickly avoided being roadkill and ran into the woods. Shouts echoed behind him as he broke branches beneath his massive paws.*

*As his paws carried him onward he stopped when he found a clearing. The sirens were still far away, but the sounds of a single pursuer slowly crept closer behind. Sam listened to the slow rhythmic breaking of branches growing louder and louder with each step. A small sliver of humanity rose up and turned the massive beast body towards the sound. It turned out that the pursuer was quite idiotic as they came into view not taking any measures to hide. That small piece of humanity was quickly drowned out as the paw pads pounded their way towards the hunter. Heaving the large rifle the hunter carried they aimed, but proved a poor shot as the bullet clipped a tree far from the beast. Sam could see panic set in as the hunter fired off a second shot that also missed. There would be no time for a third as the massive beast leaped onto the dimwitted hunter who was devoured by tooth and claw. Sam set in on the man with sheer ferocity slinging blood and entrails into the tree branches above.*

*“Holy shit.” a dumbfounded voice said distracting Sam away from the carnage before him.*

*Turning away he saw the wolf catchers. It was finally over the little bit of humanity thought creeping its way into the wild mind. The large wolf closed its eyes as the wolf catchers did their job.*





# THE ROOSTER

*rustling the dead leaves beneath clawed feet  
the rooster makes its path  
suddenly it hears a noise  
one that puts it on alert  
stopping dead in its tracks  
it waits  
the sound draws nearer  
the rooster starts to run  
faster and faster  
it jumps erratically  
knowing death is moments away  
if only it could take to the sky  
the pace of the pursuer grows quicker  
snarls and shouts directed at the poultry  
grow louder and more vulgar  
with each step the rooster takes  
a loud thud nearby  
scatters dirt  
sends the rooster into brief flight  
another thud clips a single feather from off the rooster's wing  
a shout of frustration  
and a lunge of desperation  
finds the rooster with a fist around its neck  
a kick here and there  
tears the flesh of the pursuer  
the fist releases  
and the rooster sees an escape  
a deeply wooded area  
where the pursuer can't dare fit  
paradise awaits the plucky chicken  
but as always the axe falls before it reaches those pearly gates*



# ZOMBIE WITHOUT A CAUSE

*Long dead Fred  
is more bone than flesh  
he rolls around in a motorized wheelchair  
cause his muscles no longer move the remaining flesh  
quite like it used to  
been quite awhile since he had his last meal  
it's hard to crack a skull when you can barely make a fist  
and most of the living aren't bound to help him out with that  
so he rolls around in his wheelchair  
going to places he'd never been when he had first lived  
his trusty wheelchair isn't quite what it used to be  
sometimes he sits for days and days  
waiting for the battery to recharge  
various wildlife passes him by  
not stopping to waste their time  
his flesh long past its expiration date  
he'd spent no time outdoors when he first had been alive  
just watching the tv screen after a long day at work  
occasionally looking out the window to see a pigeon fly by  
but never had he seen a road runner speed on by  
or a desert fox leaping through the moonlight  
now these sights are his only entertainment  
and he cherishes each and every sight*



# A NIGHT OUT

*Into the night steps the black cat  
with powerful purposeful steps  
slinking through the cemetery gates  
stepping across multiple graves  
leaping up onto tombstones  
chasing mice from the crypts  
brushing up against the striped socks  
of a goth girl looking for the tomb of some dead occultist  
quickly scampering across the overgrown grass  
of the forgotten plots of those that died long ago  
walking through the remains of the original gate  
finding its way to bushes near a neighborhood  
watching in the shadows  
as children scamper and scream  
wearing bright plastic pieces  
and the older children  
wearing jeans and a t-shirt  
with some rubber mask dangling from their faces  
who get distasteful looks but still get treats dropped into their bags  
the black cat runs from shadow to shadow  
observing the costumed children as it goes  
eventually it finds a quiet end of a street  
where a jack-o-lantern sits upon a porch  
quickly running up to the orange squash  
the black cat marks it as its own  
then moves along  
the scent of food catches its attention  
following its nose  
it finds the bits of food left out for some other cat that is not around  
quickly it feasts  
then sprints off for a cool dark place to take a nap*





derelict ink  
VOL.1 ISSUE 11  
Jason Cates

# *The Last Thanksgiving*

Vivica grasped the brittle stem of her wine glass, filled a bit too high with a dark red wine. She took a sip dripping a bit down the edge and down her fingers. Overcorrecting, she splashed some drops upon the off-white carpeted floor. It seemed that maybe this would be the last glass for the night. Everyone else had gone to sleep and she stood staring out into the night at Don McKenzie putting up Christmas decorations. Taking another sip, she began to wonder why he insisted on always beating them to it. When they moved in they first put them up on December fifteenth. Don had noticed them starting to work, and made sure he was finished before they were halfway through. The next year, for whatever reason, the family got out on the lawn on the tenth of December and Don somehow had known this would happen- he had his up the day before. Now here he was over twenty years later climbing up to his roof the night before Thanksgiving. It had been Vivica's idea to put out Frosty on Monday, just to see if the old coot was up to it. So here he was a bit slower, but starting his plan of attack upon his modest (for the neighborhood) house.

After taking a rather deep gulp from her modern goblet, she watched as old man Don took a tumble. From her perspective it seemed Don had missed the top step and couldn't regain his balance. She watched as the old man flailed through the air to the ground below and she could have sworn a bit of blood had flown up when he hit the ground. Though, she wasn't completely sure about that last detail. For what seemed like a lifetime she wondered if she should make the emergency call, or wait and hope Don's wife would have somehow heard his most likely fatal fall. A few sips later, as the old man continued to lay upon the ground without a sign of movement, she decided it was probably time to make the call. At the dining table, she set her glass down and lifted up her brand new cell phone. Her son Timothy had said it was the most impressive phone since the iPhone- not that she really cared, as long as the damn thing worked. Maneuvering through what seemed like one too many menus she managed to dial for help.

"Nine one one, what seems to be the emergency?" a almost too calm, placid voice said on the other end of the phone call.

"Yeah...umm...I think..." Vivica began unsure of how to go forward.

"Ma'am are you alright?" The calm voice questioned.

Vivica knew she wasn't alright, but she was compared to Don.

"My neighbor is dead." Vivca finally said after some silence.

"Come again?" the uncomfortably calm voice asked.

"My neighbor Don is dead." Vivica said throwing the name in as if that was all that was being asked.

"Now how did Don die?"

"Fell off his ladder." Vivca said as she picked up her glass and drank deeply from it.

"You're sure he's dead?" the calm voice inquired.

"Uh huh." Vivca said taking a brief sip from her slowly emptying glass.

"What was that?" the calm voice asked.

"Yes I'm pretty sure he's dead. He hasn't moved in awhile." Vivca verified.

"So, there's no sign of breathing?"

"Well...."

"Yes?"

"I don't know."

"Why don't you know?"

Vivica started to feel like she was being investigated for killing old dead Don and took the biggest gulp of wine of the night.

"Well he's across the street. I saw him fall."

"Can you go make sure he's not breathing?"

"I mean what's it matter really. He hasn't moved in awhile." Vivica said regretting making the phone call.

"Wait, how long has he been down?" the now not so calm voice asked.

"I don't know." Vivica said as anxiety began to brew inside.

"You said you saw him fall, how long's it been?" the now somewhat accusing voice asked.

"I didn't say that." Vivca said noticing Don's wife emerging from the house.

"Yes you did." was the last thing Vivica heard as she hung up and heard Don's wife scream from across the street.

Sloppily setting her brand new phone upon the table with a loud clatter, she lost her grip on the wine glass and watched the red wine soak the off-white carpet.

"Shit." she said.

"Want to tell me what happened last night?" the voice of Vivica's husband, Ben, asked waking her from her heavy slumber.

Pieces of what had happened last night slowly collected together in a foggy, unpleasant nightmare inside Vivica's mind. Not wanting to face what happened in the night she decided to avoid the more horrifying event.

"It was just a bit of wine, it will come out I'm sure." she said to her husband as she pulled the comforter over her head.

"You could have at least picked up the glass." he said.

Relief washed over as it seemed that Don's fall wasn't what he was referring to. Hopefully when that did come up it would be passed off like the death of a total stranger, she thought.

"Yeah..sorry about that." she said peaking her bloodshot eyes out from underneath the comforter.

Ben looked down at her already dressed and ready for the day's festivities, with that all too familiar look of disappointment that always hurt her more than any times anyone had become angry with her.

"It's alright. It will come out. I just wish you wouldn't drink so much alone." He said before making his way to the door, where he stopped and said, "Do get ready though, catering will be here any minute and that's your thing."

Retreating back to the safety of the comforter, Vivica dreaded the day before her. Why couldn't this have happened some other day, she wondered as she rolled around upon the bed in frustration. Had it all been her fault for pushing Ben to put that snowman upon their lawn? That was insane though. Don was old, if he hadn't fallen from the roof last night he would have died some other way sometime soon. For a moment this thought calmed her a bit, then she felt it probably wasn't the best way to soothe her. It would have to do for now though, she reckoned as it was enough to get her to emerge from her fabric cocoon. A drink of water was first on her list of things to do to get ready, she decided as she made her way to the master bathroom. The feeling of the cold tile almost sent her back to the warmth of her bed, but that wasn't an option, not today at least. The water seemed to flow too slowly as she filled up her glass. The water went down faster than the wine had, as she flushed out the bad taste from her mouth, refilling the glass a few more times until she felt as flushed out as she could be. With that taken care of she went about her usual routine to get ready for the day ahead, though put a bit more effort into getting it done in a timely manner. As she went about finishing converting her tight curls into long straight strands, a knock came at the door.

"Yes?" she short of shouting said.

"It's me mom." the voice of Heather said from outside the bedroom door.

"Come in." she said, knowing whatever Heather had to say probably wasn't something she really wanted to hear.

"What's up?" she asked as her daughter walked in the door.

"Andy isn't coming." her daughter said with her head downcast.

"Oh." Vivica said as she tried to remember who Andy was and embraced her daughter as warmly as she could.

"He said his parents wouldn't let him. I think he's seeing Jenny." Heather said as Vivica gently rubbed her daughter's back trying to calm her. "Jenny's such a bitch."

"Well she sure seems like one." Vivica slipped, as Heather pulled away a bit shocked at what her mother had just said. "I mean that was a little harsh, though you're right, she sure isn't much of a friend."

"Thanks I guess." Heather said walking out of the room slowly.

Well it appeared honesty might be the key to getting out of any further discussions she'd have

with Heather in the future, Vivica thought to herself as she made some final touches to her appearance.

As soon as Vivica reached the top of the stairs the doorbell rang. Just in time she thought as she made her way downstairs not into big of a rush. Halfway down the stairs the doorbell rang again with a follow up ring, as if that might get a more urgent response from the inhabitants of the house. Her eyes rolled as they had probably the year before, when she found herself with a hang-over like she currently had. She knew no one else in the house would be getting up to answer the door. The males of the family were in the den watching some football game between some animal and some racially insensitive caricature made out of foam. Just a load of bullshit, as far as she was concerned. That her father and even Ben seemed to feel compelled to shout obscenities over the most minor drawbacks to their teams. As these thoughts flowed through her head a loud fuck emanated from the den just as she opened the door to find poor old Don's quite alive wife. She looked sad, which seemed like the obvious state to be in after losing a husband, but she also looked frightened.

"Mrs. McKenzie, can I help you with something?" Vivica asked hoping this would be brief.

The old woman stood there for a moment as Vivica watched the fear seem to grow. Then in the blink of an eye the fear was gone and replaced by a look of determination. The old woman fumbled for something in her large purse. Vivica stood there unsure of what to do or say, then noticed the caterer walking up. She quickly saw her out of this awkward situation.

"Excuse me Mrs. McKenzie but the caterer is here and I need to show them around." Vivica said gently moving the old woman to the side as the caterer approached.



Vivica always hated large gatherings. The loud talking. The clinking of silverware and glasses. The sound of a full room of people all eating at once. Drinking wasn't an option today, she had decided as she drank down some water. The plate before her was empty while everyone else had bits of food smashed all up together. She wanted to make sure to go get food once everyone had gotten there's, the very thought of being alone with anyone and having to make small talk was terrifying. Part of her thought if she said too much she might spill the beans about what she had seen and done last night. Another good reason not to drink, cause sometimes when she let something out it tended to just keep coming out when she wasn't entirely sober. Excusing herself from the crowded loud table, she made her way to the kitchen. One of the caterers was still in the kitchen dropping off a few things.

"Well that should be it." they said not really acknowledging Vivica other than with those words as they left out of the back in quite a hurry.

She didn't even have time to say thank you, though as always she would write a thank you card to the company like she always did she figured. Giving the food a once over, she thought over what she would put on her plate. She knew she had to make the portions small to get everything she wanted, but even then something was bound not to fit. Slowly she fit the delicious pieces of Thanksgiving feast upon her plate. Now came the perilous journey back to the dining table weighed down before her personal banquet. On more than one occasion she had seen the perfect portioned plate topple to the floor to be replaced by quite the inferior anger fueled portioning. She was quite determined to make it back with full plate intact this year. That's when Jim Jr., son of her brother Jimmy, threw open the kitchen door knocking those perfect portions into disarray as the scattered to the tiled floor with a loud crash as the plate broke. Vivica didn't even notice the ruckus in the other room die down as the anger welled up inside of her.

"I'm sorry aunt Vivi." Jim Jr. said.

Vivica's hand started to pull back causing the young boy to cower a bit fearing the hit, but it would not come, as Jimmy burst right in. For her luck he hadn't noticed her hand focusing on the mess on the floor.

"Come on Jim. Let's help clean up this mess and get your aunt a new plate." Jimmy said picking up the bits of broken plate.

"I'll go get the broom." Vivica said leaving the scene as the frightened boy helped his father with the mess.

"Don't worry, it's just a plate." she heard her brother say as she closed the door behind her and started to cry.

Quickly, she brought herself back from the edge and wiped her eyes dry. Grabbing the broom and dust pan she went back to help with the mess. Most of the plate had been tossed in what she liked to call the celebration can. It was nothing more than a large plastic trashcan that came out on special occasions. Sometimes she even went through the trouble to decorate it, so it didn't look so drab. This time, however, it was its old gray self with a black plastic trash bag around the rim. She set into brushing up the bits of food and small bits of plate that hadn't been picked up. Glancing over at the massive gathering of various foods, she saw her brother plating everything that had been lost. Though of course being the considerate brother he was the portions were excessive, and not what she wanted at all.

"I'll go set this at your place for you when you get that picked up." he said carrying out her plate filled to the brim with food she would feel compelled to finish every last bit of.

"Thanks." she said, lacking enthusiasm as he exited with Jim Jr. in tow.

As she scooped up the last bit of wasted food she stared at the very obvious smears upon the tile and felt a compulsion to go get the mop to clean it up. The thought though began to evaporate when she realized just how hungry she was.

There was a somber tone permeating the table as she walked into the dining room. Loud declarations had drifted into one on one dirges between various family members. An urge to ask if someone had died as she sat down stirred, but was quickly snuffed realizing that someone had. They were all probably too stuffed to speak too loudly now, she figured. That's how it always went she tried to convince herself, and besides she was probably just being paranoid. There was no reason to be paranoid. It's not like she'd gone out and shook the ladder. Though she did take quite some time to actually make that phone call, and wasn't entirely sure how long it had taken for her to do so. Maybe the food before her would fill the hole left by the guilt she felt she figured as she began to eat. The food seemed to be rather bland, as if not a pinch of seasoning had been used. She continued to shovel down the food and felt like everyone was staring at her. Why didn't they get up and leave if they were done eating, she wondered.

A loud knock came at the front door that just about sent Vivica out of her chair. No one at the table seemed to notice, as their attention was directed towards the door. A few people muttered as to who would be going around knocking on the door during Thanksgiving dinner.

"I'll go see who that is." Ben said as he got up from the table.

Everyone for the most part got back to their separate conversations. Vivica, however, was concerned with who was at the door. She could hear the door open, but nothing more. A loud bang silenced everyone.

Glances went back and forth as no one was sure what to do. The patriarchs seemed to be having a telepathic discussion on who should go see what that loud bang at the door was. Vivica's father nodded at Brad's father who slowly got up and exited the room to see what the matter was.

"Brad?" his concerned father said.

The answer was another loud bang. Vivica's father sprang up as if he expected a different fate than the two previous men. She noticed her mother try to bar his way, but he was determined to get to the bottom of what was going. As he entered the doorway to the hall there was another loud bang as the back of his head scattered out into the dining room raining down upon the table. Vivica's mother launched herself up to be by him as if she might save the man with the missing brain. Everyone in the dining room was in state of hysterics- either screaming or crying as Vivica's mother tried to come to terms with her dead husband wrapped up in her arms. Vivica was quiet and sat in shock at the sight, and watched as old Don's wife appeared in the doorway with a large rifle.

"Mom." Vivica said weakly causing her mother to look away from her dead husband as old Don's wife raised the rifle.

Vivica shut her eyes tight not knowing what else to do, but not wanting to see anything else more. She wasn't sure how many shots were fired but she heard silence and didn't dare open her eyes to see if anyone was alive. Why hadn't she been shot yet, she wondered.

"Open your eyes." old Don's wife said sternly.

Vivica could hear the sound of footsteps approaching her, then felt her hair gripped in a tight fist.

"Open your god damn eyes!" old Don's wife yelled in Vivica's ear.

"No!" Vivica yelled out just wanting to die already.

"Mom just do what she says." the voice of Heather pleaded.

Vivica opened her eyes and saw the horror around her, but her daughter still lived and didn't seem to be wounded.

"You're ok?" she asked her daughter.

"Shut up!" old Don's wife said tightening her grip on Vivica's hair.

The old killer let go of Vivica's hair and walked back to the doorway looking a bit uncertain about how she would proceed.

"You took everything from me." she finally shouted at Vivica.

"What?" Vivica responded.

"Don!" she exclaimed at the top of her lungs raising the rifle for a moment then lowering it back down.

"Mom, what's she talking about?" Heather asked from across the table.

"Tell her!" Don's wife shouted.

"Mr. McKenzie died last night." Vivica said meekly.

"Tell her the fucking truth!" Mrs. McKenzie said.

"I saw him fall off a ladder." Vivica responded.

"That's right and what did you do?" Mrs. McKenzie said.

"I called nine one one."

"And what else?" Mrs. McKenzie inquired.

Vivica sat in silence, not wanting to say what else had transpired.

"Go on and tell your precious daughter. She should know what her upstanding drunkard for a mother did when someone needed help."

Vivica looked at the partially eaten meal before her and wished this would all just be over already.

"Tell her!" Mrs. McKenzie shouted.

Vivica tried to ignore her as if that would make it end quicker. Another loud bang and Vivica felt

something fly past her head.

"I hung up!" Vivica shouted at the old woman.

"Do you know what they told me when they finally got to my house when I called them?" Mrs. McKenzie said walking close to Vivica. "They said if someone had called sooner Don might have had a chance. In fact they said someone had called earlier, but seemed intoxicated and hung up. I knew it could have only been one person."

Vivica stared at the old woman, expecting her to finally lift the rifle to her head and end it, but Mrs. McKenzie walked away towards Heather. Mrs. McKenzie set down the rifle and dug in her purse pulling out a revolver which she handed to Heather.

"Now I assume you know how to pull a trigger. I want you to aim that at your mother's head. Last thing I want her to see is someone she loves taking her life. I'm leaving. If I don't hear that gun fire I'll be back." Mrs. McKenzie told Heather as she turned away.

Heather lifted up the gun and aimed at her mother's head. Vivica closed her eyes and heard a loud bang.

"You can open your eyes." Heather said.

Vivica did so to find Mrs. McKenzie crumpled on the floor bleeding out, but not dead.

Heather got up and helped her mother stand up.

"Let's get out of here." Heather said guiding her mother out through the kitchen.

As they emerged into the backyard Heather continued to help her mother out to the small glider on the back porch.

"I'll go call the police." she said before departing.

Vivica sat and thought about all the bad things she'd thought about her family. How many times she'd thought about running away from home when she was younger. The times she'd wished her father would just leave and never come back home. Even sometimes hating her mother for allowing her to be born. The times when she'd had a minor fight with Ben and wished he'd have just left her. How she'd joked more than once about wishing that her mother in law had died in car accident and couldn't come over to help set up the house. Finally she thought about how she had almost struck little Jim. So much hate she had for this loving family, and now she wasn't sure how she would move on from this. How did anyone move on from something like this, she wondered.

The sound of the back door opening wiped her mind clean as she managed a smiling waiting for Heather to emerge from the house. It wasn't Heather though. Quickly she fell back into a state of gloom as Mrs. McKenzie emerged from the house gripping her bleeding side. Vivica began to grow less frightened as she saw how little life was left in the old woman. She watched the old woman limp towards the glider and collapse with all her weight next to her. Mrs. McKenzie used what little strength she had left to sit up straight.

"That girl must really care about you." Mrs. McKenzie said through pained breaths.

"Why do you say that?" Vivica asked.

"Took a risk to save your life. Maybe you can learn something from her."

"I sure hope so." Vivica said turning to Mrs. McKenzie. "I'm sorry for what I did, or didn't do more so. Mrs. McKenzie?"

Vivica noticed that Mrs. McKenzie was no longer with her as her gaze didn't seem to deviate from the back of the house. Growing ever more uncomfortable sitting next to a dead body, Vivica decided it was time to seek out her daughter. As she approached the backdoor she hesitated before opening it. The kitchen was the same, like nothing terrible had occurred in the house. Though that was to be expected, she figured as she made her way across and hesitated at the door to the dining room, not wanting to see what was on the other side. With a long pause she finally opened the to find a room full of loud conversations and the clinking of glasses and the gnashing of mashed potatoes as if nothing had happened.

"Get to work, most of us are already done eating." her brother Jimmy said motioning towards her overfilled plate.

She made her way to her plate and began to eat. The food now had the flavor that she expected- no longer was it bland. All seemed well as she dined away on the plate before her. There were much too many pieces of food upon her plate, but she didn't mind as she devoured every last bit. As she lifted the final piece of mashed potato soaked in gravy to her lips there was a knock at the door. The very sound caused her to drop her fork upon her plate.

"I'll go see who that is." Ben said as he started to get up.

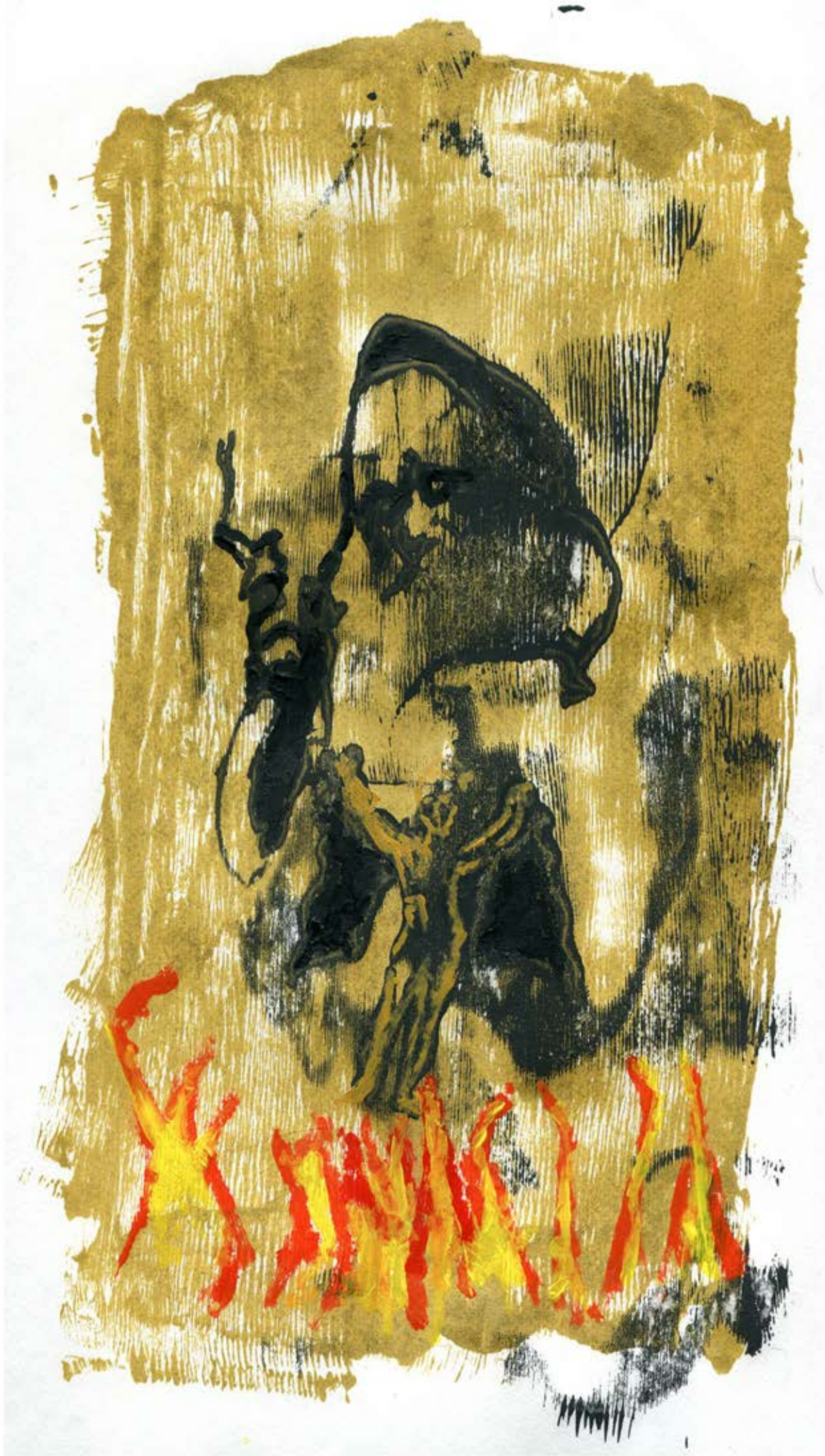
"No honey, let me see who it is." Vivica said as she quickly got up and made her way to the door.

She could tell who it was before she opened the door. The small frame of Mrs. McKenzie stood upon the stoop waiting for someone to open the door. Vivica gripped the knob and opened the door.

"Mrs. McKenzie, I'm sorry I was so abrupt with you earlier." Vivica said.

"That's alright dear. I was just wondering if I might join you for dinner. Don....he passed last night and I have no other family." Mrs. McKenzie said seeming on the verge of tears.

"Of course, come right in." Vivica said stepping aside to allow her to enter.



# It's ok to Step Away

Santa stood propped up against the facade of a convenience store in some small town that he'd forgotten the name of already. A cigarette bobbed up and down between his puckered lips as he felt around his coat for his lighter. As his fingers grazed the cold chrome, a voice distracted him from pulling out the lighter.

"Should have just waited a minute, I'll get that for you." the voice said.

An unseen force lit the cigarette between Santa's lips, causing him to let loose, sending the lit cigarette to the sidewalk. Santa quickly stomped out the lit cigarette with his big black boot.

"I hate when you do that." Santa said frustrated, "You owe me a cigarette."

A demonic laugh erupted seemingly from all around Santa. He searched around him for the source of the laughter but came up empty. Then a hand firmly clasped around his shoulder, startling him and almost sending him to the ground as he quickly spun around. A rather slender form stood before him still chuckling. A baggy black hoodie was draped upon the bony figure with the hood up and an almost cartoonish black pointed beard stuck out like an ebony spike. Black skinny jeans that seemed almost unrealistically skinny clung to the legs like a second skin.

"All these years I would have thought you'd gotten used to my pranks, old man." the figure chuckled.

"I just keep hoping they send someone else to deal out the punishments other than you." Santa responded.

"But Santa and Satan has such a nice ring to it. Unlike Santa and Krampus. Such vulgarity in that name. I'm surprised they ever let that beast out." Satan replied.

"I could say the same of you." Santa responded bitterly.

"Come now." Satan said, drawing closer and producing a cigarette "We're partners. We're a balance of rights and wrongs. Now cheer up buttercup, the night is young."

Santa begrudgingly took the cigarette from Satan, and then produced his lighter and lit it before Satan could pull his old trick again.

"You're no fun." Satan said with a laugh before disappearing.



Santa stood smoking his cigarette slowly and methodically, not wanting to return to his sleigh to get the night started. A whoopee cushion or something else would be waiting for him to send that old buffoon Satan into a laughing fit at his expense. As he continued to finish his cigarette one of his impostors approached the store with a bit of a gait that signified the later stages of inebriation. Santa sure wished that the man was too sauced to even think of approaching or engaging with him. At first his fears abated as the drunkard passed on by, then quickly rushed back as the man pivoted on his heel almost losing his balance and taking great pains to return himself to what passed for balance in his state.

“Say...say buddy you shouldn't be smoking.” The man chastised Santa.

“Why's that?” Santa said humoring the drunk man.

“Cause...cause...uhh...cause that's a bad example for the...the uh...the children?” The man said shaking his head as he turned back to his destination.

“The children” Santa thought to himself as he dropped the cigarette to the sidewalk and crushed it beneath his boot. It had been some time since he'd bothered to really care about them. He cared for them as much as an overworked father or mother that put in extra hours to get the little brats some fancy electronic bullshit for them to waste their lives chasing some digital dream version of what life was supposed to be. Dreams of material wealth and not but a small glimmer of spiritual. Though maybe that was a fault of his own doing. Creating toys to distract from the plight of life for commoners, while his other half tried to dispense behavioral correction through neglect. Maybe this whole time the children had all been rotten little shits. With that thought, he shrugged his shoulders and made his ascent into the cold night sky. The drunken impostor emerged from the store just in time to see Santa disappear into the clouds. From the shock of what he had seen, the drunk man dropped his new bottle of booze and ran screaming into the night about the flying man.

Once above the clouds he found his sleigh with his only passenger, that oft times tormentor Satan waiting patiently for his arrival. Not even a single

comment from Satan as he slowly drifted over into his seat.

“Did you get all your pranks out already?” Santa asked just as his rear made contact with the cushioning of his seat emitting a rather uproarious mimicry of flatulence, which sent Satan into a laughing fit. “Seriously?”

Satan was still laughing as they arrived at the first delivery destination.

“You surely are easily amused.” Santa said as he reached into the large pack, pulling out the first gift.

“It helps pass the time when you live forever.” Satan said as he reached into his jacket to check his list.

“Anyone here?” Santa asked not really all that interested.

“The father.” Satan answered.

“What's his sin?” Santa questioned still not all that interested and knowing what it probably was.

“Adultery.” Satan responded confirming Santa's guess.

“I suppose a few sores on the pecker or some other venereal disease.” Santa said continuing the business talk that kept things moving along on the long, long night.

“Really Santa? They call them STIs now.” Satan stated with a bit of scorn as if Santa should be up to par on new naming trends.

“What the hell does that mean?” Santa fired back.

“Sexually transmitted infection.” Satan quipped.

“It was STD for a while wasn't it? What point is there in calling it a disease over an infection?” Santa wondered out-loud, not particularly looking for an explanation.

“To reverse the stigmatization of those who contract it.” Satan said rolling his eyes.

“These humans are fickle beasts.” Santa said as he dropped from the sleigh with presents in tow.

When he re-materialized inside the house he found a rather posh mini mansion. A tree that stood taller than most men and probably required a team to decorate stood in the ridiculously large living room. A tray of cookies and milk had been left out, which somewhat surprised him seeing as how most upper middle class families detested the idea of leaving food out for fear of vermin. Knowing full and well it wasn't good to subsist on cigarettes alone, he picked up one of the cookies and took a bite. While it sure tasted like a cookie something

did seem a bit off about it, taking a drink of the milk he found yet another not quite familiar taste upon his tongue. Whatever it was it sure hadn't come from a cow. Finishing what seemed to pass for a cookie and passing on the rest of the milk, he got to work. Quickly the empty stockings were filled, and a few presents were slipped underneath the behemoth tree. Standing there for a moment he admired his work, which was quickly ruined when an old familiar slap on the back scared him causing him to let out a yell. Quickly he teleported himself out of the house and back to the sleigh before anyone found him standing there. Not long after Satan appeared next to him in the sleigh laughing his ass off as usual.

“Oh how it brings me joy knowing no matter how many years I've worked with you, the same old gag gets you every time.” Satan said through bouts of laughter that caused tears to be shed down his burnt red face.

“One day your joke will backfire on us, and you won't be laughing then.” Santa said.

“You go around all the time among the mortals without even bothering to change your get up.” Satan fired back.

“Well it's a lot easier to move around them when it's not too out of the blue, you on the other hand would stick out like a sore thumb. I have enough impostors running around for me to blend in. Most people would find it strange for a devil to be running around during Christmas time.” Santa rattled off quickly.

“You know I don't like that term. If you must use it to refer to me at least say the Devil.” Satan said with a bit of hurt in his voice.

Santa wondered if the hurt was true or just another one of Satan's ploys to get set up some other joke. He figured he'd just let it pass instead of allowing himself to be made the butt of a joke yet again. There were plenty of houses to get to and therefore more opportunities for Satan to get one over on him, though it had grown awfully silent as they made their way to the next abode. It seemed best to bring up something unrelated to divert the conversation away from what had been stated.

“What do you have at the next house?” Santa asked breaking the steely cold silence.

Satan let out a sigh as he ruffled in his hoodie for his list and began to examine the next entry. Some time passed as he seemed to be intently examining this particular entry. He let out a laugh that bellowed through the night sky that sent a shiver down Santa's spine.

“A real sicko I'm afraid. You'll get to spend some time in the sleigh for this one big guy.” Satan said as he returned his list into his over-sized jacket.

Even though he knew better of it Santa couldn't help but ask, “What sort of situation is it then?”

“A child who will become a serial killer. He's already killing small animals, and eyes his first victim.” Satan replied with a joyous glint in his eyes.

“How old?” Santa asked.

“Just shy of twelve years old.” Satan said with a look as if he was reminiscing.

“What were you doing at twelve?” Santa inquired.

“Spreading disease across the slowly expanding world.” Satan said whimsically as if spreading death was something of beauty. “And yourself?”

“Exploring nature and escaping mankind.” Santa stated with a bit of sorrow wrapped around his words.

“What changed for you?” Satan asked.

Santa thought about this for awhile as they continued onward to their next destination. It was a question he hadn't asked himself in quite awhile. One he probably should have kept asking himself till he had a firm answer as to why he continued this pursuit. Was it simply that he had chosen to do so long ago, and why no longer mattered.

“Well, here's my stop.” Satan said. “Maybe when I get back you'll have an answer.”

With that he disappeared down below, leaving Santa above to think about the unanswered question. As he sat there alone his mind tried to wander back to his early years. To a time before he'd donned his easily recognizable red suit. Then he began to think about how the very red suit he now wore wasn't even his own device, but one manufactured by a soft drink company.

At first he was slightly taken aback by the brazen attempt to co-opt his appearance, but then saw the proliferation of impostors that cropped up at social occasions giving him a chance to immerse himself in the population. A chance to be among them once more and see how they behaved instead of relying on reports he received from whoever sent them. Even Satan didn't know entirely where his list came from, and Santa figured he probably didn't particularly care about such details either. This made him wonder what exactly made it so easy for Satan to deal out the horrors he was tasked with and keep up an almost joyful presence. According to the mortals it was Santa that was jolly and fully of joy. Though as he sat up in the air all alone he sure was nowhere near such a condition resembling joy.

“So.” Satan said startling Santa who was still deep in thought when he reemerged. “Do you have an answer yet?”

“No.” Santa responded morosely.

“Well, on to the next house. Have you ever thought about giving up on this?” Satan inquired.

“Who would do it if I didn't?” Santa said almost defensively.

“No one.” Satan surmised.

This caused Santa to pause and think about the prospect of no longer trying to bestow joy on the good children to encourage them to continue to be good. Maybe they would be good without him around for encouragement. All this time he had no one around to encourage him to do what was right or good. Just a list to follow year after year. Even as he was losing faith in the children and so many had lost faith in him he continued onward. Maybe it was time to hang up the suit.

“You have made a good point, though I wish you might have made it long ago.” Santa said.

Satan looked a bit shocked by the statement, “You sure about that?”

“All these years no one has held me accountable for doing good. So I can only hope the good will stay good, and the not so good may see a better way through life.” Santa said.

“I guess we'll see if you're right some day.” Satan responded.

“Will you continue onward?” Santa asked, only remotely caring about what Satan's response would be.

“As long as there are people to be reminded of the wrong they do I'll be around.” Satan responded with a laugh.

“I may not understand what brings you joy, but may you always find joy.” Santa said disappearing from sight.

# Snow for Simon

Simon watched the leaves fade  
the verdant spring  
turning towards an auburn hue  
before crumbling and fumbling  
to the dead grass down below  
many a times he'd seen such change  
yet never had he seen snow  
gray skies would pour down rain  
turning the ground to a mushy mishmash  
bits of leaf and bits of grass  
poking through the earthy sludgy ground  
yet never had he seen light white flurries  
slowly drifting to the ground  
just rain drops on the windowpane  
drip dropping on down blurring the winter scene  
then there came a winter  
when Simon had seen many a rain drop  
and as he grew weary of the gray days  
something strange and new occurred  
slowly but surely  
a snow flurry did stir  
at first a group of stragglers  
eventually joined by a horde  
white drifts slowly sashaying to the ground  
transforming the sickly brown tundra  
into a bright white sight  
not a bit of dead grass could be seen  
as far as Simon could  
he jumped up at the windowpane  
warm paws touching the cold cold glass  
dramatically wiping away the condensation  
“Would you like to go out?”  
the human in his house asked  
Simon felt some hesitation  
but the decision he knew wasn't for him to make  
as he was lifted quickly into the air  
the door flung open and quickly he was set down

the snow was colder than the glass  
yet he showed a brave face as he sat upon the porch  
tail swishing and swashing across the cold snow  
“I thought you wanted out?”  
the human of his house said  
and Simon thought him quite the ass