



UNHEARD MAGAZINE

Volume 1, Issue 4

Our Cover

This issue's cover was generously contributed by Illustrator, **Nathan Pride**.

www.natepride.com

Nathan's childhood was filled with exposure to lots of cartoons, Saturday afternoon horror movies, random comic books from a pharmacy spinner rack and early 80's MTV videos. Those visual images combined with his exploration and love of the natural world has generated a style that is organic, textured and fantastical. His previous background in design and publishing with Caliber Comics (1990-2002), afforded him exposure to all the creative sides of producing illustrative and graphic storytelling work. His artwork has appeared in *Mage: The Awakening* and *Scarred Lands* RPG books from White Wolf Publishing. His latest illustration project, a hardcover collection entitled *Library of Wonder: Jules Verne*, is available exclusively from Barnes & Noble. Nathan resides in Michigan where he enjoys the change of seasons.



We hope you like what you read and that you may commission the authors profiled for future work. Please direct all queries or requests by email to greg@unheardmag.com



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ARE YOU UNHEARD?

A great many people have quality things to say irrespective of their current success.

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Unheard Magazine looks to be a leading creative light to focus attention on homegrown talent as well as enthuse others. If you create anything you think might interest us and our readers, please contribute. We are always on the lookout for fresh perspectives.

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- Poetry
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“We shall not hesitate to gratify the curiosity of our inquisitive nature.”



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Mr. Chang

by Rob Lewis

Mr. Chang sat across from me, his small, weathered hands folded neatly on top of the table.

“Really like ‘Happy Noodle,’ he said. “Always good food. Nice workers.”

We didn’t have long to wait as we relaxed on the café’s outside patio. The waitress brought us our lunch entrees; we’d both ordered chicken-rice combos. Mr. Chang smiled warmly at the waitress, showing his gold front tooth. She smiled back and winked. He had that effect on people.

Chang was one of those people that savored every moment of a meal. As small birds chirped from a nearby pine tree, he’d take a bite, chew methodically, close his eyes, swallow. His skill with chopsticks was impressive. He chuckled a little and I asked him what had struck him funny.

“Days like this, eating chicken and rice, being outside, remind me of childhood. Raised on farm in south China. Grew rice, had chickens,” he said.

“Good life. Lots of work, but good life. Would feed leftover rice to dumb, little chickens,” he laughed.

“Would boil chickens, then use water to make delicious, yellow rice. Every morning, would shovel chicken crap out to rice field for fertilizer. After

we kill chickens, smash up heads and feet and guts, use that for fertilizer, too. Put father out there when he died.”

“So, you see,” he continued, “chicken, rice, farmer... all same thing.” He lifted another bite to his mouth and smiled at me. His gold tooth caught the sun and flashed in my retina. Then he swallowed.

All I could do was smile back.

Chang had that effect on people. ✨



Chrysanthemum Blizzard

by Aurinko Sunshine

At exactly 6 pm on Monday afternoon, a chrysanthemum blizzard passed through my door, and through my door only. It was a joyful reminder of all things lost, in two decades and a half of inhaling and exhaling cocktails of oxygen and smog.

The list was plump.

My father. He loved me so much he hit me. He was so sure of my intelligence that he didn't need to hear me speak. Ever.

My mother. She hated me so much she made me alive. She believed in me so little that she gave me confidence.

My friends. They were so neglectful that they never left me alone.

My pets. They were so immortal that they died.

My boyfriend. I needed him so much that I left him.

My love affair. It was so great, so profound, so breathtaking that it didn't even exist.

My identity. So strong that I chose to be somebody else.

Wounded chrysanthemums hovered in the air, the day was lovely and entirely mine. I was alone and grateful, doing the dishes while I looked out the window into the ballroom scene of white petals and UV rays. Oh how I adore the sun. My love for it is such that I stay in the shade. Ah water, so crystalline and smooth on my skin that I wear rubber gloves to touch it.

My memory. So vague it torments me with pristine details.

My brain. So inactive that I can't turn it off.

My blood. So thin it clogs my heart.

The kitchen is so clean now. So clean somebody could lick it. So clean I could perform an autopsy on the floor. The bills are paid, the plants watered, the bed made, my shoes shined. The mafia is not after me anymore. Now is the time to take a break from real life, to put on a red haired wig and smoke with cigarette holders. To get a fake ID and cross the border.

Invisible pen and paper write:

For my heart. I can find a spare part. ❧



The Running of the Bull

by Joseph Grant

Key West is not just the southernmost point in the continental U.S., it is by all admission, a state of mind. For no place such as this tropical bacchanal truly could exist outside of the mind. Or could it?

It's as if when one leaves the mainland via Miami through the Upper Keys, one begins to lose perspective and the responsibility of reality disappears quickly in the rear view mirror of modern American life. The reality you are losing is supplanted by a newer, more uncontrolled way of being. The last shreds of any sort of reality you once knew are tossed over the side of the nearly mythic 7-mile bridge that connects the lower Keys. The reality in Key West, once you get there, will be unlike any other and once you have been to Key West, your reality will never be the same.

For it is a distinct non-reality that you will discover lying in wait for you. It is in the way time ebbs and flows at a much slower pace. It is in the way dappled sunlight seems to last longer and conclude more brilliantly at the end of Mallory Square. The way an afternoon can be peacefully spent watching the La Mirada resident cat slumber lazily in the shade of a friendly palm tree, blissfully ignoring the lunch-time crowd. Whatever it is, it can wait, seems to be the mantra for man and beast alike. And it is in that suspended

reality that one enters the reverie that is Key West. In the Keys, time is an afterthought. In the Keys, there is no hurry.

And why should there be? Key West has remained at this slow, steady pace for much of its history, having overcome a notorious past of rum running, dope peddling and general lawlessness. It is now a respectable community, if not a bit touristy than those respectable citizens would prefer it to be. The town, off the busy Duval Street, Key West's own pocket version of Broadway, is a sleepy and tropical maritime village.

It is a tale of two cities. Olde Town Key West isn't olde at all, judging from the ubiquitous tourist-ready T-shirt and souvenir shops and then there is Key West Proper. The latter is a neoteric Southern Floridian town, complete with schools, a small airport, town center and county jail in case, just in case.

Key West Proper is a jumble of weatherworn New England-style houses embellished in a quasi-Caribbean flavor, some with lush backyards replete with chickens and quasi-Caribbean crowing cocks.

In many ways, the island of Key West is a last chance for many. It is where one goes either to give up or

to find themselves. Artists, writers, poets and painters, along with every stripe of hustler (sometimes the line between these can blur enormously) live comfortably among the doctors, lawyers, accountants and used car salesmen (where, again, the lines tend to blur.)

But as modern a tropical metropolis Key West may be, it is also firmly rooted in the past. It embraces this past and thrives despite of it. Traditions are broken here as well as passed down to the next generation. The centuries old practice of cigar rolling is alive and well here, a holdover from the island's obvious Cuban beginnings. There is another holdover from centuries back that predates cigar rolling and nearly everything else on Key West. It is the art of the fast buck.

Everything comes with a price on Key West. Including the past. And that past is getting costlier all the time.

Recently, I found myself in the middle of the annual Ernest Hemingway Festival. It is a festival in which the writer, although many years dead, is commemorated sublimely and ridiculously. The Nobel Prize winning author is remembered through the reading of his works, both good and bad, the reading of other writer's works in the Bad Hemingway contest, a full week fishing regatta and possibly the most bizarre spectacle of all: the Hemingway look-a-like competition.

Each year in July, the hot tropical streets teem with bloated and bearded, gray-haired middle-aged men, decked in thick Norwegian fishing sweaters trying to out-grin the last guy. Spectacle it is, for nowhere else on earth is a dead man so garishly paraded around this side of Paradise. It is merciless Greek theatre without the tragedy.

The Hemingway Festival is as close as Key West gets to religion. Akin to the ever-traditional San Genero festival in New York's Little Italy or the Mardi Gras in New Orleans, there is a fervor present, but it is a false zealotry brought on by the last drink.

Whereas the inspiration for Hemingway's first major work, *The Sun Also Rises* was the infamous summer at the Fiesta of San Fermin and its subsequent centuries old running of the bulls into the awaiting bullring, this is a poor man's Pamplona.

In a move that would most likely infuriate the late writer, the beauty and inherent danger of the running of the bulls has been caricatured by inebriated grinning men wearing cutouts of cartoonish bulls trotting through the streets as if in some whiskey-soaked Romper Room photo op nightmare.

There is nothing to suggest the magnificence of the author's best or even least known works, save for the wonderful nightly readings of his work on the elegant lawn of his former

home on Whitehead Street during the festival. It is by reservation only that one may attend and thankfully, this tends to sift one seemingly years away from the confusion and drunken miasma that is Duval Street only one block away.

As I stood there upon the lawn and listened to the words of El Maestro as Mailer and Marquez have both called him, I sensed nothing of representation of the author as buffoon and finally felt truly at home in my admiration of both the man as writer and world-class traveler. But the most bizarre aspect of the weeklong celebration awaited me.

By the sixth day, both wanting and needing to get away from the non-stop carnival atmosphere of Duval Street, I wandered into a bar across the way. As is habit, I struck up a conversation with the bartender in between rounds. Invariably, he asked me the usual questions; what I did for a living. Writer, I answered. Then came the usual questions and comments. Writer, huh? What kind of writer? Are you famous? Have I ever read you? The kind of questions that make one wish they had never answered what they did for a living in the first place.

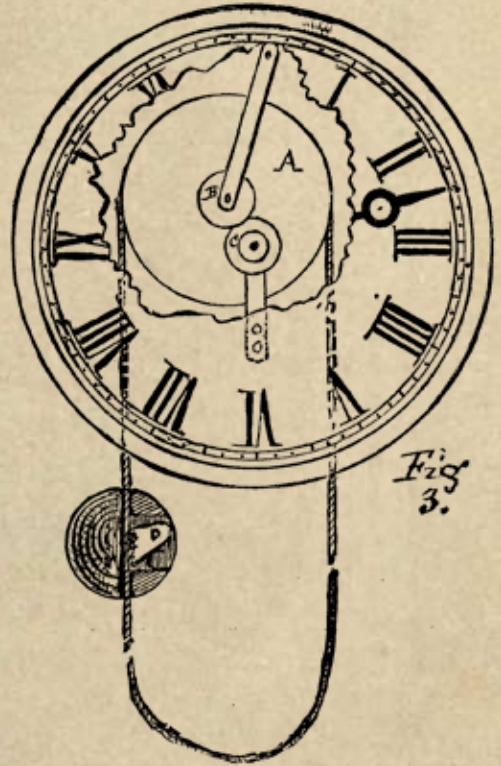
Then, came the weirdest aspect of the entire week. The dim bulb over the guy's head must have flickered. Hey, he points. I bet you're that writer. Hemingway, that's him. Everybody keeps talking about him. Yeah, that's the guy.

When I tried to correct him, he just wouldn't listen. The more I tried to tell him, the less he seemed to want to hear any of it. It got even better or worse, depending on the reader's conception of suspended reality or comfort level. As my face reddened both from anger and frustration, the man started to tell patrons I was Ernest Hemingway and for whatever their reasons (drunk, joke was on me, complete and utter ignorance of the fact that he had been dead for decades-pick one), they believed him. The moment cameras started to snap, I decided it was time to leave. It's not good for a writer, I thought, when they think you are already dead.

Upon returning home, it is always with me, the irony of those days. Irony in the sense of how they deign to know the man, these so-called aficionados, but not by trying to write a story or in the least cracking open a book, but by how many drinks they down or how many grinning arm wrestling championships they can win or marlins they cull.

In a generation in which one knows more of Mariel, rather than Ernest Hemingway, it is not surprising that television has replaced prose as the font of all knowledge and is the modern hearth in front of which the new, non-literary family gathers. It is a generation whose last read book was during finals.

In many ways, the good habits of the Lost Generation live on, inspiring other, newer generations to question literature in an attempt to better it. But as in many cases, some of the lesser aspects of the Lost Generation live on in Key West as in Paris, New York, Pamplona and many other literary cities of the world. Yet, in many ways, the generation still remains lost. ❀



Answers

by Nivethitha Kumar

“Daddyyyyyyyy” was the last word I heard. The next thing I remember was a floating sensation. I felt incredibly light as though I had left all of my wants, worries somewhere and was just flying away. Far , far away. I tried to remember what had happened. It had been a regular morning, I had woken up late today, rushed through the morning chores and got Nisha ready for school. As I readied to drop Nisha and head out for work, I glanced at the serene face of Asha sleeping. She had had a long night at work and I let her sleep a little more than usual. Nisha’s school was on my way to work, I dropped her and came back to the car and as I turned to wave bye, it happened. I don’t know what it was but somehow in that instant I realized that this was probably good bye.

As I was floating up, I saw a few others drifting away too. Each with an expression of shock, disbelief and confusion. All the faces shared a similar question. What had happened? Why did it happen? And where are we floating to?

I took a moment to look for Nisha. I was happy to locate her and was glad that she was not drifting too. I was happy that whatever happened, happened a moment later Nisha stepped out of the car and went to her school building. I was trying to

say good bye, to Nisha, to Asha but it was hard. I guess I was still harboring thoughts of going back , back to where the floating would stop, back to being heavy , loaded with worries and needs. After all it has been 40 years of heaviness.

As I turned away I looked at another person. It could have easily been just another face drifting away if not for the different expression the face bore. The person was smiling. His face bore an expression of a victorious man. An expression of a man completing his mission. I wanted to know more. I was curious why he was happy. I did not know how to drift towards him. It was as though I was on auto pilot, moving according to some pre programmed instructions.

I was surprised when I drifted towards him. It was weird to move without actually walking. It was as though the thought was enough to get near him. I did not have to do anything. Strange I told myself and realized that I must start getting used to this. But not knowing what was happening was a huge drawback in doing so.

“How can I help you” asked the man when he saw me approaching him.

“You can help me by telling me why you have such a smug look at whatever is happening. How come you don’t look as disconcerted like the rest of us?” I asked sounding visibly irked.

He turned and looked at me and after almost 2 seconds turned back and continued looking down. I was not sure if he had heard me or just disregarded me.

As I was struggling to accustom myself to this floating feeling, he seemed at ease. He was wearing torn denim, a nice sky blue shirt with white collars. He seemed just like the rest of us. Still he did not belong. Not the way he acted, he did not. I did not know why I was still standing trying to talk to this man while he had made it clear that he was not interested in a conversation with me. I then realized that it did not matter if I was being a pest anymore. The petty things that bother you in your daily routine do not matter anymore, not here, not when we were drifting away.

“Are you going to bother with an answer” I asked

“I don’t think you would want to know it “he said still not looking up at me.

Being treated like an unwanted person did not go well with me. I got worked up and asked him

“And who are you to know these

things about me. You are in the same state as I am. Are you not?”

He smiled. A small short smile, just long enough for me to realize that it was a smile.

He just drifted away. Just like that. Not bothering to answer. He did not even acknowledge me. It made me angry. It did not make sense. I did not know what to do next. I told myself that I just had to wait. The wait to know what happens after you stop existing. But do we? Stop existing that is? I still felt like me, I was not sure if I was breathing, but you never had to tell yourself to breathe, you just did. I was not sure how to make sure I was not breathing. I felt very light, but I still was existing, or so I thought. I knew I had to wait. Wait for some answers. Wait for a destination.

I stayed at the same place all the while looking at Asha and Nisha. However drifting we were, I could see the people I wanted to see. I saw Asha, Nisha, my parents, my friends everyone I wanted to see. I was not sure if the other drifting folks could see my family too. I wanted to spend every other minute I had left with Asha, watch Nisha grow up, graduate, marry, have kids. I wanted to stay with my parents, make up for every lost minute, catch up with long lost friends. I realized that the drifting did not stop making me feel bad. But it did assuage me to see that people cared for me. It became easy to let go and realize that it is over.

I turned to my right to see the same guy again. He had come closer to me and was looking down. This time I decided to shut my mouth as he had made it clear that he did not want to have a conversation with me.

“Feels nice does it not?”

“What?”

“That people liked you, that people cared for you and that you will be missed”

“Yes”

“You had some question a while back.”

“Why do you want to answer them? You did not seem very interested then”

“I was not, yes”

“What has changed in the last 5 minutes” I asked him

“Is that how much time you think has passed”

“I guess so, why is it not”

“Well I would advise you to not worry about time anymore” he said with a glint in his eye.

“Why does all this make you happy? I am dead. Do you understand? I am dead, gone, blown in to pieces

along with the other sorry souls here, leaving behind a perfect family. It's not something to be happy about or derive some kind of weird contorted pleasure out of. If that is what you intend to do, at least get out of my face when you are doing it.”

His short smile, extended in to a hearty laugh.

“Who are you?” I was angry, but my curiosity was higher.

“Ask your question, I am here right now willing to answer it”

“Your.. Your expression.. It was different. I can't explain it. But while everyone around here seemed scared and confused, you had an expression of content. It was different. Why was that? Why were you not confused?”

“One is not confused of routine, Anand.”

I took a minute to recover from a surprise. “I never told you my name”

He just smiled.

“Are you who I think you are?” He seemed to be in control unlike the rest of us.

“There is not always someone who notices me at these times. These are traumatic for the ones involved. I am surprised you even noticed me”

“Your happiness was palpable” I

said with disgust.

He seemed to like it that I was disgusted. He smiled at me and turned to leave.

“Why? Why did you have to do this?”

“What do you mean why?”

“Why a bomb, why take lives like this? This is probably one of the worst ways to die”

“So you would have been happy if you had had a heart attack? Is that what you are saying?”

“Well .. I don't know. But this seems unfair to Asha, to Nisha, to... to Me”

“It always comes back to you doesn't it? You know that's my biggest strength. The obsession that menfolk have with themselves. It has often given me great leverage.

“Why?”

“I don't have to give you any answers Anand.”

“Maybe you don't. But you would not have stayed here encouraging them if you dint intend to”

He stared at me for a minute before he started to answer. “This is what I do Anand. This is my mission. It is a lot of work, I tell you. To take

an job from conception to completion. It might disgust you because you were a part of the plan today. That's all. There is nothing you could have done anyway. So stop killing yourself with the questions and just let go. Disorder has been a part of the world ever since its start. I always had a job and always will. “

“Are you going to tell me it's a balance? Good and Evil, Right and Wrong? Are you going to tell me that this is essential for the regular functioning of the world? Are you going to tell me that you do what you do since you were always meant to do it? That this is all Karma? That this is just a small part in the larger scheme of things?” I asked unable to control my anger

“Hahaha. Is that what you guys think? Hell no. I do it because I like doing it. Disorder, Anand, gives me a high. How about that?”

“That cannot be the truth”

“I never promised Truth”

“I don't think I like you. You disgust me.”

“I don't need fans. Thank you anyway.”

“Where was he? Where was God? If you were creating mayhem should he not be protecting us from you? Where was he? Does he even exist or is

it another one of the stupid things we believe down below?”

For some reason, he did not seem prepared for the question. The smugness in his face had taken rest and it was replaced by an almost writhing anger. A frustration that was almost scary. He truly did look every bit the devil that he was.

“You think taking down a few dozen people was my intention? Are you that stupid?”

He paused took a deep breath and said “Who do you think saved all the rest of the people today, all the kids in the school? I shall succeed you know. One day.” He said.

I do not know what took over me. My whole body shook for a second. It could have been Nisha and all the kids at school alongside me. But it was not. It was a few of us in order to spare all the hundreds of kids. I did feel like being a speck in the larger scheme of things. For a good thing though. I had helped save Nisha. If I had known it, would I have done it? Of course yes, my mind answered immediately. It dint seem so bad now. The drifting. I felt content. I felt relieved. I almost felt happy. That seemed to alleviate the weirdness of the drifting. I was feeling more comfortable now. I could almost control the drifting myself. I had let go by doing so gained control.

I could not wait for my encounter with God.

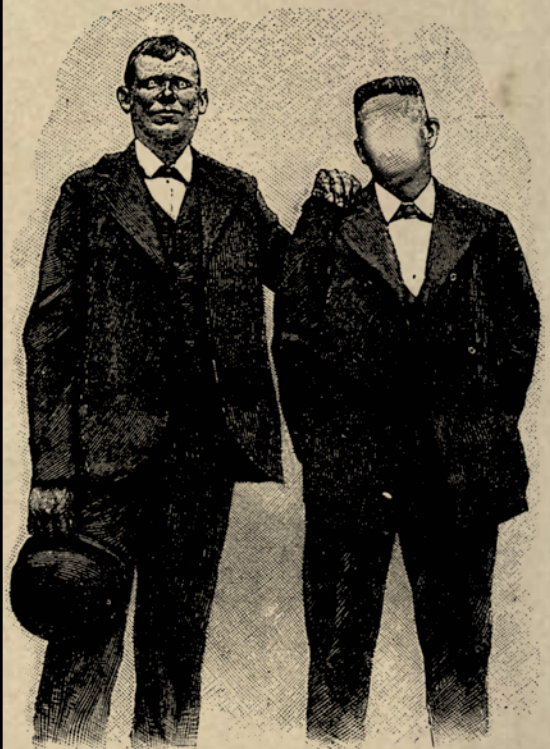
“I’ll tell God when I meet him” I told him

“Tell him what?” he asked moving away.

“That the devil fell short, as always.”

I did not turn to see the angry face, as I drifted away. I had a feeling that my wait was going to be over. I felt at peace. I got all the answers I needed to be at peace.

Devil’s doing. ✨



Madrid

by Joseph Grant

And now it is as before, all that remains returns to normal, the hotel, the room, the girl, the loaded pistol on the night stand, the bottle of whiskey on the table have all have stopped moving and the bombardment that had been threatening



to hit you has gone elsewhere in the night, a lucky turn of events one guesses, a baptism by fire some conclude, a course of future consequence that will change the lives of those who are unlucky enough to live throughout this night. Later on, as the girl leaves you for another, you will think back on this night and how it would have been better if the girl, the gun, the whiskey or the bombardment had killed you first. ✂

Red Like Wine

by Joseph Grant

Beneath the bright Mediterranean sun, the colorfully painted wooden fishing boats rocked to the gentle sea lullaby as their bells tolled to the languid blue sway. Fishermen unloaded their catch of silver tuna that gleaned like chrome against the pebbled, tawny coastline as the town of Catalua, nestled against the sun-baked Pyrenees Mountains, readied itself for the annual wine festival. Dignitaries from throughout Spain were attending and it was even rumored that the bishop himself, no teetotaler when it came to the vineyard-for even Christ drank wine, he would fervently clarify-was said to be on his way by rail. As the

town bedecked itself in flowers, ribbons and finery, vendors prepared their stalls with a variety of local foods, trinkets and pennants to wave in a show of national and town pride when the luminaries arrived. But Paloma would not be going; instead she readied herself to meet her soldier fiancé at a hotel outside of town as all others had been booked solid many months in advance. He had written her and told her how he had secured a leave just so he could see her. But her fiancé would not be coming; having been shot dead for desertion by the General himself this morning. His blood flowed; red like wine. ✂

Golden Axe

by *Aurinko Sunshine*

Of all the drunken, axe wielding, smelly hillbillies that surrounded me, Kim was the only one able to hit the target, not only once, but twice.

She looked and sounded as if she could be fourteen forever, but she was closer to 41. Lean, grey and undefined, she was an eternal tomboy.

She said, after consumed champion of the night, that she got her axe throwing skills and bush knowledge from her father, whom had also given her that splitting axe with golden blade and red helve. The reference of her father, however, made a few eyes roll; since that man, an archaic mannered and overall nasty drunk hermit, wasn't held in much high regard by the lumberjack community. He never really cared much about her and didn't even pay the child support quota but that didn't make her any less amazing.

Of all the sad yokels that stirred around the improvised trash can fire, Kim was the only one with a full set of teeth. Big and horsey, but white and clean.

My hands were cold and small, proved too weak to handle axes that night. And I wished I had a special skill, like doing card tricks or throwing knives. I wished I could nail a fly to the wall with a pointy knife, a knife that would look like a Persian relic.

I wondered what would a knife throwing expert would look like, and all I could think of was Gomez Adams.

Of all the noisy teenagers, I was the only quiet one, the only one without a geographical or double name (like Georgia or Laura-Ann), and the only one without proper winter attire. A borrowed parka and hole ridden scarf didn't make a 40°C-below-proof being out of me.

I just stood there, drinking as much free beer as I could, because what else could a young kid do.

Some drunken girl with a rhyming name that I can't remember snatched me from my line of thoughts, into the log cabin. She was loud and annoying, but I followed her anyway.

The kids were playing poker round a filthy, sticky table under a lamp that was way too low and left faces in half shade, and made them look like dwarfish adults.

A girl and a boy were making out in a corner, and the boy was feeling the girl's chest up. Another boy had found a helmet with a headlight, and kept pointing his head at them jokingly, making them look like *infraganti* albinos, until the guy with wrinkly eyes threw a punch and knocked the helmet down.

The boy at my side put his hand

on my leg in a way that made me uncomfortable, and he kept telling me how wasted he was. Of all the awkward teenage casual mating ritual settings, this was the one I less fitted in.

I saw a man outside the window, sitting on a log sprinkled with snow.

I decided to go for a walk.

The cold air slapped my face and I took a mouthful. It was rough and dry as a snake, and it crept inside through the holes in my scarf and the gaps between my clothes, down under many inefficient layers of cotton unto my skin. It somehow made me feel sexy, and a thought of taking off my clothes crossed my mind. Taking all my clothes off and feel the wind scratch my body with monster claws, pinch my nipples frozen and fill the empty curve behind my knees with ice.

And I would howl. Howl at the moon. Howl the angst out of me.

I would think of Kim. (Kim Kim Kim. The “m” is like a kiss)

I found a big rock, closed my eyes and sat, and put my hands between my legs. I thought of home, of the things that I’m used to see and I’m used to think about. About city lights reflecting in puddle water, about people making love in small apartments with stormy weather, about watching life go by from a bus.

Lightning.

I woke up with a painstaking slowness, first realizing my mouth was wide open and my throat was sore. It was sore like scratched with a rusted blade, I was older than ever. I bent my neck up and down a number of times, without succeeding to get up. This made me so tired. I rolled my eyes back and forth once, and it was day.

My teeth and lips were repeating the sound of the letter “f”.

Flashes of her looking into my eyes, holding my face with both hands, rugged smoky hands. Her knees were spread out on each side of my hips, and her pelvic bones were touching mine. I felt saliva in my mouth, so much saliva it dripped and foamed. I felt her breath, her heart and her warm, but I couldn’t see were she was.

She was shaking me and I kept hitting the ground with a muffled sound.

But, she wasn’t shaking me, she was holding me down. She begged me to stop, but my body was moving on its own, and my will could not partake in this nightmare.

Then, dark. And cold.

Somebody was on the phone.

”...your child had a...and the road is closed and...isolated but...taking care of ...”

I felt a strange sensation enfolding me, a heat wave; that started mild and grew overwhelming, almost unbearable under so many quilted covers of this stranger bed. I felt bruises in my body, boiling with heat, pinning me down with a cry.

Who did this to me? Why is my head crushed and my body so sore? I'm exhausted. My brain feels melted on a puddle of acid. Was it her? The shadow of her hands still sleeps on each of my shoulders, and they're firm, but loving.

Who was it, then? Who knocked me to the ground and kicked me inside my brain, made me roll on snow and rocks and left me there for a whole day?

She was crying now. Why is she crying?

She's sobbing and her nose is running.

I don't want to see you cry. Never.

Only if you miss me. Only if I'm gone.

"I guess you'll have to do it, there doesn't seem to be that many options ya' know. Poor kid. Nobody is coming before Tuesday, and this is looking pretty bad..."

"Can't wait until Tuesday, this is not only frostbite."

"Nope. You'll have to do it woman, I can't do it myself, and no one else can but you as far as I know. Poor kid, good Lord."

She told me to hold my breath and look away. She called me baby, she said she was sorry. So sorry.

Everything else was static on the radio, but her voice.

Then I remembered what was wrong with my head, with my occipital lobe and with my life. Nobody betrayed me but my own self. My own negligence.

I stared at the dead black piece of flesh that used to be a part of me. And I held, tightly in my hand, the place where it used to be attached to. It looked like a chunk of old tire rubber.

I guess it doesn't belong to me anymore. ❧



THE SNOWFLAKE, *LEUCOJUM VERNUM*

Breaking Sound

Chapter Five Nilas, Search (Measure 1)

by Sarah Alsgaard

“There’s nothing left of him! So please, please, I must ask that you leave him be. What else could you do to him? What more could you want?”

The old man looked up at me with absolute desperation. His son had lost his mind right in front of him. It was hardly my fault. The son was now slumped on the ground, and I only had to take his hand into mine.

When I touched his wrist, I could feel the younger man’s thoughts crawl up my hand and dig into my skin. The thoughts were desperate to leave their previous keeper, as though they had sensed the man’s future. I closed my eyes briefly and sifted through the grains of memories I’d newly gained.

Where had the man buried the most precious memory within these thoughts?

“Please,” the old man pleaded. “Please, leave my son alone.”

“He is very much a hollowed man now, and I will be leaving very shortly,” I said while I continued looking. “Is not that leaving him alone?”

The son’s memories that I had taken began playing before my eyes again.

I could see the old man in one of his memories, smiling with his hands around a woman’s waist. The son, a boy in the memory, looked up at his father and started laughing.

“What did you do to him?” the old

man cried, back in the present.

There would be one memory more carefully buried than the others. I kept my eyes closed and concentrated on one memory moving before me, trying to escape unnoticed. I felt the old man’s dry hands feebly try to push and pull at me, a sad attempt to distract me from this single memory flashing before my eyes. I laughed and shoved him aside. I heard his head crack against the dresser, and felt content enough that I was on the right track with this memory.

The memory continued playing against the back of my eyelids. The old man in the memory suddenly seemed very grave when he and his son were playing on a swing set. The old man set his son on his knee, still swinging gently back and forth on the swing, and looked over at his wife nervously. She sat on a park bench leafing through a newspaper.

“We,” the man cleared his throat. “There’s a secret I must tell you now and you must swear never to repeat it to anyone.”

I could see through the boy’s eyes that the man was deeply afraid of uttering the secret even to his son. Memories from other psychics had revealed the same to me. All afraid of the truth they hid. The boy nodded his little head earnestly and grew still.

“There’s someone you must protect.”

“What’s the secret?” the boy asked.

“The fact that this one special psychic that you must protect even exists is the secret,” his father said.

“Your mission is to guard a psychic who holds an even graver secret. There should be someone who comes along and tells you this later in life, but it always has passed through our family, this secret. So I wanted to tell you, myself.”

“When do I have to protect this person...this secret?” the boy asked.

“Soon,” the father said. “Whenever the archivist wishes.” Tears welled up in the man’s eyes. He patted the boy’s head. “Yes, your power is strong enough to protect her now. Yes...you will leave here tomorrow to go see the archivist.”

“But how will I find her? What’s an archivist?” the boy said. His father remained silent. In desperation, the son cried out, “I don’t even know her name! Who am I supposed to protect?”

The father looked around nervously. He nodded at his wife, who had looked up, and she returned to her papers. Finally, certain no one else could hear, he leaned down to the boy, unaware that one day he would be whispering it into my ear. “When you arrive at the airport tomorrow, there will be many people holding signs with names on them. You will know the archivist because he will be the one holding a sign with the name ‘Salezra’ on it. That is who you must protect.”

Perfect.

I opened my eyes and tucked the memories deep into the pockets of my

mind. Thousands of memories from each psychic I had touched remained there, each neatly stored for access at any time.

The son, though I had now emptied his mind, reached out for his father and felt the blood running on the ground coming from the old man. He started to cry, though he had no reason to. I had taken every single one of his memories that would suggest he should be saddened by this. A strong psychic, I thought, to maintain some shred of himself after I had taken his memories. .

My cell phone rang. I fished it out of my pocket and waited for the usual three- second pause.

“Are you finished?”

She always seemed so impatient to me.

“Yes, send him here for cleaning any time you want. These two will not be moving for a while.”

“You always have to think of the police,” she said.

“The entire Corporation could come knocking at the door and I wouldn’t feel bothered right now.”

“A good night, then,” she said, her voice lifting into careful optimism. “Good. Progress is good, isn’t it?”

“However slow,” I muttered.

“I’m sending him now,” she said. “Please feel at ease to move on to your next target.”

“Thank you,” I heard myself say, though I never knew exactly why.

“Thank you,” I said again.

“Always,” she said and hung up.

✿

The Smacky Saga

by Ken Spivey

Ok, so I have this friend named Ken who decided that he wasn't getting enough dates by the traditional methods. To remedy this, he turned to okCupid.com and entered the online dating scene. It didn't take very long for him to get his first interested woman and they planned to meet. Even though they met in a public place, he somehow disappeared. The only contact I've had with him are text messages he sends to my cell phone. I've decided to share them as a warning to all of the single people of the world. Be careful out there!

-Greg

01: The date

Hey! I'm on my date, from okCupid. She's kinda cool, acts alot like Daria... not sure if that's a good thing. It appears to be going well, she's currently taking us on a romantic drive.

02: What happened?

Um, Greg, the date, I don't really know what happened. I woke up in a gas station restroom in Huston. All I have is a pair of sweatpants and a roll of quarters. There's a trucker named Smacky who says I have a pretty belly. Greg, I'm scared.

03: Dude

Dude, yesterday I was in Sacramento. Somehow, I'm now in a small town 50 miles outside of denver, now. Smacky gave me a t-shirt for a back rub, then dumped me out in a field. I got a job as a short order cook and am dating the sheriff's daughter.

04: The sheriff's daughter

The sheriff's daughter, Matilda, and I bought an old houseboat. We're not near any water, so we got a deal. Smacky came by, today. He and I are

now selling steaks out of the trunk of his Buick. Also, you'd be really proud of the tattoo of an eagle flying over a sunset I got on my left knee. It keeps me focused.

05: Matilda's first husband

Matilda's first husband said he has her baby, that she apparently forgot she had. The baby's name is Tally, and neither she nor I know it's sex. The baby lives in Boca Raton, which means "Mouth of the Rat." Smacky says the baby is an omen of a good season for steak sales. I am optimistic, we are close to our quota!

06: Tally

Tally was not really Matilda's baby, turns out he/she was merely a ploy. Her ex-husband wanted her back, so he used an orphan. We were both badly shaken by the incident. Heck, old Smacky was starting to grow a shine to the child. The t-shirt Smacky gave me a week ago is getting dirty, it's about time to try to find a new one. Steak sales are down, just like our luck.

07: Matilda and I

Matilda and I went for a walk, today. She said she loved me and she thought it was a good idea to discuss the matter over candles and bath salts. I didn't see her carrying any candles or bath salted items when we left the house. Turns out, Smacky ran ahead and bought them at that shiny CVS that just opened up on the corner of Bushel and Pine. Oh, how I do love progress.

Steak sales are still on the decline, due to the growing vegan population in town. Damn hippies.

08: Easter

Well, it's Easter. Smacky cut a steak into a bunny shape, but that won't make up for my loss. I left Matilda, the feelings were not mutual. She just lost that "new car" smell. We reckon we'll be movin' on, again. But first, we gotta find air for our tires, that's a rare thing in this town.

09: The days

The days have been long & hard, Smacky is low on gas money and I've developed a rash. I fear for our future. Also, I've begun bleeding from my toes. I pray for socks.

10: I'm working

I'm working as a ball boy at a golf course in The Hamptons. Smacky took off for a while, but I'm living in the nice doctor's pool house. I apparently look like his dead son, and it's kinda creepy when he calls me Eugene.

11: A letter

Smacky got a letter which made him turn pale white. He got in her Buick and drove to the coast. Two days later Smacky told me He was a She. Not only was Smacky a woman, but she told me the letter was from the former KGB.

12: West End Girls

West End Girls played in the background as Smacky told me of her russian past. She wiped a tear and told me about the abuse she suffered while training for the Olympics and how her daughter was taken from her when she failed to win the gold. Smack moved to the US to raise money to find her daughter.

13: Dr. Tajfel

Dr. Tajfel showed me the trophy room where he keeps the heads of all he's killed. He said, "all god's creatures end up someone's trophy" then pointed skyward and screamed.

14: Late last night

Late last night I heard a sound from Dr. Tajfel's house. I looked in the basement window to see a crowd of people gathered around two children. The children appeared to have knives and the onlookers were placing bets.

15: The summer heat

The summer heat beat down as I swam when Smacky told me he/she tivo'd the original MASH. Dr Tajfel's pit has been closed for a few days for remodeling. I found a kitten.

16: I named the

I named the kitten Tally after Matilda's fake baby. Smacky says she has nearly enough money to go back to Russia. I was fired today for text messaging on my cell phone.

17: Not a single

Not a single day goes by without Smacky going on about her kid. The fighting pit got vinyl siding. My kitten is due to fight a baby on Tuesday. I've yet to find a job.

18: I put on my

I put on my best shirt and went huntin' a job. I got a gig at Starbucks. I start out as the Foam-Boy but they tell me if I work hard I get to make teas. Oh, my cat won.

19: Smacky and I

Smacky and I watched re-runs of "Three's Company" on Smacky's circa 1994 "TV" watch, which picks up a total of four UHF channels when the weather is clear enough.

20: We packed our

We packed our stuff, set the kitten free, and wished Dr Tajfel and Starbucks goodbye. Smacky and I stowed away on a cargo ship headed to Europe. Smack bought rice crispy treats!

21: We've been at sea

We've been at sea for days. Smacky spends the nights crying and the days reading The Davinci Code. I befriended the captain and am learning the ways of the sea. He calls me Jo-Jo.

22: We hit a storm

We hit a storm today. The Captain told the men to hold fast as the wind blew up Smacky's skirt. I grew seasick and hid down below.

23: Smacky finished

Smacky finished the Davinci Code and decided to burn it to keep us warm. I learned a song from the sea about women and soap from our Captain. I then napped.

24: Our boat

Our boat was taking in water so we took refuge at an off shore oil rig. The rig's crew is very nice and invited us to stay aboard while the boat was repaired.

25: The scream

The scream of seagulls blended in with the cries of help I heard from Smacky's room. When I arrived he/she was bleeding from a stab wound.

26: The ship and

The ship and the rig's medics kept Smacky in surgery for 5 hours. Afterwards, they said he would not be safe to move for weeks. Our ship left us so I'm not sure how we're leaving. The rig has an immense library. I've started reading the lesser known works of Dean Koontz to the in-a-coma Smacky. The would be assassin is still unknown.



27: The rig has

The rig has workers from every country, even some I think they're making up. There's something creepy here, I fear for our safety. I just read "Twilight Eye."

28: A young man

A young man from Tanzania has stayed with Smacky day and night while she/he recovered. I found a hole in the wall of the cabin where I believe someone has been watching me.

29: I feel like

I feel like my life is going too fast. One minute I'm a student the next I'm sleeping with a Swedish girl. No sex, just it's cold and I need the warmth.

30: Svulga

Svulga, my Swedish special friend, took me to the deck of the rig. She pointed out her favorite stars and told me that one day she plans to own her own Denny's.

31: Internet access

Internet access has finally been restored. When Smacky awoke he claimed the would-be-killer was the captain of the boat that had brought

us there. Svulga and I have started a jazz duo. Any day now another vessel is due to come by. Now that Smacky is back among the land of the living, and has shaved her back, we can continue after her daughter.

32: Japanese pirates

Japanese pirates boarded the rig and killed most of the crew. Smacky and I were taken captive. I fear I may never leave this man-made hell. Still, the works of Dean Koontz comfort me.

33: Smacky and I

Smacky and I were taken aboard the pirate ship tonight before they set sail. I'm still unsure why the pirates let me keep my laptop. I'm also confused as to how and why pirates would have wireless internet access.

34: I was awoken

I was awoken in the middle of the night to angry Japanese cursing. Two pirate guards came into our cell, stood in front of the two of us, and just stood there silently. They stood there motionless, just staring for hours. Just looking... gazing... waiting...

35: I held her

I held her hand as Yin's eyes closed in pain. "It's time," she cried. Smacky got some warm water and towels and wiped her forehead. Today I delivered my first baby. Yin named her child, "Ken."

36: We arrived

We arrived in a land which is unfamiliar to me. The sights and sounds overwhelmed my senses in a way only the most deviant adult book stores have. Smacky and I were still bound as we were escorted off the ship. We were given baths and placed in the finest silks.

37: This island

This island had a people who spoke a tongue we'd never heard before. Smacky has had more international experience, and even his (or her) knowledge seemed to be lacking. We've been forced to eat immense amounts of what appears to be a small cabbage.

38: Though these people

Though these people appear primitive, the wireless access here is amazing. After the chief of the tribe that Smacky and I were sold to granted me access to their secure network, I was able to download the entire first season of "Spin City" in less 14 minutes! Well, I gotta go work in the mines. I'll write soon.

39: Given

Given, being sold into slavery on some tiny island was not part of the plan, but it has its perks. We get bread twice a day, but only the "elect" get to see daylight. The old timers have gone blind like those cave fish you see on PBS. I guess we should try to escape.

40: We escaped

We escaped from the mining camp, stowed away on a cruise ship, and we're finally headed to Europe. Thank God for the world's obsession with pleasure at sea!

I need new soles for me shoes. Laboring in a mine can wear down even the strongest of Rockport's.

41: I never knew

I never knew boats were so freakin' slow! There's nothing to do at sea. Smacky has taken to playing shuffleboard on the upper deck. I have taken to dating as many of the german tourists as possible. I've had sex 7.3 times today.

42: We landed some time ago

We landed some time ago on the fjord of Norwegian coast. The view is beautiful from the small village in which Smack and I have taken residence. We are once again out of money, so we're working for the local cobbler as "shoe boys."

43: Some time has

Some time has gone by and Smacky went off looking for her daughter, left two weeks ago. My life has a shoe boy has given me new insight into the writing of the eastern writer, Camus. Is life anything more than a shoe? Anyways, the pay is decent and because the Norwegian love of SpikeTV everyone speaks English.

44: I joined a new

I joined a new cobbler-only HMO. It turns out shoemakers have unique medical needs. Oh, and Norway is indeed a wondrous land. I met a man who claimed to be Thor.

45: Thor took me

Thor took me to a local pub. They take pride in their Viking garb. Thor's muskrat skin pants were very impressive. I ordered some mead and sang war songs into the night.

46: I was arrested

I was arrested for public drunkenness. I spent several nights in jail before they released me into the custody of the cobbler's union. I now owe them a blood debt.

47: The cobblers have

The cobblers have a century old feud with the fishmonger union. Plans are in the works to finally topple the fishmonger control of the east side.

48: The Cobble Lord

The Cobble Lord has commanded me to infiltrate the fishmonger base, pose as one of their own, then report back my findings. My life is in peril for if I were found out...

49: I stopped

I stopped shaving for a week, covered myself with cod oil, then walked into the pub where the fishmongers drank. The barkeep pointed to a door that led to a small cave.

50: Yesterday I

Yesterday I entered a cave... today I awoke next to a sexy blonde with the most glorious breasts. I think I'll enjoy this den of fishmongers.

51: My day was

My day was as sensual as the night. Woman after beautiful woman came to my room. Something about fishmongers really turns Norwegian women on. No wonder the cobblers were jealous. Yet, I owe the Cobble Lord my life. I told the final woman I was tired then sneaked deep into the fishmonger lair...to learn their ways...

52: Turns out the

Turns out the fishmongers are making extra money by selling bootleg seasons of "Charles in Charge" and other 80's sitcoms on ebay. They are funneling the money into a Swiss account. It also appears that they practice the dark arts! The stockpile of flat colored paints explains the drab artwork on the cave walls.

53: I went out

I went out to sea today with my fellow fishmongers. What I learned on the sea helped me pose as a fisher. I caught a net full of trout and traded them in for some good money at the market. I went back to the fish cave, had sex with 7 hot women, then sat down to a large bowl of grits and Canadian bacon.

54: We went on

We went on a "fishing journey" over the weekend. It's lonely without

Smacky to greet me. I hope he/she finds his/her daughter. I reported my findings to the Cobble Lord. He was so pleased with me that he upgraded my cobbler HMO to a PPO. My blood debt is now paid. Yet, I'm torn between the fish and shoe worlds.

55: My days were

My days were filled with the heels and insteps of cobble-life. At night, I would steal myself away to monger fish. My friends are but illusions, for none know my turncoat ways. I received a letter from Smacky. She/he is in southern France, enjoying the wine until she has another lead on her daughter. I miss him/her.

56: I went back

I went back to the bar Thor showed me when I first arrived in Norway. I attempted to drown my sorrow in brew. I spoke to a man who knew where I could get a glass of iced tea. Oh, how I thirst. His name was Loki and he wore an elfish smile. I gave him 12 Euro and he gave me a map to the only iced tea in all of Norway.

57: The whole

The whole "map to the iced tea" thing sounded epic and all... but the map was really a bus route. Yet, when I arrived I enjoyed the most wonderful beverage. I savored every swallow of this leaf-made concoction. Loki sure knew his tea! Anyway, it's the weekend so no fish or shoes. I can relax, watch re-runs of Murphy Brown with Thor, and drink my lovely frigid delight!

58: My days were

My days were filled with the heels and insteps of cobble-life. At night, I would steal myself away to monger fish. My friends are but illusions, for none know my turncoat ways. I received a letter from Smacky. She/he is in southern France, enjoying the wine until there is another lead on his/her daughter.

59: Norway, like most

Norway, like most of Europe, makes you pay to use the restroom. It took me 1 Euro just to relieve myself after another trip to the ice tea maker. Oh, I also spoke to the CobbleLord & he understood my confish between the fish & show worlds. He suggested I go on a "Shoe Sojourn of The Soul" to re-find my inner cobbler.

60: Hours of

Hours of meditation in the Temple of Shoe brought me nothing but confusion, and a hunger for Buggles. I got a bag from the temple gift shop then sat before the Golden Shoe of Ragnorock. It's comforting gleam reminded me of Matilda so I wrote my old girlfriend a letter, put it in a bottle, then threw it into the Boot Sea.

61: I got an

I got an email from Smacky. She/he is going to come to Norway via a gypsy caravan. Thor looks forward to meeting ol' Smack. Love is in the air! Yet, I miss Matilda.

62: There is nowhere

There is nowhere to go to Mass in Norway. It seems they blame Catholics for the rise of reality tv. I bought a guitar and am going to start a Journey cover band.

63: My Journey cover

My Journey cover band has gotten really popular. The mate & I plan to tour Europe in a while. Also, it turns out the real Steve Perry is from Norway and is our new lead singer.

64: Steve Perry sure

Steve Perry sure is nice. He has an elaborate collection of stained glass unicorns from every country he's visited. Smacky called, he/she'll be in Norway soon.

65: I got a

I got a chain text message on my cell phone today. Thor tells me I'd better send it our or I'll get bad vibes. I think it's all a bunch of crap.

66: Ever since I

Ever since I got that chain text message I've been getting calls from a little girl saying, "you have 7 days." Either someone has seen The Ring one to many times or I may soon die.

67: Yet another

Yet another creepy call today, 6 days left until something. Lord knows what will happen. Thor suggests I stay drunk. Come to think of it, it's always his advice.

68: Fishmongers

Fishmongers found out about my stay in their lair so they summoned an assassin from the east to take me down. It's amazing what you can learn on www.fishmonger.net

69: It is late

It is late on a Sunday evening. Smacky's ride was delayed due to weather. Last night I heard a noise outside my room. When I opened the door...
Thor was dead!

70: I have been unable

I have been unable to write for some time. I've been in a Turkish prison for months. Smacky is here in the next cell. I don't want to say what I had to do, and to whom, for this cell phone. My God! The guards are here, not another de-lousing!

71: I just got back

I just got back from saving Smacky's daughter from white slavery and decided to hit the road with my guitar. I leave in the morning.
✿

To be continued...

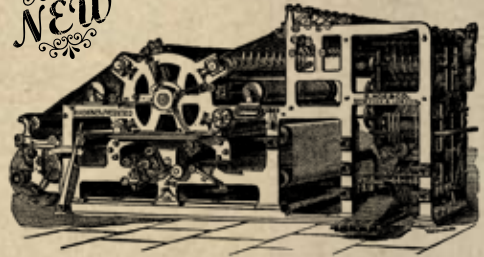
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