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Editor's Note

We've all got problems. It's not just a pithy response delivered with a shrug by the droopy-trousered repairman who has informed you that, despite the immanent arrival of your book-and-margaritas (but-mostly-margaritas) club, the enchanted flange gasket that will make your garbage disposal stop spewing purple sludge like a bad special effect is on backorder for six weeks; it's also the rallying cry of this month's protagonists: survival problems, ethical dilemmas, relationship predicaments, communication conundrums, and many others. However, unlike you with your malfunctioning household appliance, the characters in these stories are actually stuck in interesting situations. Read, commiserate, and feel a teensy bit better about your busted In-Sink-Erator, at least for a while.

— Laura Garrison

The Little Duck

Sam Bradford

You have to dismantle Brad Pitt's butt cheeks before replacing them. Donald knows that too well. Twice monthly he finds himself on a small stool, like a milkmaid, in front of Brad. This is *Fight Club* Brad, shirtless, and his jeans have a hidden zipper that runs down the seam of each leg. Donald, in white gloves, unzips the jeans.

He doesn't say anything to Brad, unlike some of the other employees. You start talking and things get weird. It's just a wax model, after all. Donald has the dual job of night watchman and "Evening Sprucer" over Brad and the others in Sir Blingly's Wax Emporium.

Patrons pose with Brad for photos. Here, they can feel the excitement of celebrity proximity without any shame over the inability to control themselves. One outcome of this phenomenon is a surprising number of patrons, who, when posing with Brad, reach around and pinch his bottom.

Enough pinching results in a pocked, uneven wax derriere. Armed with a putty knife and a hair dryer, the Evening Sprucer rights such wears and tears and alerts the Wax Master to larger maintenance.

According to Todd, who is Wax Master and Donald's boss, the last thing you want to do is rip people from their fantasy. For one moment these workaday folk are on equal terms with celebrities, casual enough to throw an arm around them or pinch their

bottoms. A furrowed rump, however, disrupts the illusion of egalitarian brotherhood the emporium temporarily provides.

So Todd had the idea of installing rubber foam pads in Brad. He excavated the wax hindquarters (rumor has it they are still in his office somewhere) and replaced them with foam. Now Todd can look over the floor from his upstairs office and see adventurous patrons rewarded. Of course they know the figures are wax, but the unexpected gluteal suppleness generates a flash of doubt visible from across the museum. Like seeing people believe in a miracle. It lasts for only an instant, but Todd lives for this moment.

But even the foam wears out. A vigorous pinch can pluck out a nugget. And if you shuffle Brad's pants, it falls by his ankle. Then, when it catches on that you can "get a piece of ass" from Brad Pitt, the response is piranhaian.

So Donald exchanges used butt pads for fresh ones. Donald, a still-single Ph.D. candidate in political philosophy, bows before Brad for rump maintenance. Donald, a real-life philosopher, already bald and bearded, sees women swoon over a mound of wax and ignore him entirely. Donald, whose 416-page dissertation-in-progress considers the political detriment of American consumerism, takes a dual job at SB's just to sustain himself in his kimchi-stained, one-room apartment.

But it's all ok. Donald doesn't mind tonight as he rezips Brad's pants and trashes the mangled foam buttocks. It's all ok because that morning, Donald had received the first glimmer of real progress after eight years of labor: an email from a publisher telling him that he was "in for a treat." To be looking for it in the mail.

The mail came and Donald only allowed himself to see the return address from the major publishing house. They don't send hefty packets for rejection letters.

You see, Donald wanted to be more than an obscure scholar. He wanted to be the thinker that obscure scholars devoted themselves to. He knew that to have a lasting impact on the populace, you had to put things in terms they understand.

So Donald wrote what was to be the first in a string of scathingly dark satires, designed to skewer American consumerist ignorance so immaculately that there could be no resistance.

His first piece, "The Little Duck," improves Eric Voegelin's concept of sociopolitical history, the Orders of Being. This Donald portrays by describing American *fowl* behavior.

The gods of the Greeks and Romans inhabited the natural world—the trees, rivers, atop a particular mountain. Everything divine is in human, worldly terms. This, to Voegelin, marks the Compact Order of Being:

In the big blue pond, the little duck sings.

In the big blue pond, he sees many things.

But for the Israelites, God was unfathomable. No longer in Nature. Outside of all. They had made a "leap in being" from the Compact Order to the Differentiated Order:

In the big blue pond, the little duck was kept.

Out of the big blue pond, the little duck leapt.

Outside the pond, there was more to see!

Outside the pond, there was more to be!

But Donald himself sees a second leap in being—so long in the Differentiated Order and we create our own evil God, capitalism:

The little duck found a pretty dime.

The pretty dime had a lovely shine.

The pretty dime caught a hunter's eye.

The hunter aimed his gun at the little guy.

The little duck leaps and leaps some more.

Boom! The little duck is no more.

Fin.

Finally, someone in the publishing world had recognized Donald's vision. And so, tonight, Donald does not dawdle as Evening Sprucer. He wants time to read the contents of the hefty packet without distraction:

Mr. Donald Dubeneffer,

We are very pleased to offer publication of your groundbreaking book, THE LITTLE DUCK. We even have Una Lentutti, top-tier illustrator, interested in collaborating with you. We included samples of her work.

"Fancy that!" Donald says.

Please complete the attached contract and royalty negotiation and return in the enclosed envelope. Our editors will be in touch.

We are thrilled to publish your work, Mr. Dubeneffer. We believe it is the perfect addition to our new WORKS FOR "WIDDLE WEEDERS" series. Shooting from the hip here, but how would you feel about a pen name? Something punchy, so the kids won't stumble over so many syllables—think "Brad Pitt."

Warmest regards,

Gerard Albertson IV

Albertson, Albertson, Albertson, and Albertson, Publishers, Inc.

* * *

Una Lentutti—whose e-cigarette has interchangeable lights to match her outfit, whose perpetually damp hair looks jetted by an alarmed squid—was so powerful in the children’s publishing division of QuadAl that she was allowed to choose a book every year to “make.” Known for once depicting all characters in a book on table manners as nude and anatomically exaggerated, her drawings captivated young readers, evoking a profitable *je ne sais quoi* in lackluster subgenres. The book was banned in some countries.

Una was not to be inspired by a story; on the contrary, the story was not to get in her way. So every year, she scavenged the most innocuous submission from the slush pile.

When she had read Donald’s piece, she had recalled a species of Amazonian duck with a penis twice as long as its body. She could draw that. *It’s not being crude*, she thought. *It’s real. Just try to censor it!*

At the Wax Emporium, Brad Pitt and Donald climb to the top floor, where Todd’s office overlooks the figures. Brad Pitt has foam bottoms pinned all over him. The two stand atop the guardrail.

Brad Pitt leaps in being. He leaps and is no more.

WM. SAMUEL BRADFORD teaches high school English in Atlanta, Ga. He is currently working on a novel. His stories have appeared in the *New Yorker*, which is to say that he staples them in the back of the copy at the public library.

Hunger

Sara Krueger

I float the back channels in the swampish heat,
past the leavings of one town and then another,
keeping my peepers peeled and my mask tugged tight.

Every few miles I shore up and scan the trees,
fingering the blade I rescued
from Gummy's hog farm.
My work boots sink into the muck
as I root around for something squirrely.

The search is so much harder now after the change.
But, Gummy needs the meat — —
bloody and almost beating.
Her book tells us these things.

She'd got no teeth left in her head,
Gummy didn't,
when I found her.
Her eyes had gone too from many months of basement living.
She keeps me at this life,
Gummy does,
and she makes me fancy
that it ain't just the metal men out there
rustling along in the dark.

SARA KRUEGER received her B.A. in Film from Columbia College Chicago. She has directed several short films. Her written work has appeared in *Menacing Hedge* and *Devilfish Review*. She has attended artist residencies at the Atlantic Center for the Arts and the Ragdale Foundation. Sara lives in Chicago with her husband Garrett, her cat Lando, and her dog Luna.

We Break Up in Multiple Universes

Brooke Glass-O'Shea

We are drifting toward the quasar, vacuuming up space dust and listening to the blast of radio waves. My rocky surface is so close to yours. Your craters and valleys shine in the torrent of electromagnetic radiation that engulfs us.

The quasar's fluctuations might be throwing us off, you say.

Didn't you look at the star map? I say. I told you to bring it.

I know where I'm going, you say coldly.

You're mostly made of ice, I know, but you could still be kinder to me. Your rotational axis has been shifting lately. You don't seem to notice my adorable ice particles anymore. You are pulled toward another asteroid—you think I don't see it? I know that within a short million years you'll be gone, and it makes me want to break up into fragments.

We are swaying in the wind and photosynthesizing. I emit a cloud of orange pollen that blows into your upper branches, because I like to see little bits of myself coating your leaves. The afternoon light pours into our cells.

A troop of energetic monkeys gathers beneath me, hops up onto my trunk and peels off bark, looking for insect grubs. I am annoyed at the monkeys and wondering how much bark I can afford to lose. You used to say how much you loved my bark, how thick and strong it was.

You shudder slightly, attracting the attention of the curious monkeys, who wander out of my shade and into yours. What do you see in those stupid monkeys? I notice that your shuddering has shaken my pollen off of your leaves, and some has blown into the monkeys' black fur.

We are stoned and trying to order pizza from another universe, but the transmitter isn't working properly. I wrap my tentacles around your eyestalk because I can't resist you and I don't want you to feel sad. Boiling lava from the afternoon's volcanic eruption fills your apartment with a pleasant orange fire.

I smack the top of the transmitter with a tentacle and the voice of Robert Krulwich snaps into the air, on that Radiolab show.

"Are you trying to order pizza with the radio?" you say, laughing.

I'm so embarrassed. "If you didn't put the other transmitter in some stupid place . . ." I start, but you're just staring out the window, so distant, like you're in another universe with our pizza. You don't even notice as my tentacles drop sadly to my sides.

We're walking together along the packed beach sand, the late sun elongating our shadows, our strides perfectly matched because our legs are exactly the same. As we slow up toward the jetty, you turn to me.

"This feels weird," you say. "I don't really think it's right for me to be sleeping with my own clone, you know?"

"Wait, what?" I say. "You're *my* clone."

“Is that what they told you?” you say, looking at me like I’m a child.

“Well, yeah,” I say defensively. “Look, even if they told you the same thing, how do you know they were lying to me and not to you? Or even to both of us—like, maybe we’re both clones of some other person?”

You sigh. “What difference does it make?” you say. “It’s still fucking wrong.”

Your lips curl into a suggestion of contempt, and I unconsciously raise my hand to my own mouth, stopping midway as I catch your eye. I swallow hard, the taste of you fading from my mouth.

BROOKE GLASS-O’SHEA lives in Missoula, Montana, with a miniature potted rosebush named Doctor Plant. She is currently studying for an MFA in Nonfiction.

In the Stairwell

Sean Denmark

Wolves in the stairwell, they clamber, they clamber. We live on the fifth floor; hear them scratch at the door. Up and down they pass along—don't their knees tire, as once did ours?—as though five flights is nothing. But perhaps there are even more on floors below. We cannot see them from the peephole. Once we opened the door.

Just once.

Sometimes, we think, their fur flashes from the windows across the street. Surely it's not just our building? The streets are empty, neither peopled nor wolved. Are they on the roof? Do their claws click in the apartment above?

When will they take to the fire escapes? We don't speak it, but always an eye is cast towards the windows. Never have we seen a wolf outside, though, and we also do not speak of this hope.

Footsteps once fell above us. We told stories about them. A father, mother, child. In the silence we've stopped telling stories. The radiators, they bang oftentimes, but we don't know the code. It's too late to learn it, or invent one.

Do we hear their claws strike the pipes? They burrowed to the basement, into all the basements; this is the explanation we've selected. They chewed through all the wires, but the world still does exist.

To keep going so, up and down, they must have called on several apartments. Even then, a tenant can only support so many

wolves for so long. There are only so many units. They must have begun to turn on one another.

We're hungry too, you know. We wonder what wolf tastes like. We've taken to eating each other, but that only lasts so long, and seems such a waste when to ourselves we taste bitter and wolves relish us so.

SEAN DENMARK is a current MFA student at New York University and former New York City school teacher. He was a Peace Corps volunteer in Cameroon and hails from Alabama.

Divine Message

Amy Foster Myer

"And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day." Genesis ch.1, v.31.

And on the seventh day, God rested . . . but as a rather high-strung kind of Guy, God did not look forward to sitting around all day. And since we all pretty much agree that a day to God is, like, a gazillion years, that's an awfully long time to sit on your duff, doing nothing except being grateful to One's self for all the good One has done.

So God started in on His restful activities. He caught up on laundry, though a pair of red underpants somehow found its way into the whites, pinkening all his robes, for which God blamed Morning Star.

Then God scooped the kitty litter, which was long overdue. And, finally, sorted through the junk mail that had been piling up, and clipped the coupons He intended to use and put them in the drawer with His spare keys, and circled the date on the fridge calendar when His Bed, Bath & Beyond coupon was set to expire.

But that only took half of God's seventh day. Half a gazillion years.

So God thought about what He had not yet made and in what areas He might make improvements before He invited friends over to see His new place. He pondered the oceans: the deep blue seas

and the fish and leviathan streaming through the warm, salty waters; and He pondered the skies: the many species of birds that hummed, soared, circled and dove in graceful formations. He gazed down upon Adam who squatted flat-footed in the dirt and picked his toes and wiped his boogers on the grass; and upon Eve, who constantly scratched the scar below her breast where Adam's rib itched her. And God thought about all the land animals, ending with serpents, which He had so very much enjoyed making, the clay rolling out long and thin between his palms, then dropping from His hand in a neat coil which rose to life, hood-open and hissing.

Finally, God considered the land — and more particularly — the Garden. But it had barely been twenty-four hours since He'd finished creating it, and an old college professor had once said to put your work aside for a few days before revisiting it, lest one either gloatingly submit it too early or anxiously revise out the bits divinely inspired. So God, in thinking of what was missing, what could be made easier, more streamlined, created texting. And when He was finished, He sent this new thing, this text, to all of His friends telling them of the marvelous thing He had made and they texted Him back things like "OMG!" and "LOL!"

And He saw what He had made and saw that it was good.

And so it happened one day while Adam roamed about the Garden naming things, he set his phone down upon a fallen log covered in spongy green moss. And a family of slugs slimed their way onto it to google things they had been arguing about and make long distance phone calls to their family in Sweden.

And when Adam saw what they had done, he grew angry and flicked them into the dirt and threatened to throw salt on them if he caught them nosing around his phone again.

Adam, forlorn that he had nowhere to carry his phone, lifted his hands to the heavens and called out, “Why hast thou forsaken us, oh Lord, and our iPhones?”

But God was on another call to his cousin in Greece and did not answer Adam’s plea.

But Adam’s wife had hidden behind an as-yet unnamed bush to eavesdrop and skittered back to the house to retrieve her plastic bin of crafting supplies. And with the leaves of a palm frond and the rope from a hemp plant, Eve hot-glue gunned a satchel in which Adam might carry his phone rather than having to place it on the ground or clench it between his ass cheeks as he strolled about the Garden.

And so Eve searched for Adam to present to him this great gift and found him standing at the edge of a very dark, very deep chasm, stroking his chin in contemplation. A plywood sign had been erected near the mouth of the cavern, which read “Glory Hole” in sloppily painted red letters. But that was only Morning Star’s crude attempt at humor and was not, in fact, the cave’s official name. Naming things was Adam’s job, by golly, which he took very seriously, and spent many hours late at night deeply engrossed in thinking about, querying to his animal friends about while they took turns playing free cell.

Eve presented Adam with her creation there on the shore where sea met chasm and said she had reserved the naming for him alone. Slinging the bag over his shoulder, Adam could not help but feel a

bit like a girly-man as he spun in a circle and the bag bumped against his hip.

“What am I supposed to do with this . . . this man-purse!” Adam demanded, tossing the thing back at Eve and resuming his consideration of what to call the great chasm.

“Oh, go to hell!” Eve shouted and flung the Earth’s first man-purse into the chasm.

“That’s it!” Adam cried and turned to thank Eve, but she had gone back into the woods, probably to go cry about it to Mrs. Rabbit and make all the woodland creatures refuse to call stuff by the name he’d given it like they had done when Adam refused to eat Eve’s poison-ivy tarts, after which for many days everyone went around calling the sky “the great blue sheet” and the sea “the wet spot” while they snickered behind his back.

And so a few weeks passed in which Adam continued to lament his lack of a place to put his phone and Eve stormed from the room when he brought it up. So one evening, while Eve was making more man-purses to sell on Etsy—Mrs. Goat had said that any man truly secure in his sexuality would be happy to have one—Adam texted Deer, Wolf, Goat, and Rabbit and asked which of them would like to be made into the first ever set of clothes. An honor, he texted them, the highest form of flattery—wearing another person’s skin. The epiphany had struck in the middle of the night—what their phones really needed were pockets. But in order to have pockets, one must first have pants.

And Rabbit, who was off screwing his wife’s best friend like a—well, you know—was the last to text back “Not It!” And so it came to pass that Rabbit became a loin cloth to cover Adam’s dingle and

keep his phone off the ground while he toiled in the dirt or ran about naming things.

And Adam saw what he had made and saw that it was good.

And years passed in which Adam and Eve enjoyed the fruits of their labors and the company of their friends and held lovely soirees with Chinese paper lanterns strung between the palms and fancy cocktails with maraschino cherries frozen in ice cubes clinking about in their IKEA martini glasses. But Serpent looked upon Adam and Eve with contempt and dreamt how he might pull them from their pedestal.

In the middle of the garden stood a great tree which never lost its leaves and produced small red fruit which God had forbidden Adam and Eve from touching because, so He said, forbidden apples made the best Waldorf-Astoria salad this side of the Euphrates.

Since Eve was more of a citrus girl and Adam preferred legumes, they both swore solemnly, offering their extended pinkies to make the ultimate promise, to never eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree.

But Serpent, with his unlimited data plan, sent Eve hundreds of texts a day, trying to convince her to eat of the forbidden fruit. Eve texted back things like “No” and “Leave me alone” and “If you don’t cut it out, I’ll make a pair of boots out of you. I learned how to do it from eHow so you know I’m serious.” And though the last threat frightened Serpent, especially after he researched it himself and saw that eHow had gotten it exactly right, he continued with the textual harassment because, hey, it wasn’t costing him a cent.

Eventually, Eve succumbed, worn to the bone first from the barrage of texts and then from Adam, who scolded her about how much this all cost them. And Eve ate of the forbidden apple so Serpent would shut up about it. And she gave it to Adam who also ate of the fruit because he wanted Serpent to shut up about it too.

And when God came to the Garden to harvest apples to make His celebrated salad and found that He had one less than the recipe called for, He grew angry with Eve for not just blocking Serpent's texts and with Adam for not showing her how.

And Adam and Eve hid from God. They turned off their phones and threw them under a bush. They avoided the places they usually frequented—the topiary garden, the clothing-optional beach—in case God poked His Head in for a look around. But Adam had become obsessed with Candy Crush and when he turned his phone back on to play it secretly, God used His friend-finder app to track them down.

And God—still smarting from memories of that dinner party, the hushed whispers that He was losing His touch and perhaps someone else should bring fruit salad next time—banished Adam and Eve from the Garden forever.

But even worse, He took their phones away and cancelled their plans, though He had to pay a \$75 cancellation fee for each phone, which the woman at customer services would in no way let Him wiggle out of. And God gave them two pre-pays that didn't even have a single game or voice recognition or one-touch dialing.

And God sent them, textless and bereft, to wander the Earth.

* * *

Some years later, after Adam and Eve had settled in with a nearby village of hunters-and-gatherers, they gave birth to twin boys, sons so different Eve could tell by scent which of them stood behind her. One was a farmer who as a boy had tried to make a garden from small pebbles he planted in the dirt. He'd grown into a slight man but strong and deeply committed to ideas of justice. The other was a shepherd and a hunter. As a boy, he had practiced skinning on the family cats and grew to hate vegetables or anything that had grown in the ground, consuming only meat. He was big and strong, but selfish, and his father's favorite.

One day, while Cain carried a bushel of grain through his brother's pastures to the storehouse, he overheard Abel speaking to one of the shepherdesses from the neighboring village, giving her his number and telling her to text as often as she wanted.

"But won't your father be mad?" the shepherdess asked, skimming her fingertips over the thick coarse hair that grew in abundance on Abel's arms and back and of which Abel was so proud.

"Nah," Abel said. "We're on a Family Share Plan." And Abel sneered and described his brother as a weakling with spaghetti arms whom no woman could love or want to text.

And in his heart Cain hated his brother and wished to take back his texts for they were his birthright whether he used them or not.

That night, Cain knocked on the flap of sheepskin separating Abel's half of the tent from his.

"Come in," Abel called and Cain entered, finding his brother in the metal tub they used for baths and laundry, pouring conditioner over his shoulders. Wagging the bottle, Abel indicated he wanted Cain to rub it in.

Kneeling by the tub, Cain explained how he only wanted his fair share of texts. He made great speeches, discoursing on the philosophies of morality and justness, punctuating his long address with catchphrases he picked up from the online law school he attended between harvests. His main argument being it was only right. That he should not have to pay ten cents for his texts when Abel used all the family's. That it was God's will that all should have equal parts of the Earth's bounty, including the Family Share Plan.

At this, Abel laughed and asked just who Cain expected to text him? And Cain shrugged, then mentioned his friends, to whom he occasionally sent text-vites to set up a role-playing game in the basement of one of their parents' tents. And Abel reached for his phone which was lying on his towel and tappity-tapped out a very long message and showed it to Cain, that he was telling his girlfriends that his hairless farmer of a brother wanted to text so he and his hairless dorks-for-friends could pretend to be dragon slayers. And the shepherdesses texted back things like "LOL! UR brother looks like an Egyptian hairless!" and "Ooh, Abey, let me stroke your shoulder hair."

And so, enraged, Cain followed his brother into the pastures the next day, and when the shepherdesses' backs were turned, beat him to death with an iPad, which turned out to be about as durable as Consumer Reports reported, though the mute button got stuck and some blood oozed its way under the screen, creating quite a few issues with movie watching. And Cain took Abel's phone and texted the shepherdesses that Cain actually had a really big schlong, that RPG's were a totally valid way to re-realize reality,

and that if they knew what was good for them, they'd stop texting him—as in Abel—quickfast and start texting Cain.

And when Cain's phone erupted in a flurry of texts, none of which would cost him a dime, Cain saw what he had done, and saw that it was good.

Years passed. Cain was cast from the world as his parents had been cast from the Garden, sent to toil the barren soil of the desert, marked in such a way that all who saw him fled lest he murder them for their data plans as well. More years passed. Men and women multiplied over the Earth and got themselves into mischief the likes of which even Serpent himself could not imagine. They built the Tower of Babel, erected by those who wished to touch Heaven and speak directly to God. A shameful attempt to encroach upon God's Personal Bubble, and particularly onerous in light of God's Gift of a year of unlimited texting. And so God cast down the builders and placed new languages upon their tongues. Then the phone companies had to come up with new versions of old phones that included all the new accents and letters needed (and they had thought Sanskrit was tricky), which left the multitudes out of touch for a considerable amount of time, years of darkness and despair.

More years passed. When the sin of the world became too much for God to stand, He decided to erase the peoples from the world as He had done when he re-installed The Sims and a fresh gleaming world popped back on the screen. And so God sent a message to set an alert on the calendar in Noah's phone as well as a text to each of the animals God wanted to keep. And Noah, waking from a rye stupor, built a boat based on the schematics he drew up using his

blueprint app and emailed it to his three sons and so they were saved, along with all the animals who had received the text. Except the unicorns, who were not out playing and frolicking about as certain fairy tales would have it, but were actually doing volunteer work in Calcutta and were in a no-service zone when they were texted to board the boat. Some say this is how the dinosaurs went extinct too, but not even God has an app to tell Him what happened to them.

And more years passed. Years in which God was bountiful and received many thanks and sacrifices and e-cards with dancing gerbils, which He saved and watched whenever He was feeling glum. Years in which God was angry and vengeful and rained fire and sulphur from the Heavens and sent men on holy wars against one another in His name, having read Machiavelli on his kindle during the morning train commute, and deciding that the only way to make men more grateful of all He had done for them was to unleash murder and mayhem in the name of religion, economic sanctions, and oil.

And still more years passed. Men no longer prayed to the God of their fathers, forgetting both His gifts and His wrath. Instead, they bowed to Macintosh and Apple, to MP3 players and sports heroes facing sexual assault charges, to French press coffee and German cars and Italian shoes—all of which could be bought, sold, traded, and delivered via the nation's largest 4G network.

And God saw what He had made and clasped His chin in His hand.

Then He settled the headset over His ears, the mouthpiece resting just above His bottom lip, and logged into His internet

gaming account where His partner, an electronics store manager in Hong Kong, waited.

AMY FOSTER MYER earned her MFA from Queens University of Charlotte. Her work has appeared in *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Prime Number*, *Blue Lake Review*, *Eunoia Review*, and others. She evades writing by playing the banjo (pretty badly), drinking beer (also pretty badly: she spilled beer in her bed three nights in a row), and staring off into space (one thing she's good at). She lives in Portland, Oregon.

The People Outside Your House are NOT Monsters

Jeffery Suwak

Listen, you're in really bad danger right now. I mean, like, pretty much the worst danger ever. And it's not the kind of danger you think it is, either. You need to come outside. Right now.

This is Doug Evers writing. Remember me? I grew up next door to you. You used to make me peanut jelly and butter sandwiches.

I've seen you looking out your window a few times and I waved, but you never waved back. I tried your door a few times last night, too. You probably heard. What the heck is that thing made of, anyway? None of the other doors in the neighborhood have given me so much trouble. That door is ridiculously strong!

So, listen, you've got everything all wrong. I bet you heard that crazy story about how a meteor landed outside town and released a bunch of gas, right? I bet you heard that the gas was full of tiny eggs that turned into worms inside people's lungs, right? And I bet you heard that the worms took control of people's brains and turned them into monsters that eat people and are really stupid (which is totally ridiculous), right? Well, listen, I'm telling you right now that all of that is WRONG!

There *was* gas in the meteorite, but no worms. What the gas actually did was to make some people start seeing things that weren't there. That's what happened to you, and that's why we're writing this letter to you. We're trying to save you from yourself. The people in your yard are NOT monsters. We are your friends.

You're the last one left in the whole neighborhood. We got everyone else out of their houses already. Their doors were easy, not like yours. What is that thing made of, anyway? It's seriously the strongest door ever.

So, come on outside with us. It's safe. There aren't any monsters out here. This is Doug Evers from next door. You used to make me peanut jelly and butter sandwiches, remember?

Oh! And you know what else? That gas that's making you see things is also going to make you and your husband go crazy and totally start killing each other. That's why you have to come out here with us! Right now!

I'm going to slip this note under your door (seriously, I have no idea what that thing can be made of). Of course, if you're reading this, then you already know that I slipped it under your door, so there's no reason for me to say it. Duh!

Come on outside. It's totally safe out here. We are NOT monsters. We're your friends. We want to help. I promise. I'll even make you a peanut jelly and butter sandwich if you come out, just like you used to do for Doug Evers.

Think about it. Seriously. Come on, brain worms? You'd have to be a total idiot to believe that!

JEFFERY SUWAK lives in Washington state. He likes the word 'carbuncular.' Some of his recent short fiction publication credits include *Plasma Frequency Magazine*, *Spark: A Creative Anthology*, and *The Colored Lens*. He's the author of "Beyond the Tempest Gate" and "No Punchline; Or, the Night Chale Thayer Blew his Head off at the Punchdrunk Comedy Club." He regularly contributes to *Song Places*, *Song Facts*, and *The Prague Revue*.

On the cover:

"DROWNING"

Grace Zhu

Grace Zhu is a freelance illustrator currently studying Computer Science. She has been drawing traditionally and digitally for more than nine years, most of it self-taught. She enjoys reading and playing video games in her spare time, and dislikes pastries unless they're covered in ice cream. Her work is available online at gracezhuart.com.

