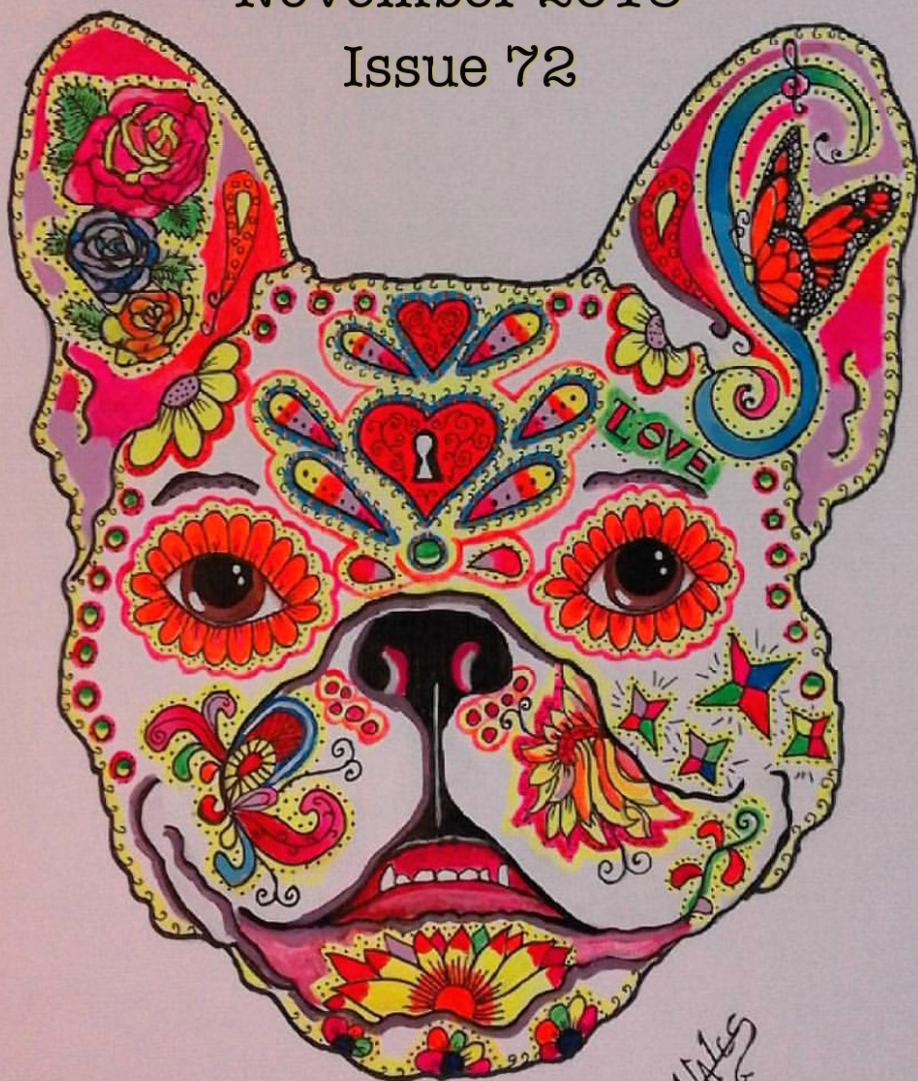


# JERSEY DEVIL PRESS

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Lou Hiles  
2015



# JERSEY DEVIL PRESS

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## Editor's Note

With Thanksgiving lumbering toward us like a fat feathered dinosaur, we are pleased to present three stories about family and two stories about food. In Chelsea Hanna Cohen's marine creation tale, an axe-wielding dad indulges in corporal punishment on "Sedna's Hands" with surprising results. Maria Pinto describes a peculiar (and heartbreaking) "Response to the News," and C. B. Auder explains, in a surreal way, why "We Cannot Become What We Need to Be by Remaining What We Are." Anthony Cordello explores the unique dangers of being a "Dishroom Supervisor" in a Chinese restaurant; meanwhile, Marcel Harper drops a hell of a secret ingredient into the chili in "Heatseeker."

Read, enjoy, and don't forget to leave cranberry-sauce handprints on your front door, unless you want Turkasaurus devouring all your leftovers and half of your children while you sleep.

— Laura Garrison

## From Sedna's Hands

Chelsea Hanna Cohen

### Ten

You were unhappy; this much is true. When he'd revealed after your wedding what he really was, you heard nothing but the winter wind howling in your ears. You told him it was fine but wept silently through the night once you understood. To be married to a bird; who would have thought?

*The axe slices through your pinky finger and you watch as it tumbles into the sea. The littlest finger will become the biggest creature, the one they call Whale.*

### Nine

He wasn't your first suitor; you were quite beautiful, and many Inuit men came calling, asking for your hand. Your parents begged you to accept, but you declined them all: too tall, too short, too young. You were not willing to go from being just a daughter to just a wife. "What will they think of us, with a spinster for a daughter?" your father raged. "Sedna, you will shame us." But you ignored him, too used to his rages for them to affect you anymore.

Then the birdman came along and fooled everyone, including you.

*Your ring finger is the next to go, and with it, the twisted band he gave you when he asked you to marry him. The band sprouts fingers of its own, becoming Starfish. Your grip on the kayak loosens.*

## Eight

You loved him at first; he was thoughtful, articulate in ways other men weren't. He promised you'd be more than a wife, more than a mother, if you'd marry him. And you agreed, because you loved him and because it would make your parents happy. On your wedding night, after he'd taken you to his island, he shrugged off his skin to reveal his true shape. Arms gave way to feathered wings. His mouth became a sharp, imposing beak. "This is who I really am," he said. And you cried, in love with who you thought he was, but not who he turned out to be.

*He cuts off your middle finger next. Below you, it blooms into a creature who you silently name Fish.*

## Seven

He said he would provide for you, give you the best furs to keep you warm in the frozen winters. But you soon found out this was a lie. When you asked him about the furs one night, he said, "I am a bird, Sedna. I cannot hunt. You understand," and his bird friends, huddled around the campfire with you, laughed at your ignorance. You didn't understand, and at night you huddled under the thin

blankets he provided, shivering and trying to keep the cold at bay, unwilling to turn to your husband, the birdman who lied.

*Your index finger falls into the water, the edges of skin stretching and transforming until it is Jellyfish, and your right hand squeezes the edge of the kayak harder.*

## Six

Your father came to visit; you promised yourself you would be strong and not tell him the truth, not wanting to admit you were wrong about your husband. But you were never a good liar; out by the campfire, you broke down and told him everything. He, enraged at the mockery the birdman had made of his family, told you he would take care of it. You knew what he meant, but you pretended you didn't so you could sleep at night.

*The thumb is the most painful so far and that pain gives birth to teeth in the mouth of Shark. You dangle from the boat by only one hand now.*

## Five

You didn't follow your father as he pulled out his gun and walked back inside, so you didn't see your husband's death, only heard the gunshot followed by the terrible squawk as you tried desperately to block your ears. Your father reappeared. "Let's go. Now," he said as he pulled you toward his kayak. You got in the boat, too shocked to resist.



*When he continues down your fingers, cutting your other thumb, it elongates and sprouts fins, becoming the creature to be called Dolphin.*

#### Four

The boat had barely left when you heard it, the first drawn-out shriek of sorrow, quickly joined by more; his friends had found him. "What is that?" your father asked. You urged him to row faster, but he could not row faster than they could fly. You heard the beating of their wings and saw them approaching. The sky darkened as their wings blotted out the sun.

*You don't notice when your index finger is severed; your remaining fingers have already gone numb with the effort of holding on. When you look down, you see it has become Octopus.*

#### Three

Your father rowed and rowed, but still the birds kept gaining on the little boat. "They know," you said, and he tried to row faster. As they drew closer, the water started to churn. The winds grew stronger as the birds reached the kayak and circled above it, drawing the wind into their wings and spinning it back out. The wind created waves, little ones, then bigger ones, splashing over the edges of the kayak, shaking it back and forth. "We will capsize," your father said. He looked at you, and there was no love in his eyes. "This is your fault."

*Your middle finger grows tusks, born out of the shreds of fingernail that were left after it scraped the side of the kayak. It balloons into a massive creature, Walrus.*

## Two

“It is you they are angry at,” your father said. You did not point out that your father was the one who pulled the trigger. You’d seen a similar look in his eyes too often, if you dropped a plate or if he felt you weren’t properly grateful. The kayak lurched dangerously, and you weren’t terribly surprised when he pushed you over the edge. But you grabbed on, not willing to give in.

Your blood froze with your skin when he pulled out the axe.

*Your ring finger is gone. Claws blossomed from it as it transformed into Lobster. You hold on desperately by your last finger, also your weakest.*

## One

Your grip won’t last much longer; it’s almost a relief when the axe swings up again for the final blow. Above you, the birds circle faster, unmoved by your father’s offering of the sacrificial lamb.

*You feel a moment of satisfaction that your death will not save him before the axe falls and you have nothing left to grasp with, falling with your last finger, which becomes the tiny Shrimp.*

## Zero

You sink into the icy water, strangely calm. The creatures spawned by your fingers circle around you, their mother, and you stare at them in wonder. If this is the cost of your sacrifice, it is a price you are willing to pay. You will be worshipped more down here than you ever would have been up there. Not a daughter, not a wife, but *Sedna*.

*The power of the ocean fills you, and you breathe it in like you once did air.*

**CHELSEA HANNA COHEN** works in publishing by day, writes by night, and can often be found reading instead of doing either of those things. Her work has previously been published in *freeze frame fiction* and *Every Day Fiction*, among others. You can find her on Twitter @chelseahannac.

# Dishroom Supervisor

Anthony Cordello

The sink water was the exact color of vanilla extract. Rice swirled in deranged orbits around the biggest stalk of broccoli I had seen for a while. Slushed bits of carrots got caught in nets of lettuce.

Dumplings floated aimlessly while their either pork or vegetable insides were alive and rippling against the thin membrane. A lo mein noodle leapt out of the water and clung to my arm hair, slipped up under my sleeve, crawled across my chest, and burrowed effortlessly into my belly button.

It did not bother me too much. This was the third time this week that something strange had found its way inside of me. This Monday, my shoelace untied itself and inched all the way up my side to squeeze into my armpit, and on Wednesday, at least a foot of floss wormed its way from one ear to the other. And it was Friday so I assumed that whatever was happening to me was following a MWF schedule. At least I got the weekend free.

It was six at night. The weekend was four hours away. I made nine-fifty an hour, so I had to make thirty-six more dollars before I could go home. For thirty-six dollars I was going to wash every single plate at least a dozen times. I was the Bamboo Kingdom dishroom supervisor, but I was also the only Bamboo Kingdom dishwasher.

The dishroom was a small corner squared off from the rest of the kitchen by a pair of cherry-blossom dressing screens. Everything inside belonged to me: the three-compartment sink where each compartment had its own sponge, the grease trap, the

waste pulper, the pressure-wash hose with a crack in the nozzle, the aluminum ball for grease stains, the spackle knife for burnt pans, the industrial steam sanitizer that cleaned the dishes after I cleaned them, the laminated night chores posted on the wall above the sink, and the green dry-erase marker I used to check off after each chore.

I washed dishes. All the dishes had the exact same boring, bloodless personality except for a single, fascinating bowl that had been scarred by a microwave. I saw the bowl maybe once a day. Sometimes I thought about holding onto it, keeping it on the top of my head, but I had a feeling it might disrupt the dishroom. I did not want to do that.

I washed twenty-five dishes in five minutes, loaded them between the yellow teeth of the sanitizer, set the machine on automatic cycle, pressed my ear against the metal door, listened to the grimy hum.

“Sid?”

I turned to see my boss, Jake, standing on the edge of the tape with his arms crossed. It was impossible for me to look him in the eye, so I stared at the giant trademark mole above his right eyebrow.

“Hello again,” I said.

“What time did you leave work yesterday?” he asked.

“Ten. Like I do every day. Come in at two and leave at ten.”

“You sure about that? Because I just took a look at the time clock, and it looks like you left at nine fifty-two. A full eight minutes early, but at least that was better than Saturday when you left at nine forty-nine, more than ten minutes early. Did you really think I wouldn’t find out?”

"I guess I did not really think about that too much." The mole was like a burned bubble on pizza crust.

"Is there a reason why you've been leaving early?"

"I think I finish all the night routines, and I get bored and tired and because I'm not doing anything productive, I decide to leave a little early. I realize that is wrong and dishonest and I am sorry. It won't happen again."

"I'm glad you understand. How's your father?"

"Why?"

"Good."

"Good."

He smiled as he left. The flash of his teeth seemed to nudge the noodle down into the bladder. It started to stir up a storm. The bathroom was all the way on the other side of restaurant. I ran through the kitchen bumping into one of the giant steel mixing bowls filled with dumplings and sending it into the back of the legs of the older cooks. They all started yelling at me. I hated every single one of them.

"Piece of shit dishwasher."

"Watch where you're fucking going."

"Tiny dick pussy bitch."

As soon as I got to the hallway, a sharp pain shot from the base of my penis to the tip like a puck hitting the bell on a strength test. I fell and knocked over a whole column of milk crates lining the wall. I crawled through the wreckage into the bathroom, slid under the handicapped stall, and hoisted myself up on the seat.

My bladder was a cave where the stalagmites were almost touching the stalactites and the pool of urine was slowly rising past

all the past benchmarks on the sepia walls glittering with ammonia, calcium, glucose, sulfur, methyl mercaptan, diphenhydramine.

The noodle sliced through the urine like a shark fin, surfacing for a moment, as if to take a breath, before diving down to the bottom where the opening of the urethra was fitted with a pink rubber plug. It wrapped itself around the chain, yanked it free, followed the urine down, tore me open and blacked me out.

To wake up I had to wade through a memory of the muscular hydraulic lift transferring my father from his bed to his wheelchair, his wheelchair to his bed, in the second intensive rehab center he attended after the first stroke. I found myself on the floor, on my back with my limbs spread out, stretched across two stalls. My skin fatally cold on the tiles. My hair wet with my own drool. Blood on my thighs that I wiped away with toilet paper.

Something splashed in the toilet. I peered over the rim and saw the noodle swimming counter-clockwise, conjuring a small whirlpool. It stopped when it noticed me staring.

"What's your name?"

"Sid."

"Listen, Sid, you really need to take some colace."

"Some what?"

"Colace? Docusate sodium? A stool softener. You are pretty backed up. You should take care of it before it gets serious. One of my previous hosts was so constipated that stool ended up in his stomach. One morning he woke up vomiting shit, and by that afternoon he was dead from toxicity, and that did not end well for either of us because I had to escape from the morgue. Ever have to swim through formaldehyde? It's a carcinogen."

"Are you an alien?"

"That poor guy ate here alone every single night. I am sure that had something to do with it, and I wish I could have done something, but people are going to do what they want to do. I cannot remember his name for the life of me. Miss him though, sometimes."

"Do you know the shoelace or the floss?"

"Listen to me. The dumplings are going to attack soon."

"Who?"

"The dumplings are coming to take back what first belonged to them. They are very angry and very dangerous. You have to believe me."

"Pork or vegetable?"

"Both. The females are pork and the males are vegetable."

"Weird; I thought it would be the opposite."

"Me, too, but that's how it is. Ok, time for me to leave."

"Wait, what should I do? Should I call the police?"

"Why would you do that? What are they going to do?"

"I don't know. Arrest them?"

"I'm sorry, Sid, but it's all up to you. You're the dishroom supervisor, aren't you?"

"I guess so."

"Ok, that's all I need to say. Good luck."

The noodle slipped down the curve of the pipe. I flushed the toilet with my foot, washed and dried my hands, finally left the bathroom, and stopped in my tracks as soon as I saw the state of the kitchen.

There were dumplings everywhere. They were crawling across the stainless steel tables, climbing up the walls, pouring down out of the exhaust hoods. They had puckered mouths filled with tiny



needle teeth on their undercooked undersides. They hissed when they latched onto open skin. They attacked in swarms, around two dozen dumplings to every one person. The cooks were running around, screaming.

Jake was in his office wearing a mask of dumplings. I could not see one inch of his face. There was nothing I could do about it or any of it. I went back inside the bathroom and propped the trash can against the door.

**ANTHONY CORDELLO** lives in Boston. He went to UMass Amherst for his BA and Fairfield for his MFA. His stories have been published in *decomP*, *Tin House's Open Bar*, and *Thickjam*. You can reach him at [majortonywoohoo@gmail.com](mailto:majortonywoohoo@gmail.com).

## In Response to the News

Maria Pinto

When he notices I haven't moved from the spot in the backyard where the swing set used to be, he tries to ignore me. He goes about his work and play around the house, causing undue commotion. He wants me to notice how much life he's living. He prunes the palm tree. He fishes for toothy Florida gar in the lake. He whoops in triumph each time one of the prehistoric creatures waggles at the end of his line. He learns to play my steelpan, poorly. He sweeps at a mound of dirt near to where I sit, pretending his sidelong looks are meant for something just beyond my left shoulder.

When he realizes I've been eating dirt, he comes out to yell. My dreadlocks are tossed horizontal with the force of his objection. I remind him that he used to make mud pies for his younger sisters. He still feels bad about that childhood tyranny. He breaks down and prepares a mud pie for me, presumably following an old recipe. His lips tremble with the effort it takes to remain quiet. I imagine he resents me for reducing him to the role of enabler, once again.

I have not eaten anything but soil in weeks. My loved ones think they can remedy my invisible illness. Mom brings vitamins and cans of ackee; friends bring vintage-shop dresses beautiful enough to wear to a wedding. I will not be changing my clothes. This hospital gown is it for me. The only words I spare, between bites, for those with offerings are, "I cannot participate." He brings out teas of stinging nettles, pennyroyal, Queen Anne's lace. "I am

not trying to abort a fetus,” I say. “I am trying hard not to do anything.”

He comes home late one night. I expect him to keep his vigil at my side, but he doesn't. The lights never come on in the house. He's in there, though, feeling around for the stairs, maybe stubbing his toe. I don't need him. As I sift black soil between the roof of my mouth and tongue, I imagine him sleeping naked, whiskey-spent, the length of him soft against our scratchy alpaca comforter.

It is on the fifty-second day that he comes out to sit with me just as I chomp down on an earthworm. I've eaten a crater into our once-perfect landscaping. My nails have separated from their fingers from all the digging, and I smile to think of my blood in with the dirt. “You're purple as a plum,” he says, his hungover breath tickling my neck, and I wonder if he means to bite my shoulder. Like he used to. He does not. Exhaustion has gouged deep rings under his eyes. He watches as I eat and eat. He wonders aloud what the attraction could be, tosses a clump of dirt into his mouth. He spits out what he can, coughing like a new smoker. He sees that there can be no solidarity between us. But that's just fine. Even if we couldn't make anything lasting from this life, he will be at my side when I dig deep enough to find the next.

**MARIA PINTO's** recent work has appeared in *Word Riot*, *The Butter*, *FLAPPERHOUSE*, *Hermeneutic Chaos*, *Small Po[r]tions*, and elsewhere. She was the 2010 Ivan Gold Fellow at the Writers' Room of Boston, in the city where she cares for dogs and does karaoke. Her debut novel is in search of a home. She's working on her second.

# Heatseeker

Marcel Harper

He had the butcher's apron strapped on like a suit of armor: proud and tight. He wore it dirty. The stains from previous chili tournaments were intact and crusted brown, like barnacles on some ancient leviathan from the deep.

He liked to hee-haw and back-slap with the tough old fucks who sought out these backwater festivals. Men with calloused hands from working too damned hard all their lives and calloused tongues from smoking cheap cigars. They offered their stogies to him, and he accepted with grace but never smoked.

He made a good chili. In the clapboard, shit-heel smokehouses that most of the festival regulars claimed to have made pilgrimages to but had never actually seen the inside of, he was known. The old ones who tended those outside-of-time, hickory heavy smoke pits knew him by his apron or Panama hat or just the way he dipped a short rib into their chili sauce. Made them think of the pastor dunking a new convert in the muddy waters of the local river.

His chili was hot and honest and contained about a baby's crib's worth of smoked poblanos and a quart of Sazerac Rye. First, though, he would decant the expensive whiskey into an empty bottle of Old Crow. He drank half of that to get in the mood and poured the other half into the chili to finish it off. His competition buddies liked booze mixed in with their heat and liked that he never had all the alcohol cook off before serving time.

He won as often as he wanted but always shared his prizes. After the main ceremony he would dole out cups of the prize-

winning dish and watch the small town folks line up because God knows that everybody loves a winner. During such times the story of Jesus and the fishes and loaves would come up strong in his mind, and it made him forget about the small towns and the small townspeople with their rough hands and lives of mindless labor.

He liked the way the forgetting burned through his mind, nice and slow.

The losing cooks always wanted to know about his secret ingredient, and he would always tell them to go fuck themselves. They liked that sort of talk and rewarded him with much back-slapping and some genuine affection. Their faces, red and alcohol-fueled, would remind him of Noah and that shit-filled ship the old codger had steered into the side of a mountain.

When his opponents won, not often, but it happened, they would also offer him a share of the loot. Maybe a skillet endorsed by a has-been football hero or a plastic cooler big enough for a six-pack of longnecks or the head of a murdered spouse. He accepted such offerings with grace because that's what was expected of him.

On his way out of town he would take their gifts and heft them out the window of his Chevy and watch the worthless junk roll and jump and shatter against the asphalt. It made him smile to see the pieces later on, like dried bones, lying open to the sun when he passed by there the next day.

He always doubled back. Liked to see his handiwork because that's what his Pappy had taught him: you have to be proud of your work. And he was.

On that day, when he came back into the festival town, he tipped his Panama at the banner strung across the now-empty main street. Small towns loved themselves a good banner, and this one

was no exception. On it was advertised the hellfire heat of the chili contest along with some sage advice like, "Come hungry!" and, "Bring your own fire extinguisher!" He enjoyed the home-spun humor and chuckled when he passed underneath, riding his Chevy like a chariot charging down some unfortunate Christians caught in a tough time and tougher place.

He drove down the street and thought about the story of Sampson's honey-filled lion. How the sweetest delights were so often distilled from decay.

He stopped off at the festival grounds, got out and walked to the judges' table. The place was mostly quiet, but the main tent's loudspeaker was still plugged in, hissing like a snake chopped in half. He took up the microphone like an old-time crooner and breathed in the scent of stale beer and stale meat that clung to it. Then he belted out one long and hollow, "Well howdy, folks!" and waited for a response, even though he knew there wouldn't be any. He liked the sound of his own voice.

The greeting bounced around the grounds in such a way that two stray dogs and a few crows scattered away, abandoning the objects that had held all their interest up to that point. He was glad to see the crows and dogs. He thought of them as his kin and liked to mess with them from time to time. He knew that they liked him more than they could tell.

After a time, the vagrant animals returned and took up their previous occupation. So as not to disturb them, he walked slowly to where his chili still stood, seething in the sun with a halo of midges and flies competing for a scrap of the meaty sauce. He dipped one slender finger into the pot and ran it around the rim to properly sample all the goodness and then brought it up to his nose and

smelled the complexity of the poblanos and whiskey. He licked his finger clean, taking care to catch the grainy bits that had gotten stuck underneath his fingernail.

The chili tasted like the freshest of small-town virgins. Those vacant-eyed country boys and girls with big plans in their tiny heads and even bigger disappointments waiting up ahead. As the sauce burnt a trail of fire down his throat, the image of the great fish came to him, and he imagined how close and tight and hot it must have felt for Jonah when that big maw inhaled him out there in the deep blue sea.

He savored the heat. The burn would last for a good long while. As he surveyed the quiet festival grounds, he stretched straight and popped the bones of his back with a sound of hailstones on a tin roof and stared up into God's sky. He tipped the Panama in the direction of the smoldering sun. He remembered a time when it was still freshly put up there. A time when he hadn't been compelled to mingle with flies and dogs and the people who now lay (some sat) all around.

He dwelled on the memories for some time. If some lone survivor or late-in-the-coming dog or crow had been there to see him, they would have marveled at how still he stood. How he resembled a statue or carving. Only the hint of a smile on his face and the way the sun caught his eyes providing clues that this was a living thing not made of stone or wood.

When the memories had faded along with the daylight, he turned his back on the place forever and took up his pot of chili and walked back to the Chevy and headed off to the next town. He didn't mind driving through the night; he rarely slept these days.

He drove without a map or a purpose. He knew that the best towns and the best chili contests they had to offer would find him. The ones that promised hotter than hell and all-you-could-eat fiery goodness. The ones that made him think back to times when he knew what he was put on this earth to do.

Towns like that found him real easy.

**MARCEL HARPER** lives in Johannesburg, South Africa, where he communes with dark forces and tries to avoid being killed by his cats. His writing leans toward the speculative and weird. You can connect with him at [www.marcelharper.com](http://www.marcelharper.com)



# **We Cannot Become What We Need to Be by Remaining What We Are**

**C. B. Auder**

"I need a transplant," Dad said, and before I could even back up my spreadsheet, the old man had tripped over the coffee table and windmilled into my lap.

I'd always thought of my father as a person only in the abstract, of course. But once that cruller-loving flesh bag was slumped across my chair, pinching my carpal-tunnel arm? Well.

Then the spark left his eyes and it hit: I was alone in the world. Just me and the family's creeping ficus.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying the idea of losing my parents ever bothered me. But at that moment, with everything seeming so—what's the word, real?—and his elbow crushing my esophagus? Yeah, I felt sheepish I hadn't thought to offer a parting wheeze.

What kills me is that I could so easily have slipped something in. That moment right after he'd clutched his chest, just before high-fiving the choir invisible. His hairy ear so close to mine I could smell those funny little balls of wax. . . .

I could have murmured, "When's dinner?" or "Whoopsie-daisy!" or "What kind of transplant?"

What do they say? That when you're in the middle of it, that last moment always feels so penultimate?

Luckily, I'd learned the fireman's carry as a kid. I heaved Dad over to the dining room and rolled him onto the buffet table just

seconds before the surgeon steamed out of the kitchen, clutching her sterile tray.

She fussed and clacked her shiny silver utensils, and then hacked a panel out of Dad's sternum.

Seeing that cross-section of ribs, that was a weensy bit too CSI for my blood, so I averted my gaze to the Gauguin. Which I never take the time to appreciate because it's always hanging over my head, and—don't tell my boss, but—I prefer Van Gogh.

After the organ harvesting, the doctor disappeared again, and I peeked over.

Dad lay there, like a giant napping open-faced sandwich, and I had to smile. He'd always been such a quiet person. And he loved mustard!

Well, I figured there wasn't anything more I could do—the embalming machine was making its little gloopy noises—and by then that goddamned sunbeam had arced onto my computer screen. All four of Gauguin's Tahitian buttocks went peachy-cheeked in the light as though to say, "Hello? This project is on a double-deadline."

I don't know, for some reason I was drawn back to Dad instead. Maybe I was curious to see if I'd get any feelings from glimpsing his lifeless corpse? I didn't expect any miracles, but they say death changes people.

It was a good thing I turned. Dad had risen and was rolling over, mumbling something about having to get back to the office—his hair a bird's nest as usual—and I lunged in (making sure to bend at the knees, not the waist) and grabbed his wrists.

"You're semi-retired, remember? You need to relax," I said—probably too loudly, now that I think back.

I hoped he wouldn't see my attempt at a casual smile as patronizing, the way the neighbor's asshole Akita always did. But Dad was so drained by that point, he didn't even notice the embalmer in the room.

Then again, when had he ever? I took heart in that normalcy and had to chuckle even as I leveraged my leg against the wall to press his earnest cadaver back down.

"Stop flopping around," I grunted. "You have to stay still or all the tubes will pop out." (Whether or not this was true, I confess I don't know, but I wasn't going to spend the next six months eating my meals above a formaldehyde-soaked rug.)

Then things got weird. An urge came over me: to rock Dad into a slumber with little chuffing noises. I was like, what the hell? Just creepy.

When the doctor returned, I asked, "What kind of transplant had he needed?"

"Brain." She scowled at a vial of some bubbling purple liquid.

"Ah, of course. That makes sense," I murmured. Soothingly, I hoped. I mean, people don't go into the healing professions because they're well adjusted and happy with their own lives, right?

But the doctor had already forgotten me. Which was a comfort, because it reminded me of Dad.

Funny. It was all so long ago. Two years, now? Three? I think I don't even own that buffet table anymore.

**C. B. AUDER** is the Associate Editor at *freeze frame fiction* and has had work published in *Asinine Poetry* and *A cappella Zoo*.





**On the cover:**

**"FRENCH  
BULLDOG"**  
**Loulabelle Hales**

**LOULABELLE HALES**

is a self-taught artist  
in Lincolnshire, UK.  
She has been creating  
art in a variety of

media for many years and has sold commission pieces both internationally and in the UK. Her most recently work involves sugar skulling and Day of the Dead art. Her work is available on Fine Art America under the name "Teresa Hales," on DeviantArt under "Teresa Louise Hales," and on eBay under the handle thor19462. She also welcomes commission pieces and can be contacted via Facebook.

