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Editor's Note

It's Feb-yoo-ary, so bust out the wine, chocolate, and red roses! And after you've delivered these obligatory offerings to the chubby Pennsylvanian rodent who controls the weather (seriously—do not make him mad), treat yourself to our seventy-fifth issue, which is so classy that it has *an actual bidet.* It also has butterflies, a kid with a beard, thumb chop-offing, Emily Dickinson, UFOs, and buckets of other cool stuff. Read it now, before Punxsutawney Phil decides to deep-freeze the planet with his Ice Laser Doom Ray!

—Laura Garrison

Spirit of the Bidet

Lise Colas

'I'm just nipping out to the shops—make yourself a cup of tea.'

At least I think that's what she said, but the details are fuzzy and I may have made it up. I am standing in the bathroom, peering through a slit of the Venetian blinds, watching my mother walk down the slope in front of the terrace, a tartan shopping bag clutched in her hand. I know every crack in those pavings. Alas, I must be such a disappointment to her.

The taxi came to collect me yesterday afternoon. The driver assured me I had a nice smile. I don't recall smiling at him. I stepped out of the car and scrambled up the grassy bank in order to avoid the cracks in the pavings. And here I am, in my mother's bathroom. I have two pills to swallow and I'm worried they will stick in my throat.

I need some distraction; it's horribly quiet on this estate. Even the wood pigeons have fallen silent. There is a kind of slopping noise, though. I peer sideways, but can't see anything. Probably Mrs. Squires next door wiping down her window sills. I go over to the sink and fill a glass with water from the tap. The pills nestle in my hand. They are my only hope. I move back to the window. In the old days the wash basin used to be here. Now there is just the bidet, squatting below the sill.

My palm is sticky. Oops. I have dropped a pill into the bidet. It rattles around the bowl with the manic energy of a roulette ball. The bidet seems like an interloper, somewhat misplaced, and you have to be careful you don't bark your shins on its thick squared-off lip. If only the wash basin was still here; I miss the view when I clean my teeth. Mum always wanted a bidet, as a kind of statement, I guess. I remember her discussing the subject with Mrs. Squires. The phrase 'on the continent' was used quite often, and Mrs.

Squires' facial expression was enough to confirm that from an English point of view, there has always been a certain mystique about how one should use a bidet. This bathroom is my mother's Taj Mahal—renovated shortly after my father died. She summoned a young handyman called Sam, who set to and pared away the old floral wallpaper, tiling everything from top to bottom. He took apart the sarcophagus of hardboard surrounding the old turquoise bath and sawed the tub in half and carted it away.

A new bath tub, gleaming white, was installed with a funny ceramic pommel on the side that you are supposed to grip. New loo, wash basin, towel rail and a bidet, of course. The elegant uplighters screwed into the corner of the mirror above the wash basin are not aligned; I don't know why—it is the one off note in a perfectly executed scheme. I look down into the bidet where the pill has come to rest wedged inside the partly raised stainless steel plug.

The red and white capsule sparkles, then twists into a curious shape like a pasta bow or, more accurately, a bow tie. A large bulbous thing sprouts out from it and then another protuberance like a nose. I kneel down on the floor and gaze in awe at the embryonic form taking shape.

I soon have to make room, as a perfect stranger is attempting to extricate his long legs from the plughole. He is now perched on the side of the bidet. He wears a tweed jacket and a smart yellow waistcoat and check trousers. He dusts himself down with a handkerchief.

'Bonjour, I am Monsieur Mérimée, Spirit of the Bidet—here are my credentials.'

The stranger hands me a black-edged business card with his name embossed upon it. He has a pasty complexion, and I have seen his profile before in an old school atlas. His nose is somewhat retroussé, and his nostrils may be aligned with Strasbourg. His eyes, watery and pale blue, fix upon me.

'Boyfriend trouble?' he asks. His voice echoes around the bathroom and the tiles seem to turn turquoise. His accent does not sound very French to me—perhaps he is an imposter, but he has made an enormous effort to emerge from the bidet, so perhaps I should give him the benefit of the doubt.

'Yes,' I lie. I cannot say that the trouble is an extended essay, due to be handed in at the end of the month—that would be too pathetic.

'Ah.'

'Your name is familiar.'

'Yes, I have the same name as one of your father's favourite authors. In fact I am the spirit of your dead father, once removed.'

'You don't sound very French.'

'Well, that is to be expected. I'm wearing the tweed jacket of his old French master at Bideford Grammar; it still has chalk dust on the cuffs.'

'Oh. How come you—live in the bidet?'

He crossed his legs and shifted his lean bottom on the porcelain rim.

'No-one was using it, so I thought I'd make it my home.'

A pause. He looks around. 'Well, I'd give it three stars. Reminds me of the ensuite at the Hotel Renoir in Montparnasse. By the way, I'm dying for a cigarette—would you like to come to Paris?'

'Really? How on earth? I mean, do I have to—'

'Just close your eyes.'

'But I haven't got anything to wear and my hair needs washing—'

'Oh, don't worry about that—we are going back to 1947, anyway. When the French didn't wash very often and clean hair smelt of Marseille soap and almond oil, if you were lucky. Your father was over there for six months. Did you know?'

'Oh, vaguely.'

'Close your eyes, then.'

There is a whooshing noise, and soon I find myself walking along a pot-holed boulevard, Monsieur Mérimée, striding beside me. We pass a dingy tabac and a small épicerie. Outside there are pears and apricots displayed in wooden crates, but the colour has been bled out of them—they could well have been carved from marble.

'Why is everything so monochrome?' I ask.

'Ah, yes. These are the photographs your father took. He wrote on the back of each one: Paris, 1947.'

I think of the photo album in the hall cupboard. Street corners, bridges and monuments caught by the prosaic eye of the Box Brownie. People and cars looking tiny and insignificant, like insects. An awful lot of foreground. Not terribly interesting.

'But this is one your father didn't take.' We are now walking by the River Seine, which I'm guessing must be the colour of dishwater, though dishwater has a distinct sepia tone. Monsieur Mérimée comes to an abrupt halt by a stone parapet and makes a gesture towards the paved walkway below.

A young woman is seated at a trestle table, typing on an old fashioned portable typewriter. Her wavy shoulder-length hair is blowing about in the breeze. She is wearing a jacket over a summer dress and her pale legs are bare. On her feet is a pair of heavy lace-up shoes. People walking by don't acknowledge her at all. They are carrying dark coats over their arms, and despite the bright sunshine they seem stooped and weary, even the younger looking ones. One old man pauses for a moment, turns his head in the young woman's direction, but he is simply adjusting his hat in the brisk breeze and continues on his promenade.

We are some distance away, but it is as if I have the acute vision of a bird of prey. I can make out her rapt expression as her fingers press down on the keys. Her cheeks seem to flush pink, and her wavy hair looks reddish blonde, but perhaps I am imagining these colours. One foot, in the clumpy shoe, rests upon a pile of papers,

the edges ruffled by the breeze. I think of my extended essay carpeting the floor of my student digs.

'Your father saw her from where we are standing. But he did not take a picture of her. He looked at her for a long time, though.'

'Who is she?'

M. Mérimée shrugs. Suddenly he seems more French. 'We will never know. She is just a girl he saw—once—but she made a big impression on him; he never forgot her.'

A thumping noise and something like a stage backdrop falls down over my eyes, and there is an awful lot of dust. The next thing I know, I'm sitting in a small bar in a basement somewhere. Monsieur Mérimée is slouched beside me on the cracked red leather seat, dragging on a cigarette. There is curling blue smoke everywhere. I'm glad that we are seeing colours now. In front of me is a glass containing a whitish liquid that looks like dissolved aspirin.

'I'm not sure why we are here,' I say.

'No one is entirely sure, mon petit chou,' replies Mérimée, after an especially deep drag of his cigarette. He now looks as if he is on fire; there is so much smoke billowing out of his nostrils.

'Let me tell you something. I had a wild life before I was given the deeds of your father's spirit. The bidet became my retreat. You could say it saved me, like a religion, almost. I needed the quiet life of contemplation. I used to carouse 'til the early hours with les demoiselles des égouts, those sirens of the sewers. Such bad girls, so wanton in their ways, holding up their skirts showing their dirty legs to all and sundry. My favourite was called Albertine, she used to carry around this pet rat perched on her shoulder—"

I interrupt him mid-flow, which is probably rude of me. But this is so obviously a dream and I'm sure les demoiselles des égouts, lovely as it sounds, will make no sense at all, once I wake up. 'Oh, look, isn't that Dad over there?'

A young man is standing at the corner of the bar in a gabardine coat with a camera strap over his shoulder. He is wearing a beret

and a pair of wiry-looking spectacles. He looks rather glum. His shoes are all dusty, as if he has walked the streets all day in search of something.

'Yes, hard times,' says Mérimée, taking another drag of his cigarette.

A woman with dark eyes and painted eyebrows approaches my father. She leans into the counter to tap her cigarette into a nearby ashtray and touches him on the arm, as if by accident. They are talking now. Her features seem indistinct apart from those brows. My father seems pleased but flustered. I imagine some hesitant French tumbling from his lips. She laughs, a silvery laugh that rides the blue haze of smoke and carries over to where we sit. The woman has short-cropped hair and wears a three-quarter sleeved emerald sweater and a dark pleated skirt. A gold bangle on her bare forearm catches the light. She is very different from the young woman we saw at the typewriter.

Another big thump and a thick cloud of dust rises once again. 'Oh, pooh! I wanted to see what happened.' We are back in the sterile confines of my mother's bathroom.

'Sorry, but our time was limited. I have to retire now.' Monsieur Mérimée has shrunk somewhat and is climbing into the bidet. He has already become the size of a hobbit, but with longer legs.

'But—who were they? Those women?'

'I have no idea. It is the mystery of life. Something your father failed to catch with his camera. He may even have dreamed about them. Fleeting images caught in the visual cortex of his brain, like flies in amber. Oh, before I go—' Monsieur Mérimée picks at his front teeth, extracting something. He places it in my hand. 'Au revoir.'

I am staring into the bowl of the bidet watching a spider scuttling into the plug hole.

I glance down at my clammy palm—there are my two pills and in my other hand, the glass of water. I can hear wood pigeons

cooing and then a key grinds into the lock of the front door. I put the pills in my mouth and take a large swig of water.

LISE COLAS writes poetry and short fiction and lives on the south coast of England. She used to work in the archive of *Punch* magazine.

I Saw You There Dickinson (#1027)

Mike Good

I saw you there Dickinson
Roiling about the Gluten-Free
Organics – tapping on Canteloupan
Hues to waft the Possibility –

and so it seemed you did Stop for Death –
Filling your Cart with Grass-Fed Meat –
Squinting at Steel-Cut Oats, Manager's Specials
Along the Tip of each End-Capped Aisle – Feet

dashing a Rest – a Breath – a Connexion
Holding Potato-Rough skin – a Loaf
of Bread in the glassy self-checkout line –
Your Narrow Face wrinkled Aloof –

Stretching for a Roof of WonderBread
and then Scampering – with the Wine –
Shrinking from Fear at the Attendant
Who asked you to Self-Identify –

and in your gray Purse –
you held – four Quatrains of Cash
and a Band of unpublished Poems
Writ on unpaid power Bills – Stashed –

and when it came Time
to type – the Item –into the Scanner
I wept there Emily –
as we Poets must Weep and Stammer

to one another –when our
Credit Cards run Out –
and upon the Touch Screen flashes
Regular or Organic – routed

by the Avocado lies we Impress
upon our Screens – offering our Shopper's Cards –
Wondering at Once – how the Points
We Acquire – Amount in our Bags Beyond –

Success
Mike Good

It comes down to possession. I thought this watching Sidney Crosby score on a breakaway. It was a beautiful thing to see. When I say beautiful, I mean it looked routine: the way he bullied past a defender and snapped the puck backhand behind Anti Niemi. Crosby is famous for his rituals and repetitions. Some players do this weird thing where they lick their stick tape. Goalies are particularly sublime. Glenn Hall, Mr. Goalie, allegedly vomited before each game, crediting this emesis, or lack thereof, for each victory or loss. Patrick Roy would go out of his way to avoid skating on blue lines. Drills offer opportunities to master rudiments. What is it apart from the careful reconstitution of well-learned feats? To force oneself to vomit. To hope for the best.

MIKE GOOD is pursuing an M.F.A. at the Jackson Center for Creative Writing at Hollins University, and serves as Assistant Editor for the *Hollins Critic*. He is from Pittsburgh, PA, where he helped to found the *After Happy Hour Review* and *Hour After Happy Hour Writing Workshop*. His poetry has appeared in *Collision*, *The New Yinzer*, *Poetry Fix* and is forthcoming in *Nerve Cowboy*.

Lady Zubaida's Maid

Michael Díaz Feito

"We breathe with the plants," my friend Maram al-Razi used to say. She would say this while doting on the potted cactus and succulents by her kitchen window. She had studied biology.

I recently read about Muhammad Abduh, the Egyptian jurist and Islamic modernist, and I was reminded of Maram. Abduh argued that we also breathe with the djinn, because they are real and they are just bad microbes.

Now I wonder if Maram believed that, if a potent mix of banal fact and horrifying magic compelled her to commit the crime. We never spoke about belief.

Maram met Zahir Betancourt in Tompkins Square Park, where he was playing an electric bass and kicking a tambourine. He was also singing with an earthy rasp that Maram chose to ignore.

Zahir's bass slithered, droned.

They talked. Maram was impressed by Zahir, because their talk was sincere from the start, not riddled with jokes.

The next week they met again walking along Avenue B, and hearing that Zahir was hungry, Maram invited him to dinner.

Maram said, "Wash your hands while I reheat the ragout."

Although it was dusk already, summer heat still clung to the kitchen. Opening the window, Maram smiled at her potted cactus and succulents. She then lit the stove and stirred the cumin-spiced ragout.

When Zahir, having carefully set down his musical instruments, left for the bathroom, Maram noticed how sweat had sopped his purple t-shirt.

Heat from the stove made her dizzy—so dizzy, she later said, that she nearly sent Zahir away. But the fragrance of the cumin seeds whirled from the pot to refresh her.

A mottled pigeon walked along the windowsill. It entered the kitchen, crossing the boundary marked by the open window's shadow. It watched Maram.

"Yes?" she said.

If you continue, the pigeon said, *continue cleanly and without my help. But if you do not keep cleanliness, I must intervene and take my fee.*

"And what," Maram said, "is your fee?"

Before the pigeon could answer, Maram lunged at it with a knife.

The pigeon flitted off.

Despite the heat, Maram shut the window.

A heavy meal like ragout is sometimes perfect for summer. At first it further burdens your sluggishness, which makes you sit and digest the day, but then the meal provides real energy, runs you through the humid night.

Maram led Zahir to the bedroom. She undid her headscarf.

Zahir said (without irony), "You'll undo me next."

They tumbled onto the bed.

But when Zahir held her face while kissing, Maram screamed. Zahir's fingers stank of cumin. His fingernails were stained with grease. Maram said, "You didn't wash your hands?"

She had not seen Zahir laugh before. She grabbed a pair of garden shears from the nightstand. She swung at Zahir's head. He collapsed.

It was then, allegedly, that Maram clipped off each of Zahir's unclean thumbs.

The charges against Maram were dropped. Zahir refused to cooperate with the police. According to the legal record, then, none of this happened.

The couple was soon engaged. Last I heard, Zahir had given up music to work at an Upper East Side bank. He became a singing teller.

Maram also related to me a dream she had in the holding cell:

She woke up shrieking in her dark apartment. Someone was whistling. She rushed to the front door, and as she had suspected, it was unlocked, ajar.

A soft glow drew her to the kitchen.

The gas stove was lit. All the burners licked up at her.

MICHAEL DÍAZ FEITO is a Cuban American writer from Miami, Florida. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Acentos Review*, *Axolotl*, *theEEEL*, *Flapperhouse, Hinchas de Poesía*, *Jai-Alai Magazine*, *Jersey Devil Press*, and *Petrichor Machine*. You can find Michael's work at michaeldiazfeito.com and follow him on Twitter @diazmikediaz.

Lessons in Lepidoptery

Melina Papadopoulos

i. Serenade for Wolf Moths and Mournful Poets

We always return to the moon.
It waits howl-spangled, record-scratched
across all the best night ballads,
cathartic as a cat's eye taking light
through a milky cataract.

We become nocturnal
when our words keep us awake.
We stir as though from cocoons,
poets named by scientists.
We pore over field guides,
identify ourselves.

Lettered Sphinx—abdomen
carved up, memorial in chicken-scratch.
Dizzied by the woodwork
of our own oaken wings.

We repeat our names
until they gain meaning,
a genus, a family.

ii. The Wingspan of an Atlas Moth in Translation

Nostalgic for church bells,
incense that with its stern aroma
startled me into reverence,

plant my candle in the sand—
In the moment, fear of fire quelled
as an answer to prayer.

For all the wrong reasons,
stained glass moves me.
I am easier to confront
as mosaic, assertive
in my rejection of sun
as a hasty spill of light.

I chose two surfaces to study—
the cold static waters of a plastic globe
and the pilgrim-penned flight of the Atlas moth.
Wingspan tantalizing in a forgotten Greek alphabet,
bilateral *deltas* revealed before flight.

The first time I identified Greece on my globe,
I wondered at its mosaicked anatomy,
unlike the resolute fullness
I thought classified land into countries.

iii. A Revised Map for Monarchs

What compels a monarch butterfly into wanderlust:

Sun in its systematic sweep
over archipelagos of milkweed,
rain that hitches rides on worn thoraxes,
air quivering with the pliable heat
mirages are made of.

A knapsack of biological tools—
a dizzied compass
unfamiliar to direction but partial
to the steadfast plod of mornings,
evenings with worn soles,
a circadian clock with its sense of rhythm
invested in storm-beams.

A monarch without its antennae
has no sense of place,

spends migration as the poet
who can't define a desert,
can't name a valley,
can't sleep somberly
in the collapsed shadow
of the chrysalis.

iv. The Morphos and Memory

I startle at their size,
all wing, bodies poised
like broken punctuation
in a dead language's poetry.

They erupt from dreams,
not as insects but as pilgrims
whose wings bear thirsting bodies
of water among black expanses.

Awaken—

I remember my naptime quilt
pristine with a pink underbelly,
fabric boasting swallowtails, viceroys,
painted ladies, all flightless in their splendor,

how I wouldn't sleep. How I would spend my life
preserving instead a swath of faded cloth
teeming with milkweed, wisps of dandelion run-off,
faint lilies suspended in pinkish mire,

how it took me five years to write this poem,
first in the form of an essay whose language
stagnated in its own motif, then in
the transition between silence

and having something to say.

How I will never call this a poem at all
but a migration of self,
circadian elegy, cathartic taxonomy.

MELINA PAPADOPOULOS is a student at Baldwin Wallace University. Her work has appeared in *Jelly Bucket*, *Booth*, *apt*, and *Roanoke Review*, among others.

Not What We Expected

David Spicer

I'll reveal this: when she and I felt
like gluttons and punished ourselves,
we ate and drank in *The Purgatory Café,*
a dive where pictures of dolphins
and unicorns floated on walls
and Cuban fishermen argued
about terrorized islanders. The place
pleased us with the faint smell
of fried sausage, and a blind woman
in a cotton dirndl decorated with daisies
played the oboe on a small stage, a pail for tips
next to her. Suddenly the door opened to voices
obscured by smoke and fog and revealed,
in a white robe, a bearded child
with a few followers. He carried a cross
carved from a wooden rocket and a dancer's
pole. My skin tingled and we scoffed
for a moment before he spoke:
I've returned to the fires and jungles
of your world, I'm the rebel you've
waited for, so kneel and pray, run
with me, scrounge no longer,
the mathematics of this scorched
planet will arrive soon, but I am here.

Termination at the Crime Scene

David Spicer

We salvaged the wheelchair
and one shoe in a ditch at twilight
on the Okie-Texas line. Where was the vic?
An enigma. Somebody phoned me.
A woman who wept every other word.
I was the lead, Green the secondary.
Climbing out of the drooping earth,
we organized a search party,
found the corpse under the moonlit maple
next to an old horse with a bullet
in its head. The stiff had a gunshot wound
to the brain, swelled like a cocoon,
playing cards rolled up and stuck in his nose.
A hypo in his big toe. The stink astonished
Green with its wicked texture. *Ah shit,*
between you and I, it's a heroin OD.
You're not paid to think, moron, I admonished,
banishing him then and there. After his bad
grammar, for all I cared Green could've been
vines sprouting from a tea kettle
or a papoose with a pacifier in its mouth.

DAVID SPICER has had poems accepted by or published in *American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Yellow Mama*, *Bop Dead City*, *unbroken*, *The Curly Mind*, *Slim Volume*, *The Naugatuck River Review*, Yellow Chair *Review*, and elsewhere. He is the author of one full-length collection, *Everybody Has a Story*, and four chapbooks. He is the former editor of *raccoon*, *Outlaw*, and Ion Books. He lives in Memphis, Tennessee.

Visitation

Tony Clavelli

There's a noodle shop tucked behind two equally run-down dry cleaners in a narrow alleyway that dead-ends and which is always full of puddles even when it hasn't rained. Fiona eats lunch here every Thursday. Today is the fourth day since the sky spots appeared over Seoul, but class is on, so life is on, and it's lunchtime.

In the days previous, no one seemed terribly worried about the black spots in the sky. Around the world, satellites are pointing Seoulward, trying to see if they could identify the mystery objects. Combined with the efforts of local meteorologists and astronomers and military personnel and conspiracy theorists, still no one has a solid grasp of what is going on. They simply agree that it is definitely something—solid masses, suspended, waiting.

Fiona walks a block from her university's office and hooks a sharp left, splashes in the damp alley, bumps into the unavoidable smoking man bulging in his apron, perpetually on break, and she opens the jangling, steamed-up door. She sits where she can have a good view of Min-jun, the young owner in a yellow t-shirt and bandana who both cooks and serves the food while the big guy is smoking or chopping dough for noodles aggravatingly slowly.

Min-jun holds a long-handled colander over the sink and shakes the noodles out before swiftly pouring them into bowls and adding broth to cover. Fiona likes the dexterity with which he manages this, the overlapping motions, and the way the triceps tense and relax.

He sees her enter and shouts a welcome to her. He does a quick couple gestures near his face, a Vogue-like move from a K-pop video Fiona and he had laughed about on her previous visit. She mimes it back to him and suddenly the weight of loneliness lifts, even if only a fraction. Her friends usually only lasted a year or two

and left with a parade of going-away parties. And any Korean friends she's had have gotten married quickly, had children, and dropped off the social map. She and Min-jun only talk here at the restaurant, but after months of post-lunch conversation, he's the closest friend she has.

She calls her order to him in Korean.

"Oh kay!" Min-jun says back as two distinctly separate words. The little hint of English comes with a half smile, shirking eye contact. She chose the kalguksu, a dish with fresh-cut noodles and green onions and heaps of tiny shellfish, because it is fantastic on a chilly, early spring day with strange dark spots in the sky overhead. It is also the only thing they serve. She pushes aside the water jug, the cold metal cup, and the wooden box of thin, tiny napkins she still hasn't gotten used to during her years in this country.

Min-jun announces the arrival of the kalguksu in overly formal Korean, sets the gigantic bowl down, and gives Fiona a small bow. She digs into the noodles to show appreciation, show she's good with chopsticks, show she loves Korean food—all that. She listens to the people at the other tables, mostly groups of three or four students, trying to see if anyone is talking about the discs in the sky. Despite her efforts, her Korean is awful, so she hears little more than conjunctions and a lot of loud slurping.

She wants these kids to be saying something about what is happening above them. But here, life carries on. And the sheer panic from home—the American media bursting with dread, the constant e-mails from friends and family and Facebook acquaintances asking if she is okay—all of that is absent here. K-pop still blasts from broken speakers outside the cell phone shops, fried chicken pubs never close, and food delivery bikes still zip past on the sidewalks.

The air-raid sirens eventually went off later that first evening. Nowhere else in the world have people become so inured to the

threat of imminent doom. The evening the spots appeared, Fiona cut a class short when she saw Western media outlets suggesting a war had begun.

"We cannot cancel classes," her boss, Dr. Che, told her. "There are no problems."

"But the sirens went off," Fiona said.

"They go off many times," Dr. Che said. "We have class."

Fiona was stunned. Her hands trembled, from the fear and frustration. She looked to her fellow professors for support, even though she knew they never paid much attention to the foreigner in the office. They just poured another cup of instant sugar-coffee and either ignored her entirely or shrugged.

Fiona always comes to Min-jun's shop late in the lunch rush so she's finishing up just as everyone heads back to class. Then when the bowls have been bussed, Min-jun will come and talk to her. The noodles are good—pretty exceptional for how cheap they are—but Fiona would be lying if she didn't say she came here to be around Min-jun. He's friendly to her, and they talk about the students and about good bars in the city and what she misses about home and what she likes about being here. Plus he wears these Japanese shirts with a wide collar that show off his perfect collarbone that glistens with sweat from working at the stove.

These moments are a reprieve for Fiona. After college, she took some atrocious adjunct positions in the U.S. teaching intro biology classes, latching onto field studies whenever they scraped up enough funding. Eventually she gave up and took the cushy job in Seoul, with long vacations and far more pay than she got at home. Of course, the job doesn't really go anywhere, and she probably couldn't have chosen a less biologically interesting place. Her school visited the Upo Wetlands to see the spoonbills but the whole plot was far smaller than she'd been told. As for Seoul, the city and its surroundings are devoid of all wildlife but for a few birds and some particularly thuggish cats with missing eyes and tails that creep around her apartment and hiss at her as she walks to school.

Min-jun takes a metal cup from the inverted stack on the cooler and pours himself some water from a plastic carafe.

"Kyosu-nim," he says her with a smile. They are the same age, so normally these formalities are dropped, but Fiona likes to be called this—*professor*—even if something about that title feels overblown. He pulls up a chair at the table next to hers. "You have seen?"

He points towards the ceiling, and Fiona looks up at the track lighting, the water stain on the plaster. She nods, wipes her mouth with a tissue and sets down her spoon.

"What do you think it is?" she asks. "North Koreans?"

"President says it is," he says. "So of course not!" He laughs at his own joke. It does seem like quite a leap from missiles launched into the sea to large hovering disks in the stratosphere above Seoul. Even though they looked like pinpricks from the ground, they were actually huge. Eighty meters across—that was the guess Fiona had seen come up a few times.

The heavy man, who had been in the kitchen playing on his phone, walks by, slapping his box of This Plus cigarettes against the palm of his hand. He mutters something to Min-jun without looking at him and heads outside.

"Gwang-il says aliens." He gestures towards his partner outside. Fiona can see through the foggy glass that as Gwang-il smokes—she'd been coming here for a year and this is the first time she'd ever had cause to learn his name—he's craning his neck back towards the sky, squinting against the brightness.

The idea wasn't new, of course. Lots of people, even rational thinkers like Fiona, couldn't quite let the thought escape. It had been seeded for so long, planted in books and in movies, so entrenched in the American narrative that aliens were the first thing she thought of. The night after they appeared, she even dreamed of them coming down, hovering low and beautiful. A panel beneath the vessel would slide open, and an elevator would

snake down. And then she would be here—ready to be on the scene to meet them. Even in her dreams she could never quite see the beings. Instead Dr. Che, who would head the biological exchange program with the visitors, would intercept Fiona's approach to the vessel, handing her a giant stack of visa applications to fill out. She always woke up before the visa ever came through.

In waking, the idea of being in the right place, finally, to explore a new frontier of her field—it was a fantasy she couldn't shake. As a grad student on a field study in Ecuador, the team from another university had confirmed the discovery of the olinguito, a chubby tree carnivore that Fiona found adorable. No one from her school got any credit for their efforts.

"There are people coming here," Fiona finally says, trying to steer the conversation away. "To Seoul. They want to study what is up in the sky. Or they want to be here when something happens."

"What will happen?" he asks. He is staring directly at Fiona when he says this, and she detects something suggestive, just beneath the surface. She's certain there's an attraction. She just can't get him to take it a step further.

"Maybe we will see," Fiona says, raising an eyebrow.

"Saturday," Min-jun says. He shifts in his seat. "My friend's band has show in Hongdae." He swallows hard, looks away at the ground a moment. He looks wonderfully nervous and Fiona can feel her face flush. He must have sensed her cue. "Do you like, um," he searches for the right word, snapping his finger as he tries to translate his thoughts.

Before he can find it, Gwang-il slaps the door open and shouts to Min-jun in Korean—Fiona picks up none of it. She hears the roar of a crowd through the doorway. Gwang-il's eyes are practically bulging out of their sockets, his mouth agape showing his gnarly yellowed teeth, and then he's back outside, neck pitched back and running forward, oblivious to the risk of crashing into someone, charging towards campus.

Min-jun stands and seems to want to say something. His mouth chomps at the air, and nothing but, “Keu, uh, keu,” comes out as his head bobs and nods. Then he bows to her, a look of pain on his face.

“Sorry,” he says. Then he runs out the door. He looks to the sky, and then looks back to Fiona. Then he bolts out of the alley.

Fiona sits at a noodle shop in Seoul, completely alone, with a half-inch of lukewarm broth at the bottom of her giant black bowl. She stands uneasily, and trips as she scoots herself away from the table. There are shouts muffled from beyond the glass. She looks back at her bowl, and though she knows something horrible is outside, she feels a completely irrational obligation to drop a few blue thousand-won notes onto the table. When she opens her door, the noise erupts again. The alley is completely empty, but from the main road she hears car horns and people shouting. A sea of people rush by the narrow opening, flashing in and out of view, heading both directions. Some look up, some straight ahead.

Fiona looks up and sees the disaster. Two of the black spots, two of the specks in the sky, are much larger now. But they are not, as she had seen in her dreams, gently floating down like snowflakes, the majestic visitors’ spacecraft turned to discs on fishing line in a B-movie. Instead they careen downward, a trail of smoke streaming from each of them. One is already nearing the southern horizon; its immense size showing it can't be all that far away. She cannot really make out details of it because it falls too fast—a purple-black ring like a fresh, deep bruise, plummeting out of the sky.

She looks at the main street, and she doesn't see Min-jun anywhere. She allows herself, very briefly, to feel the sting of an impressively awful rejection—abandoned in the guy's own restaurant. How does that even happen? And where is everyone going? Fiona wonders if there is some kind of protocol for what to

do for this kind of situation. High above, two more of the spots have begun to fall. Whatever they are, they're coming down fast.

The first disk disappeared behind the height of the engineering building of her school. A second groaning explosion propagates to her, a thunderclap in her feet and in her head. She hears glass breaking nearby. She crouches to touch the ground as if to make sure it is still there. She looks up, and there are two Chinese students standing on the corner next to her, and they're both sobbing into the sleeves of each other's letterman jackets.

The rest of the dots are now unstable, wobbling from their perch above. It's so hard for Fiona to look away. Though the crowds of university students and shop owners seem to scatter haphazardly, the general flow heads toward the subway station. Not a bad idea. But Fiona lets herself drift in the dense crowd until she's ejected on a side street that goes straight to the Han River. At the end of the road, there's a staircase up a small hill to a riverside park. She races to the top where a small pavilion overlooks the river to one side and the university's neighborhood to the other.

A third concussion hits her, louder than the others, closer. It shakes the little temple behind her. She flips off her shoes and steps up onto the wood planks and takes a full, stuttered breath. Smoke rises in thick black plumes from behind the buildings and mountains ahead at various distances from her—the closest has to be less than a kilometer, somewhere just beyond the back gate of the university. People live there, she knows. It's Seoul—people live everywhere. There are sirens roaring from all directions.

Above her, the final spot has swollen in the sky, blooming above her. It looks like it will come down right onto the temple. She notices with surprise that she’s not afraid.

Instead, her thoughts appear and fade without her really understanding why: her mother in a low frame-rate video-call singing to her for her birthday, the little olinguito she got to study up close that winter vacation. She needs to get toothpaste, she suddenly remembers. She needs a new lunch spot.

The enormous thing passes over her, and she breathes out with relief. A moment later it slams into the Han River with a booming splash. Though the temple blocks the worst of it, though she's a good distance from the crash, a mist of mud washes over her. Fiona clears it from her eyes to see the craft wedged at an angle and split in two halves, each partly submerged in the shallow waters. Huge waves ripple through the shallow waters and onto the highways along the river, towing some smaller cars over the guardrails. For a moment, when the water settles, everything feels still.

Then the survivors begin to emerge from the rift in the craft. They are climbing down their broken vessel, helping each other scramble onto the top and scoot down towards the water. At this distance, they're mostly just smudges—not clearly like her or different. Fiona tries, briefly, to analyze their gait, to discern some classification, but she stops herself. For now, they're people stuck in the water. Fiona is already making her way down from the temple to the edge of the river.

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On the cover:

"Lina"
Buzz Siler

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