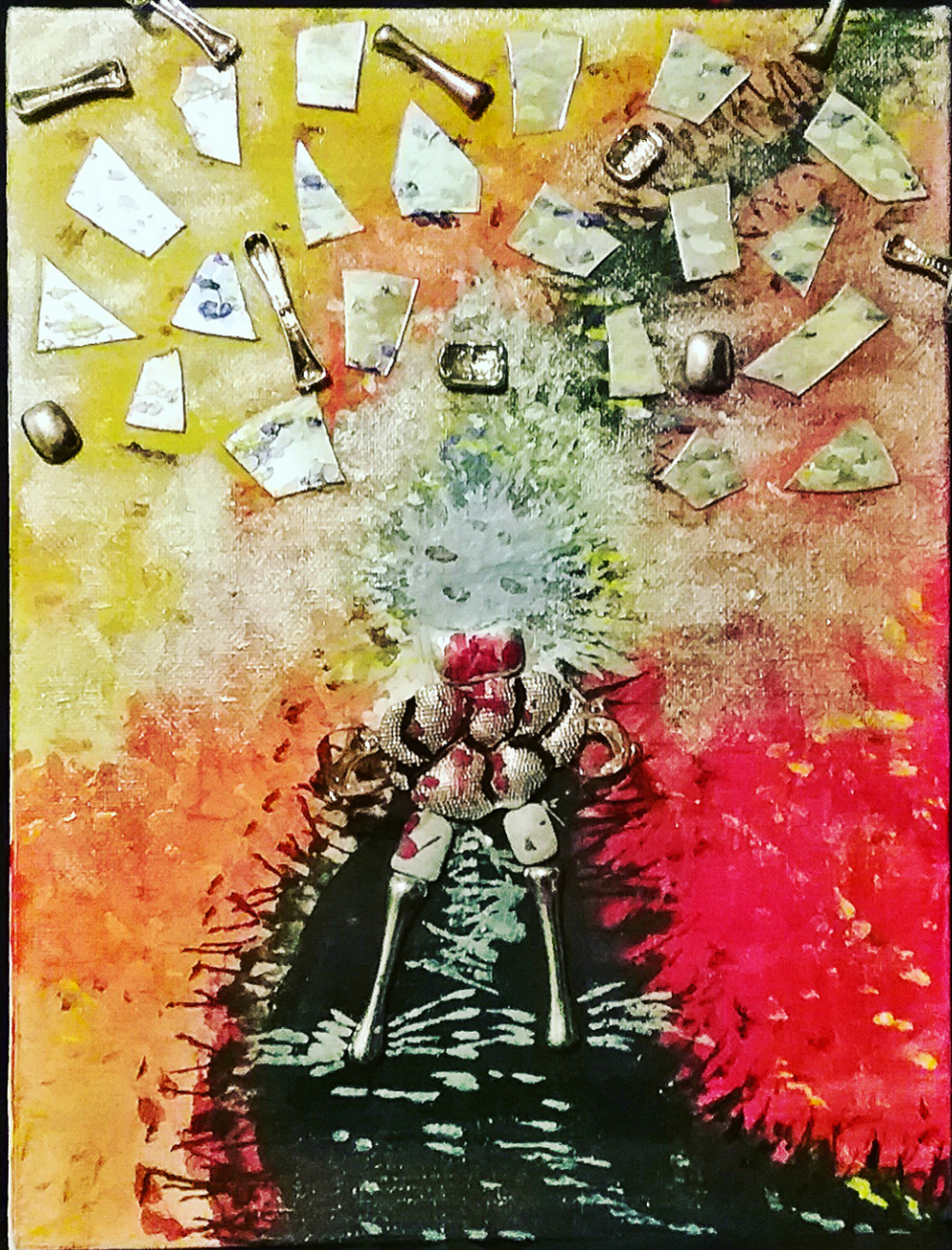


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Editor's Note

Marshmallow up your cocoa and stuff your parka pockets with loose tinsel, 'cause the season of mystery torso holes, meticulously color-coded notes, freshly tweezed pubes, and giant mythical iguanas is upon us!

Ring-a-ding-ding, motherfuckers!

— Laura Garrison

Villa de Leyva

Michael Royce

Villa de Leyva, nestled between two fingers of the Andes, rests in a harmony of white stucco walls and red tile roofs: proof there is still peace in this troubled world. Ancient doorways line the street trailing bouquets of bougainvillea. On the sidewalk, an old lady displays jars of raw honey, fragrant with a hint of flowers and minerals, in early and solitary anticipation of the day. Fossils from the cretaceous past, when the village lay covered by a warm and shallow sea, grace the steps and bell tower of Iglesia de Nuestra Senora del Rosario.

An iguana, swollen to the size of a dog, navigates riverstone-cobbled streets; lines between the real and magic blur. Early-risers pay no notice to the bulging cheeks and crenellated forehead of the prehistoric reptile as it lumbers on abbreviated legs around and beside them.

When the lizard reaches the Plaza Mayor, the fountain, silenced during modernity's brief wrinkle in time, erupts into a full spectrum of colors. The reptilian form, now as large as the taxis that later will cruise the main streets, weaves toward this rainbow while humans trickle into the square. First they come in ones and twos, and at last in a great torrent; but they see neither the behemoth nor the multi-hued waters.

The monster yawns, and Xué, sun god of the Muisca people, escapes the gaping mouth to leap back into the sky. The stone bed

of the plaza glows, and a violent tremoring knocks the sweat-stained hat from the head of an aged *campesino*, smelling of the earth he tills, who woke before dawn to make his trip to town.

Clouds, held by the sapphire sky, tower above the mountain peaks. The iguana, finally bigger than the tourist busses that descend on the village each weekend morning, trails the deity of the ancients up into the heavens like a gargantuan but faithful hound. No one watches as the two dissolve under the unrelenting light of the present, and Villa de Leyva wakes from a magic dream of its past.

MICHAEL ROYCE is a graduate of Portland's 2011 Attic Atheneum, a one-year alternative to a MFA program. His published fiction and creative non-fiction have appeared in *Bartleby Snopes*, *Fringe*, *The MacGuffin*, *PANK*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Prime Number*, and other on-line and print journals and anthologies. His series collectively called "Mississippi Freedom Summer in Eight Vignettes" was published in the "Best of the Net 2011" by Sundress Publications.

The Monster Bazaar

Louis Wenzlow

For When They Come

There needs to be a
labia or scrotum,
stitches, piercings,
an abrasive to underline
the condition.

Animals must play
a role, signifying
we all inflict/suffer
in different ways, or . . .

Jars of eyes.

Brazilian uber-wax
striping down
to the sub layer.

Stray pubic hairs must be
plucked out
with surgery grade tweezers.
Off, off, you lendings!

Old men are babes again.

Pristine, deeper

and deeper penetration.

Pain and knowledge beyond
our standard electromagnetic
range . . .

. . . all so we will be ready

when the earthlings come.

Body Glittering

You are not comfortable
in your body.

Your barnacled seashell eyes
bludgeon the landscape.

Your elbow reflexes
only one way.

When you breathe into a cup
the residue is like a
canopy/lost dreams are beautiful.

FYI I am ordering a semen sample
for on your way out.

And can you read the chart
on the wall there, the lowest
line?

Caress those tiny letters.
Don't stumble
over the finer print.

Softly now. Gently.

Others are coming, fresh,
glittering.

Love Lessons from the Monster Bazaar

Whenever they went to the bazaar, she always bought two, one as a nestling and the other for dinner, to remind the family that everyone is meat.

Another day, she culled only the adopted children. This was to teach un/fairness. The rush and primal pull of blood for

no one came back from there, yet they loved her like crazy, like Father, who only played for meals, if he played at all, until her grin that night, the smudge of red, lip smacking

vengeance, she said, was the secret sauce. If you could just bottle it, the world would forever be raving/ravenous but

what shocked them most when her own time came was how unprepared she seemed, increasingly so, as their slow-roasting hunger and love manifested.

LOUIS WENZLOW's poetry and short fiction have appeared in *The Airgonaut*, *Cease Cows*, *Cleaver*, *Eclectica*, *The Forge Literary Magazine*, *Jellyfish Review*, here in *Jersey Devil Press* and other places. New poems are forthcoming in *(b)OINK* and *The Inflectionist Review*. He lives with his family in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Chick

Emily Livingstone

My brother and I climb into the hutch with the new turkey chicks. It's our job to wipe the blood off their beaks, if there is any. If we don't, Dad says, the other chicks will gang up and peck the bloody ones to death. They can't stand the sight of blood against the white fluff.

We also name and cuddle the chicks, forgiving them when they poop in our hands.

I tell Teresa about the chicks at school. Teresa is probably my best friend, but I'm not hers. She said she didn't celebrate her birthday this year, but I think she did. I tell her to have something to say, to be one of the girls talking before class, and Bella hears.

"Gross," Bella says. "What are you, some farm girl?"

I blink at her. I like thinking of myself as a farm girl.

"What's next? You going to chop off their heads? Get all bloody?"

There's a weird sucking feeling under the ribs on my right side. Bella tosses her head, turning to watch the teacher enter.

"Bloody farmer girl," Bella's friend, Charity, whispers, without even turning her head.

Again, the whooshing sensation in my abdomen, this time right where my belly button is, as if the skin is being sucked in toward my spine. I feel hot and my palms are sweating.

"Ms. S, may I go to the bathroom?" I say, raising my hand.

"Wait to be called on, Grace," Ms. S. says, annoyed. "But yes, go ahead." Another little prick in my belly.

I glance at Teresa as I get up, but she's staring at her notebook. The bathroom is empty, thank God.

I shut the stall door and lift up my shirt. There are three holes in me, two about the size of golf balls, and one the size of a pencil. I use my phone to take a picture of myself. I can actually see the concrete wall and the flusher through the holes in my stomach.

My knees wobble, but I can't sit here. I think about the nurse, but I don't want to show her. I go back to class.

When the bell rings, Bella leans toward me, saying, "Where are your overalls?"

I gasp as I feel another hole shoot through me, right under my breasts. I hope I don't lose those because they're small enough already. I know I look about ten compared to girls like Bella and Charity.

I hurry through the hall, hunched forward, even though no one can see because my shirt covers the holes. I make it through the rest of the day with only two more: my right thigh and my left ankle.

At home, I'm hungry, but I'm afraid to eat with the holes in my stomach, so I just stare at the refrigerator. My brother pushes past me, opens the fridge door and grabs a soda, like I'm not even there. A hole erupts in my shoulder. This one, you can see—so I get a sweater.

At dinner, my hands shake. My half-sister, Juniper, is here tonight, telling a funny story about softball practice. Juniper is beautiful. Boys and girls like her, and she moves like a sexy queen in a movie.

"Where you going tonight?" I ask her as I load the dishes into the dishwasher.

She shrugs, waving a hand to sweep the inexplicable from my grasp. "Out with Timmy and some friends."

Air knives through my chest, right under my neck, and I drop the glass I'm holding. It smashes. What's left of me reddens.

"What are you doing?" Dad asks.

"She didn't *mean* to," Mom says.

"Be more careful!" he says.

I know he grew up in a house that had almost nothing. I know. Tears are sliding down my face, and I manage to sweep up the glass before my arms disappear.

I go to my room feeling crumby, especially since my legs are gone now.

"Can you try to get along with your father?" my mother says through the door.

The air sucks away my heart, the rest of my chest, my neck, and my mouth. I can't answer.

She walks away.

Only a face with ears and eyes, I drift out, past my parents sitting in armed silence, past my brother playing a video game, past Juniper, texting on the porch steps. I waft to the turkey coop and peer in at the chicks. I want to cuddle them, but I can't now. My face is gone, and I'm only a strand of brown hair. A breeze catches me, and I float toward the tree branches. There's so little left; it's easy to lose sight of me altogether.

EMILY LIVINGSTONE is a writer, tutor, and stay-at-home mom living in Massachusetts with her husband, daughter, and German Shepherd. Her work has appeared in *Cleaver Magazine*, *Necessary Fiction*, *The Molotov Cocktail*, and others, and was recently nominated for The Best of the Net 2017. She tweets @Emi_Livingstone.

References

Jason Peck

The background specialist called a dozen people this morning, his Rolodex spinning like a saw blade. But he saved this woman's interview for last. In hushed tones he tells her that she alone knows the character of Stephen Pusateri, a potential hire for the specialist's client.

"But I haven't seen Steve in twenty-five years," the woman protests over the phone.

From the specialist's well-maintained desk, a file eight inches high. At his right hand, three pens—blue for positive news, black for neutral, red for negative. He switches pens mid-sentence with a dexterity that terrifies his co-workers. He alphabetizes to the sixth letter.

"We're a different kind of agency," the specialist says. "Most companies contact the three references provided by the applicant. We catch candidates off guard by contacting everyone *but* those three."

"I'm not sure," she hesitates, and the specialist hears the muffling sound of a phone pressed to cheek. "The cuts still bleed."

But the specialist never doubts her compliance. He holds her file as well; her children are in school for another three hours. Her husband usually cancels their Tuesday lunch date. Plenty of time.

"Steve broke my heart," the woman says, her bitter voice in desperate need of a mournful soundtrack. "I wasted no time, told him no lies. I kissed his cheek in shadowy corners, my hand squeezed his in forbidden seconds. I asked him for marriage. After

uncountable moments he gave me his answer—‘OK.’ Never had two letters sounded so sweet.”

“But his façade soon cracked,” the specialist says, “like the crust on a crème brûlée.”

“More like the ice of a frozen pond in spring,” the woman corrects him.

“I saw his impish eyes from across the room,” she continues. “I caught his smoldering, tormented interior growing beyond his control. Bursting from its barriers, in retrospect. And then the double life emerged.”

“Good, good,” the specialist says, blue pen a blur.

“He had a blond on the side,” she says. “A redhead, too. A virtual collector of women, accumulated without concern. I wept and confronted him. I reminded him of our marriage pledge, but these others—the goddamned harlots—had begged as well, and each in turn secured the pledge reserved for me: ‘OK.’ Still I embraced this would-be bigamist before he dismissed me with a shrug of the shoulders that shattered my young heart.”

“And how old were you?” the specialist asks. Switch to red.

“Four,” she responds. “Then we graduated from St. Aloysius Preschool. He moved away for kindergarten, on to other conquests. Miss Kowalski pulled me aside in class and said he’d write. But no letters. Not to this day.”

“Not a one?” the specialist asks. He thinks of her as a young girl, crying in the church pews with a heart crushed to powder. The specialist would have observed the scene, had he attended the same class as the woman, his notepad tattooed in black ink. Since childhood—always noting the longing stares passed between couples, cataloguing the graceful arc of a classmate’s football pass,

making inventories of the cliques and circles of others—lifelong friendships growing solid like cement.

An education, he claims. As an observer, he learned the moving parts of people.

“Have you ever experienced such heartbreak?” the woman asks him.

He sets the pen aside. He searches for a moment in his own life where love was strong enough to hurt him. He wonders if he himself can boast of a transgression-free background—intentional or otherwise—that the lives in his files cannot.

He instead thinks of his desk. Of his three colored pens. The job usually deflects such personal questions. But now his cue escapes him.

“No,” the specialist responds with perfect honesty. He takes a breath. “But please—remember the interview’s real purpose.”

“It’s good you’re thorough,” she says. “People think their actions don’t matter, they can plow through regardless of consequence. But these little things *do* matter, don’t they?”

“Yes they do,” the specialist says. “It’s my life’s work to find the answers.”

He thanks her and hangs up. A sliver of Steve’s file moves from inbox to outbox. The folder’s still thicker than the specialist’s fist.

Time to dig again, back to the clues that really count.

He flips his fingers through what’s left—Steve’s transcripts from a graduate school that’s not Ivy League, but grows the vines. Executive reports, sworn deposition from a man whose popsicle stick castle Pusateri destroyed in a jealous rage. The winning entry in a sixth-grade anti-drug poster contest—negated six years later by

the discovery of marijuana. Goals never adhered to, opportunities never pursued. What to say of the subject?

The man hides somewhere in here, the specialist thinks, looking toward his papers. I'll find him sooner or later.

JASON PECK's fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Cheat River Review*, *Bartleby Snopes* and *100 Word Story*.

On the cover:

“Panic”

JUNE ECCLES-LOCKE is a Chicago-based musician, producer, writer, and occasional visual artist. They began experimenting with visual media more recently, and consistently repurpose physical objects for use in their acrylic and oil paintings. Their central themes include: mental disorders, queer politics, and various sciences (biology, chemistry, neuroscience, etc.). Personal experiences with panic disorder, anxiety, depression, epilepsy, and sleep paralysis have bled into the canvas, as well as the music June has recorded. They now have three self-composed, self-performed, and self-produced albums available for listen: “caricature of space,” “cinematic superstar [ep],” and “dark side of the son.” All three are available on bandcamp (junesleave.bandcamp.com) and soundcloud (soundcloud.com/junesleave).

