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Guest Editor: Mike Sweeney
Online Editor: Laura Garrison
Production Editor: Samuel Snoek-Brown
Associate Editor: Monica Rodriguez
Readers: Rebecca Vaccaro, Amanda Chiado
Founding Editor/Publisher: Eirik Gumeny

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Editor's Note

Glad autumn tidings to you, Dear Reader. From the multitude of leaves the winds have scattered in the parlor of our woodland cave, we have collected six to press between these pages. Grace Elizabeth Butler's "The Wolf Who Was Late" is a bold crimson sugar maple. Nenad Pavlovic's "How the Ninja Turtles Almost Got Me Killed" is a sycamore, splattered with vibrant crayon hues. J. D. Dixon's "They being (being there)" is a delicate handful of quaking aspen leaves. Gary Moshimer's "Chips and Cheers" is a robust horse chestnut, while Daniel Galef's "How to Pull a Coin Out of an Ear" is a slippery elm, rustling with mischief. Amanda Chiado's "Throw Yourself Across the Earth" is a rich brown oak with sharp points.

Best enjoyed on a misty moor or in the middle of a pumpkin patch.

Laura Garrison

The Wolf Who Was Late

Grace Elizabeth Butler

Mom did everything she could to keep my blood from coming, but it came. It came on a Wednesday in June. The moon was in a waning gibbous phase, or waning “give dust,” as little Corey called it, and faded into the blue summer sky like a marble sinking into a pool. I was thirteen.

Mom had pulled out all the family cantrips and more she found off internet forums with names like “Healing Circle Secrets.” She made me drink “witch milk” every Friday night, a muddy brew of shaved fir bark and black trumpet mushrooms. She made me run outside under a new moon whenever one came. She never let me use commercial shampoos or makeup “pumped with hormones” and had me wash my hair with apple vinegar. When I got the first little bumps on my chest that might be boobs, she bought me too-tight sports bras that kept me flat and pinched my skin whenever I bent over. All that, and I still went to the bathroom that Wednesday and found those little red blotches on my watermelon-print panties.

We tried to keep it a secret from Aunt Margaret, but she could smell fresh blood a mile off, spilled from a kill or otherwise. She sniffed my panties right out of the trashcan and ran through the house, waving them over her head like a flag.

“Faith is bled! Faith is bled!” she said in a singsong.

Her voice carried to the backyard and brought the boys to the patio. They jostled each other and kicked at the sliding glass door, cupping their mouths and howling in turn. Smears of dirt and bruises dotted their faces from their rough play. Little Corey patted the glass from the inside, wanting to join in with the big boys. They always scared me when they got worked up, so I shirked into the kitchen.

“Faith, come get your blessing,” Aunt Margaret hollered from her Gaia shrine room.

“She doesn’t want your blessing,” Mom answered in a snarling voice. She stood in the kitchen with me, pretending to ignore all the fuss as she stuck a thermometer into the butt of a big chicken roast.

“Yes, she does,” said Aunt Margaret. She poked her head into the kitchen, and I saw she had smeared some of my blood on her forehead, right above her penciled eyebrows. It looked like old ketchup that someone had left out on paper plate. “A first blood is especially powerful. It’s her blood. She should get in on the blessing.”

Mom threw the thermometer into the sink and pulled off her gloves. We followed Aunt Margaret to her Gaia shrine room. The hovering smoke from the sage incense made my head feel heavy. Aunt Margaret bent before her Gaia, a naked, wooden women with long hair and big breasts that sagged over her belly, and motioned me over. When I knelt, she picked up my watermelon panties and smeared some blood on my forehead. I didn’t get much, since it had crusted too much.

“You have the power of Gaia now,” said Aunt Margaret. She turned to Mom. “She’s going to get her Change soon. She needs to go see the White Wolf.”

Mom tucked her thumbs into her apron and bared her teeth. “If he touches her, I’m going to bite his dick off.”

“He’s the alpha,” said Aunt Margaret. “We have to do it.”

Mom untied her apron and threw it over the statue. “Fuck Gaia,” she said.

Aunt Margaret made me pick out my best dress, the blue strapless one I had worn to my school’s Valentine’s dance, and sat me on a stepstool in front of the bathroom sink. She circled around me as she dabbed and dotted full makeup on my face from her personal

kit. The little brushes felt like feathers as they dusted over my skin and smelled like plastic and baby powder. Aunt Margaret squatted over me and turned my head this way and that, her face scrunched. Once satisfied, she took us out in her Corolla to go see Uncle Daniel. On the drive, I kept opening the visor mirror to make faces, puffing up my apple-red lips and batting my inky eyelashes. The boys followed behind us in Grandpa Gerald's old pickup, even though we didn't ask them.

When we pulled up to the Uncle Daniel's cabin, the boys jumped from the truck bed and ran laps around the trees, shirtless and shoeless and howling up a storm. Aunt Margaret just clutched her car keys and giggled at them. Jesse and Tyler skittered up to the penis statue buried next to the garden gnome. They snickered and pointed like it wasn't always there. A "phallus," Uncle Daniel liked to call it, "for virility." Jesse grabbed Tyler by the head and tried shoving him onto the penis. Tyler elbowed Jesse in the ribs, and they both went down. The rest of the boys rushed into the scuffle, growling and yipping. The screen door on the cabin clattered open, and Uncle Daniel marched down on them, baring his teeth, but making no noise. The boys broke free and scampered off in different directions.

Uncle Daniel turned to me next, the bare teeth now a big grin. White teeth. White hair. White beard. White Wolf.

"Marge," he said, "Faith. Good to see you girls." He tussled my hair with a heavy hand. "You're late, Faith."

"I am?" I asked.

"You missed the full moon."

"Oh, sorry," I said.

"Would have been nice to have another full moon wolf." He seemed to be talking to Aunt Margaret this time. She shrugged.

"Faith's a good girl. It's not something she could help."

"Suppose not." He smiled the whole time, but his eyes bulged like they wanted to pop out as us. "Let's get inside. I'll consult the runes."

Uncle Daniel's cabin always had lots of dead animals in it, hanging off the walls or propped up in corners, their eyes open and their mouths hanging open a little. They always looked surprised to be dead. The cabin had a musty, peppery smell that made my nose itch. I worried I might be getting the Scent. Uncle Daniel led us to his study, where he had a deer head hanging over his rolling chair. The head had a big pair of antlers that reached down towards us like a deformed pair of hands with stubby, grey fingers. Uncle Daniel scooped a handful of runes out of a drawer and tossed them into a wooden bowl on his desk. The runes clacked and skittered around before settling. I later learned they were carved from bison bones. More dead things.

"What do they say?" asked Aunt Margaret. She had never learned Norse.

"The usual stuff," said Uncle Daniel as he prodded them around. "Looks like she's good and fertile. The wolf rune is there, so she's got the gift. She should turn soon."

"That's good." She bobbed her head and clicked her manicured fingers together.

"I'd like to talk to her alone."

Aunt Margaret hesitated for less than a second before saying, "Of course," and left me alone with the White Wolf.

"How you feeling, Faith?" he asked.

"Alright," I said. In truth, my stomach hurt, and I hated the slick feel of the pad Aunt Margaret had given me. He wet his lips, looked me up and down.

"Put your arms up."

I reached for the ceiling, my arms responding to the alpha's commands before I could think.

"Turn around."

I did, and the skirt of my dress flared, showing my bruised shins.

"Are you wearing a bra?"

I shook my head. My sports bra would show over my strapless dress, so I ditched it.

"You're becoming pretty. You've got some development, too. Are any of our boys sniffing after you?"

"Them? No." I thought of a pretty boy I saw at my school between periods, who wore a beanie with a skull on it and had long eyelashes like a girl. He smiled at me sometimes. He wasn't in my pack. He probably didn't even know about packs. "Boys are stupid," I said.

"Good." Uncle Daniel chuckled. "Would have to give them a licking, otherwise. You'll get your Change soon, Faith. Soon after, you'll be getting a mate."

"You?"

He wet his lip again, a little pink worm poking out over his white beard. "Maybe. It is my right. First pick and all that."

I nodded. Another thing I couldn't stop. Like getting my blood, these stupid boobs, the Change with a big "C."

"You hungry?" he asked. "I got some venison going in my slow cooker. Heck, let's open a bottle of wine and celebrate. You wanna' try wine, Faith?"

"Sure." I had sneaked sips of wine before. It didn't taste bad, but I disliked how it burned my throat.

Uncle Daniel strolled out of the study, stopping to tug my hair when he passed. I heard him say some words to Aunt Margaret in the hall, followed by Aunt Margaret's high-pitched hyena laugh. Something tapped on the study window. I turned to see Jesse making gaping kissy faces on the glass. He then pressed his naked torso on it and made fart noises by trapping air on his belly. He snorted and laughed. I walked out of the study and past the kitchen, where the adults debated two red wines that would have identical aftertastes of vinegar. Jesse and the other boys followed my steps in the windows, their howls seeping through the log cabin walls.

I went out to the back patio but stopped to pick up a little wolf statue made from painted plaster that was sitting on a table by itself. When I got outside, I sat in a rocking chair on the patio and thumbed the statue. It had its teeth bared, its neck hunched. I flipped it see if it had a penis, but only found more smooth plaster. As I rocked in the chair and felt the hard creases the wolf's fur, I thought about some of my other cousins, Mabel and Sarah and Tianna. They had left to make babies, and I never saw them anymore. Maybe when I Changed, I would get to see them on the night runs, our new feet pounding the earth in synch.

The boys circled me and pushed my rocking so hard my head banged on the wooden back. I shouted and shoved, then started scratching. They didn't leave until Uncle Daniel came back to chase them off.

Aunt Margaret drove me home around ten. I looked for the waning gibbous moon over the road, but it had already left. When we got back, Mom hissed at me to go to bed. I did, but my fan kept me up with its clanging on its hinge. I would wake up, turn it off, start burning, then turn it on again. I felt the wetness of the pad between my legs and worried it would leak into my sheets.

While I struggled around my bed, I thought about the first time I saw the adults Change. I was nine. We had stayed the night at Uncle Daniel's cabin for a Samhain party. I heard the adults yowling around downstairs and the startling crashes of their beer bottles hitting the floor, so I sneaked out of my room. They had run out to the patio and started stripping. The full moon swam through the sky with two thin clouds trailing it like it was towing them along. The adults lobbed their clothes everywhere, some shirts settling over the hedges. Aunt Margaret's lacy Victoria's Secret bra smacked me in the face with its clip. The moonlight washed their naked forms, but they had already turned so hairy, I didn't see

much down there around their legs. No one seemed to notice me but Mom. She turned to me as the pale grey hairs slithered over her face. Her eyes looked weepy as she stared, her irises collecting the moonlight and shining it back at me. She might have yelled at me to go back inside, but her mouth had filled with long wolf canines. She jerked her head and whimpered. Uncle Daniel circled around in his new white coat and howled. The rest joined in, a discordant chorus, then they scampered into the brush. Mom slipped through the branches last, turning back to watch me one last time, her ears flat on her skull, as if warning me not to follow. I didn't. I knew they had gone out to kill things and have sex.

Done with sweating in my sheets, I slipped out of bed and tip-toed outside. The mosquitoes' collective buzzing sounded like a stretched-out growl. I walked down the asphalt road, wincing as my bare feet found the pebbles and chipped holes. A car drove up behind me, its headlights blowing up my Wonder Women pajamas, but it rolled by without slowing. I walked until I found a patch of woods, then walked on inside.

As I pushed through the stabbing branches and leaves that trailed over my legs like snakes, I heard a small animal rustle in the brush by me. I stopped, and it stopped. A spot of blue-green light glimmered out of its eye like a jewel from one of Mom's necklaces. I could smell it, smell the gamey fear that seeped through its sweat. It must have thought I came to hunt, like my family would. A nose twitched in the shadows, scanning me back. I reached, wondering if I would feel a soft snout or a needle prick of teeth, but it hustled off, crashing through the woods with desperate abandon. I pressed on.

I found a spot where the trees had thinned around a log split down its spine. I slipped out of my pajamas and threw them over the log carcass, then shimmied off my panties. They had new blood stains, broken out around the edges of the pad. I stamped them into the wet grass. Gaia could have her blood back. The stars poked around the wavering tree branches like peeping eyes. I stood there,

naked, smelling the pregnant dampness of the woods, the mosquitoes on my face, the moss on the fallen tree. No moon outside. I didn't care. I threw up my arms and prayed to Gaia, let me Change. Don't make me a wolf that is always running after another. Make me into something without a pack, that can slip through the forest and disappear, like a fish slipped into a pond. Make me into something with no hunger, no burning in the groin, no need for another's fur to press against mine. Mom always told me you need to give something to get something. As I stood with my arms raised and my eyelids trembling shut, I wondered what else Gaia would want.

GRACE ELIZABETH BUTLER earned her BA in Writing at the University of Tampa, while working part-time as a paramedic in the Tampa Bay region of Florida. She has previously had her short fiction published in the literary journals, *Veritas* and *Neon*. Her works are primarily concerned with fabulism and magical realism.

How the Ninja Turtles Almost Got Me Killed

Nenad Pavlovic

Everybody knows that Teenage Mutants Ninja Turtles live in the sewer, but I was beginning to doubt that they live in our sewer. While their sewer was a dry, spacey place, suitable for performing all sorts of neat skateboarding tricks, our sewer was just a dumb metal circle with a bunch of holes on it that gobbled up your marbles on an particularly unlucky shot, and in which you could throw stones to make a "ka-plonk!" sound, if you're really bored.

On one rainy week which transformed our street into a puddle-dotted mudslide, I found out that there was more to our sewer than I'd previously known. First, it could clog (the Ninja Turtle sewer never ever clogged). Second, it opened. I don't know how, it must've had some sort of a trick mechanism, because all the children from the street tried opening it a whole bunch of times and we never could. My dad said that the lid was just heavy, but I knew he was lying because Zach The Fifth Turtle could lift it no problem. I know Zach was almost fourteen and I was only nine, but he couldn't have been that much stronger than me (could he?).

So, it wasn't just a metal circle on the ground, under it was a hole, but it was dark and yucky, and I was pretty certain there were no Ninja Turtles in there. One good thing I learned that day was that all those marbles weren't permanently lost: that plumber man got us a whole treasure trove of them from the bottom. They were all covered in mud though. My first neighbor said that it wasn't mud, and found it very funny for some reason when I polished each and every one of them with my shirt. So, I learned that there were definitely no Turtles in our sewer, and I was about fifty marbles richer (weighing at almost three hundred, probably the richest in my street), all in all an OK day.

From all of this I gathered that the Ninja Turtles probably live in some other city. My best friend Mary Ann said that they must live in Italy, because they're always eating pizza, but I suspected that she might be wrong; I don't know much about the country, but I've never seen the Crooked Tower of Italy anywhere in the cartoon. And for some time, that was that on the subject of looking for the Ninja Turtles.

Later that same summer, my other best friend Alexander came to me and said that he made a radical discovery: he had found the actual sewer in which the Ninja Turtles live! And it wasn't in Italy, or another city, but rather close, by the river! Of course, I had my doubts: his last two discoveries, the forgotten World War II weapons in a haunted mill, and the vampire's treasure in another, unrelated haunted mill, turned out to be bogus (actually, that later one was never confirmed, we chickened out and never actually went inside). But this time he not only swore it was the truth, he was willing to show it to me next time we go fishing.

It was supposed to be farther down the river from the shallow rapids where we usually fished for chub. There were a lot of fantastic stories about the places down the river. If there really was a huge white rock from which one could jump into a deep pool full of monstrous catfish, there could also be a sewer housing real live Ninja Turtles (I say "real live" because I want to set them apart from the fake Ninja Turtles I've seen in the theater, which were obviously just some guys in costumes).

I was sure he was just pulling my leg, and a bit afraid that we'd get in trouble for going too far from our neighborhood, but just a short walk from the rapids, he stopped and pointed at the shrub. And it was there. Real-life entrance to the sewer, looking almost exactly like the ones in the show, and certainly big enough for a Ninja Turtle to slide from on a skateboard.

It was a summer sundown, the golden-red rays didn't provide much light for spelunking, and we were weighed down by fishing

gear and bags of embarrassingly small fish, but we promised to return the next day right after breakfast and become the Sixth and the Seventh Ninja Turtle by lunchtime.

It didn't go as planned. The sewer entrance was there, but there was no way of getting to it: the sides of the riverbank were steep and sleek with mud and wet grass, and additionally booby-trapped with burrs and nettles. And we couldn't even go around because there was too much water near and even inside the pipe.

"We gotta come back then the water level drops" said Alexander suspiciously like an adult.

"When will that be?" - I asked disappointedly, toying with my miniature flashlight which I was so eager to use that day.

"Dunno. By the end of the summer, I guess."

I rode my bike to the river every day for the next couple of days to check if the water level dropped, but it was never quite dry enough to just walk inside the pipe without ruining your sneakers (and earning a spanking).

The search for the Ninja Turtles was never fully forgotten, but it did take second place to some other things that happened in the meantime. Mainly, the late-night movie marathons on Channel Eight. Boy, were those things great! It was like going to the video rental several times, only for free, and you could watch movies that you'd usually never get permission to. On some days, they played lame kind of movies, like dramas (or yawn-a-thons, as I called them), but on the other, there were comedies, Japanese cartoons with robots and ninjas, sci-fi's, and my personal favorite: horrors!

Of course, I couldn't stay awake that late, even if I was allowed to: that's where the magic of VCR programming came into place (I think my dad never forgave himself for teaching me how to do it). The biggest thrill of the whole thing was not knowing what you're gonna get: TV program just said "Movie marathon" and the type of the movies shown, without any actual titles, so watching the tape the next day was kind of like opening presents on Christmas. My last catch consisted of a movie called "Demons", which my dad

called "the dumbest thing ever". I thought it was pretty cool, apart from it being named "Demons" when the monsters in it were actually zombies; I guess the guy who made it just didn't know that much about monsters. So naturally, I was pretty excited when I inserted the last remaining tape I was allowed to tape over (which previously contained "Asterix", "Horton Hears A Who!" and some weird movie with naked ladies) and set the recording time for midnight.

The next day, I got up at seven o'clock, sat in front of the TV with a plate of sandwiches and pressed play, eager to see what kind of monster this movie will be about.

But it wasn't even half way through the movie when I lost not only my appetite, but most of the color in my face. This scary movie wasn't fun, it was terrifying! Almost all horror films were about a hero fighting, and eventually defeating, a monster that was obviously a man in a rubber suit or a special effect (never actually got what "normal" effects were). Or in other words, adults fighting a made-up thing. This movie was about children getting eaten by a thing that I had previously seen with my own eyes and therefore for certain known was real: a clown! And that wasn't even the worst part: the place where the killer clown lived, his loathsome lair, looked identically like the place we almost went in to look for the Ninja Turtles. On the verge of tears, with the video on pause, I sat in cold sweat mulling over that thought: we almost went willingly onto a platter of a monster so terrible that even all the Ninja Turtles combined, even with the help of master Splinter, couldn't possibly defeat.

When I saw Alexander later that day, he yelled "I know!" as he ran down the street towards me, and I instantly knew what it was that he knew. We promised that we'll never even go near the awful sewer entrance, not for all the biggest catfish in the world, nor for a chance of meeting the Ninja Turtles ever again.

NENAD PAVLOVIC was born in Serbia in 1983. He majored in English language and literature at the University of Priština, Kosovo, and is currently living in Norway, working as a teacher and scribbling away every Friday night with a pint of cold lager by his side. His short fiction (mostly fantasy, sci-fi and horror, with a few exceptions) was featured in many magazines and short story collections published throughout the Balkans. He is also the author of the novel *Hokus Lokvud* which won the Mali Nemo award in 2013.

They being (being there)

J. D. Dixon

i.

In the pale sun
of a small life's troubles,
in a quiet place,
I sit calmly in my chair,
playing chicken with my words.

ii.

Tragic mountains rise
sharp against the horizon.
A chorus sweetly
sings. Friends: speak of the devil
and nothing much will happen.

iii.

The sad, lonely truth:
nothing much of anything
happens in this town.
They call it the centre of
all, but that's a fairy-tale.

iv.

The world sits apart.
Men don't face it when they pray;
they face forwards and
nowhere else. There are no clouds
in the goddam sky today.

v.

The sun's radiance
burns bright in my quiet eyes,
and it's gone too soon.

vi.

Stark beauty mirrors
an undesired romance
for this dying world.

vii.

Beautiful foothills
distort the world; I tell them
my heart is bigger,
it is all that I can see.
But they say the world's so wide.

viii.

A small child speaks:
I'm afraid of the darkness.
There's no light today.

J. D. DIXON is a novelist, playwright and poet based in Glasgow, UK. His first novel, *The unrivalled transcendence of Willem J. Gyle* (Thistle Publishing, 2017) was shortlisted for the 2018 Somerset Maugham Award, among other accolades. His first play, *It's My Turn*, debuted at the Edinburgh International Science Festival (2019) and has subsequently gone on tour around Scotland. He is currently working on his second novel and a collection of poetry.

Chips and Cheers

Gary Moshimer

Dr. Zolman has made our house call, with his miracle tracking chip to implant in Father's neck. Father was found walking twenty miles up the highway in bare feet at two a.m. And he started calling my twin brother Aaron and me this: Laverne and Shirley. He wanted to know when we'd grown boobs. This hit Aaron hard—he'd tried to exercise and diet. We had a bad gene from our mother's side and now she was dead, leaving no one to defend us.

Father had taken our photos from the wall of his house. He hung new frames and left the generic people in them. "They look nicer," he said.

He eyed Zolman. "Are you here for the girls? Make them big losers?"

Zolman dissolved knockout pills in Father's coffee. The implant tool looked like an electric staple gun. BAM, it was in. Father woke up rubbing his neck, squinting at us. "I see you two as water polo cheerleaders."

Something went wrong with the chip. It did its job, tracking Father, but it also made him stronger. He grew younger each day. He lifted weights. He went to the college gym, where he was alumni, and started barking orders. People listened. He looked like Charlton Heston. He went without a shirt. One night he was up in the trees on the ridge in a loin cloth of his own making. It was purple, part of our mother's dress. My brother and I hardly slept, watching the monitor where he blipped along, always on the move.

* * *

One morning he showed up at our apartment. He wore a suit and tie. The purple loin cloth formed a neat triangle in his breast pocket. "Come girls, we're whipping you into shape. You'll meet the team."

We could not resist. He had pinwheels for pupils.

He paid trainers to torture us: fifty reps, a hundred. We were fat fish, mouths pumping as dying gills. We flopped poolside. The polo team wore Speedos hiding small dolphins. They gave us love kicks.

"They'll be ready," Father said.

"Zolman, we need it out."

He said that would be complicated.

I said, "Don't you see his power? He's inside everyone." I saw the pinwheels in Zolman's pupils as well.

We came to on the couch, rubbing our necks. Zolman was gone.

Our chips made us shop. We wished to pamper our man breasts and full figures at Victoria's secret, but the lady had a security button. The shoe place was more cooperative. They had monster shoe horns, jamming us into pumps. We bobbed around the floor, seams bursting. The salespeople liked it. "That's ten pair you own now." We felt like geishas with our bound feet.

We bought purses, and at the bath and body shop filled them with fragrant marbles and bubble bath for our first match.

"WE...ARE...THUNDERCATS!!"

We were the base of the slippery pyramid. The other girls perched in our fat palms, little butts snug. A finger might slip in,

unseen, a special perk, because we still liked girls and our Speedos would sprout gherkins, little salutes like flag poles.

We quivered under the weight. We were not getting the best workouts because Father had disappeared. His chip no longer worked. We couldn't find Zolman, either. We feared the worst but were on a new endorphin high.

"T-H-U...N-D-E...R-C-A-T-S!! GO!!!"

Aaron created the distraction by strutting the THUNDERCATS banner on his gherkin, while I poured the bubble bath. It made for an exciting fourth quarter—echoing referee whistles, the dolphin men rising many times with giant bubbles mistaken for the ball.

Zolman returned, drunk, wearing several coats. We saw him staggering on the shoulder, leading Father by the hand. They were casualties, Father with the bloody wrap on his neck, Zolman crying. We pulled them into the car.

Father was his old self, dirty face, suit hanging from shrunken frame. He did not recognize us in dresses and sensible make-up.

Zolman slapped his own face. "I've done terrible things!"

"No," I said. "We're happy for the first time."

We cleaned them up, bought Father a smaller suit. We took them to the championship match.

There were footholds in our blubber, launching points allowing crazier spins and twirls. We bounced our girls higher, always catching. People cheered along. Father, half up the bleachers, tossed his cane with malice, but I was able to intercept it and fire it back like a javelin, perhaps too hard. The rubber tip clonked his forehead, rendering his limbs stiff and straight, a pure neurological response. His body shot like a plank through the slats to the concrete below, his ribcage squeezing out some last number combinations, an address or latitude to find an answer, or a

question. The buzzer sounded, and we carried him out with pride. The game was won.

The number was Father's lawyer. Turns out he wanted cremation, his ashes tossed to the sea from a remote bluff in Nova Scotia where he'd spent time with our mother. There was a note: She floundered in the surf, her body whale-like. I tried to save her. Her soul left her. I wanted to live with her soul.

That was too much for us, too far. We put his urn in the back of our mammoth shoe closet.

Meanwhile we inherited the house, redecorated, threw parties. We had the cheerleaders and the dolphin men. All were unthreatened by our small penises. The girls mounted us like favorite stuffed bears of girlhood. The men rolled us around the carpet and threw balls at us.

One drunken night we broke into the pool. We had Father's ashes. We dumped them in. The cloud became a water tornado and Father formed before our eyes. Out he climbed, an ash man with reddish eyes.

"Now," he said, his voice an ashy whisper, "we're going to whip you into shape."

GARY MOSHIMER has stuff in *Wigleaf*, *Frigg*, *Atticus Review*, and many other places.

How to Pull a Coin Out of an Ear

Daniel Galef

Bunkum was learning how to pull a coin out of someone's ear. He had a website open on the library computer that said "How to Pull a Coin Out Of Someone's Ear" at the top. "I'm learning how to pull a coin out of someone's ear," he said to the library.

Billings coughed. "You can't get something for nothing." Billings was on the computer next to Bunkum. His laminated name tag said "Billings." They'd never met.

"I know that," said Bunkum. "It's magic." "Stage magic," he said, so Billings wouldn't think he was the kind of library wacko who believed in real magic.

"You're a kind of library wacko," said Billings, like he was telling Bunkum something, "looking up how to do magic tricks on the computer. I'm doing research."

"Are you writing a movie?" asked Bunkum, who didn't care. He didn't want to keep talking about magic. He didn't like being called a wacko, even by a different wacko.

"No, I'm doing research," said Billings, pressing the tab key nine times.

It sounded like Billings wasn't going to talk again, so Bunkum read the next part of the trick. "Six: Hold the coin up for everyone to see. Say something like 'He/She has got a coin in his/her ear!' or 'Ta Da!'" He held up his coin, which was a quarter. "Ta da!" Bunkum said, quietly so Billings wouldn't think he was talking to him.

"I'm composing a monograph on the history of ghosts," said Billings. "I expect it is going to be seminal. Did you know that this library is haunted?"

"I thought you didn't believe in magic."

"Ghosts aren't magic. Don't be stupid."

“Sorry.” Bunkum wasn’t liking this conversation very much either. He didn’t like being called stupid, even by a kind of library wacko. And he was pretty sure that ghosts fall under the umbrella of magic.

“Why do you want to pull a coin out of someone’s ear?” said Billings. He scooted his chair closer. “If you want money you should learn how to pull someone’s wallet out of their pocket without them knowing.”

“That’s not a magic trick.”

“Or their watch. I don’t know if that’s the same trick or not, but I saw a magician on a boat who took people’s watches and also their wallets. It might have been two different techniques.”

“I don’t want to steal people’s money. I want to astound them. I want to take a coin right out of their ear and then give it to them for free, like it was really in their ear and it’s theirs. Didn’t your grandpa or somebody ever pull a coin out of your ear?”

“I never had any grandparents,” said Billings, like he never tried a margarita.

“Or somebody. I might have a grandkid someday, or a kid someday, and I decided I want to pull a coin out of his ear.”

“Or her ear.”

“Or her ear,” said Bunkum. “The trick is non-gender-specific.”

“Is it? Golly,” said Billings, who wasn’t trying to hide he was having fun.

“Because everyone has ears, see.”

“I doubt *everyone* has ears,” said Billings.

“Most people have ears. If my grandkid doesn’t have any ears I can pull a coin out of his nose. Or her nose.”

“That’s a very versatile magic trick.”

“Thank you,” said Bunkum, like it was a compliment. That annoyed Billings.

“Anyway, I don’t think that would surprise me, for someone to pull a coin out of my ear,” said Billings. “I bet I would say, ‘I don’t

think you really pulled a coin out of my ear. I bet you had that coin the whole time.' That's what I would say, I bet."

"I don't want to surprise you," Bunkum said. "I want to astound people. Different people. And astound them, not surprise. It's more."

"No, I think 'surprise' is more. Like, 'whoa, what a surprise!' That's what I'd say if a magician stole my wallet."

"Astound sounds more impressive," Bunkum said. He was really riled now. "As-tound! As-TOUND!" Some people in the other desks were looking over. "Astound," Billings said. Bunkum looked at the next step on the screen. "Seven: Take a bow (optional)." He figured he didn't need to practice that. He went back to step three, which was the whole trick actually, and tried to pull the quarter out of his own ear. The angle was funny, and he dropped it. It rolled right to the air vent under the desk.

The quarter didn't fall into the vent. It lay flat across two khaki-colored slats. When Bunkum grabbed at it his pinky knocked the coin down the hole. "Shit," Bunkum said.

"That should be your magic word," said Billings. Bunkum said nothing. "'Shit,' I mean," said Billings. Bunkum didn't reply. "You step up onto the stage, drop a quarter down the vent, and say, 'Shit.'" Bunkum was silent. "Applause," said Billings.

"Fuck you," said Bunkum.

A couple of minutes went by.

"Why don't you write a seminal monograph on shit," said Bunkum.

"I did." Billings squeaked his monitor so it was pointing at Bunkum and Bunkum read: "On the Social History of Copromastics and Analytic Scatometry."

Bunkum read the first paragraph, then pulled down the scrollbar on the side of the screen to read the second. The bar was tiny, a pellet. The monograph must have been a hundred pages. "You're more a wacko than I'm a wacko," said Bunkum.

"I'm the ghost of a world-famous stage magician. Five hundred

years ago I fell off a cruise ship and drowned. I haunt this library and pull ghost coins out of people's ears and hide them down the vents."

"Ghost coins."

"Yeah, like pirate doubloons and buffalo nickels."

"I'm going back to my research." Bunkum pulled on the word so Billings would know he was just as serious about pulling coins out of ears as Billings was about shit, or ghosts, which weren't real anyway, or if they were real they would certainly qualify as magic.

Bunkum got really into his magic trick, working step three over and over again until he could do it five times in a row without dropping the quarter. A librarian came to tell him the library was closing. Bunkum pulled a coin out of the librarian's ear. "You have to go home," said the librarian. "Ta da," said Bunkum. All of the other desks were empty, including the one Billings had been in.

Bunkum left the library with a print-out of the webpage he had been looking at. "What a heck of a library wacko," he said to himself out loud, and laughed. He felt for his wallet but it wasn't there. He was astounded!

DANIEL GALEF has written a gaggle of short stories, a gallimaufry of poems, four and a half plays (including a musical), crossword puzzles, comic strips, ransom notes, a dictionary definition (Merriam-Webster, "interfaculty," adj.[2]), and the only true fortune cookie fortune in the world which happens to be the fortune you're going to get the next time you get a fortune cookie. His most recent fiction appears in the *American Bystander*, *Bards and Sages Quarterly*, *Barnhouse*, and *Bull & Cross*.

This story incorporates text from the WikiHow article "How to Pull a Coin Out Of an Ear: 10 Steps (With Pictures)"

Throw Yourself Across the Earth

Amanda Chiado

It was a super bloom spring & the yellow butterflies were flying into speeding traffic. Charlie was looking at his phone, a text from his boy Troy, who always knows where the party's at, "Downtown at Clifton Park," Charlie woofed out. "Oh, yeah!" I was trying to Snapchat the mustard flowers, wild poppies— Yet, the world smashed dark & echoes of metal Folded into swans, flew through my head. I was wearing new lipstick, a rusty red. I'd just shaved my legs. It was a Saturday, the second week in May. The river was throwing itself across the earth, trying to baptize the Trump Era. Even the fish were getting shoved tail-first down and over the rocky pathway to nowhere. I tasted blood, drank the river in big gulps. I shook Charlie, but his face had no face and he hung like a meat-pile from the seatbelt. Water rushed into the windows, happy to fill space. I didn't die. That is the hard part. I stare at Charlie in a tuxedo casket, wearing his prom clothes that still smell like cigarettes. I hold my breath behind my patchwork face.

JDP's own **AMANDA CHIADO** is a writer, teacher and arts advocate. She is the Director of Arts Education for the San Benito County Arts Council and is an active California Poet in the Schools. Her chapbook *Vitiligo: The Ascension of Michael Jackson* was published by Dancing Girl Press in 2016. She won the *Molotov Cocktail* Shadow Poetry Award in 2016 and again in 2019.

On the cover:

“Untitled”

STEFAN KELLER is an artist living in Germany. He likes to paint pictures, occasionally compose music, live out his creative imagination in digital composing, and occasionally take pictures as well.

