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Editor's Note

If you've ever lost yourself in a maze, or helped someone find a way out,

If you've ever been out of place or time,

If you've ever lost someone and made unusual choices,

If you've ever desperately wanted to be haunted,

If you've ever felt trapped,

If you've ever worked the night shift for minimum wage . . .

This one's for you.

— Laura Garrison

Sleep Training the Minotaur

Sarp Sozdinler

We take turns reading to it.
Mostly cookbooks.
Or the instruction manual
for a dehumidifier.

It prefers
the parts in *italics*.

At night, it dreams
of a smaller labyrinth—
just a single hallway,
with no decisions.

Sometimes it calls out
for Ariadne.
Sometimes Ikea.

We do not correct it.

A Turkish writer & poet, **SARP SOZDINLER** has been published in *Electric Literature*, *Kenyon Review*, *Masters Review*, *Trampset*, *Hobart*, *HAD*, *JMWW*, and *Normal School*, among other journals. Their work has been selected or nominated for anthologies including the Pushcart Prize, Best Small Fictions, and Wigleaf Top 50. They are currently working on their first novel in Philadelphia and Amsterdam.

Eric Wears

John Repp

Eric wears a retro-1950s pompadour & shares
a fraught lunch with the guy who will be

The New Guy till a newer guy arrives. The maple
agrees as any tree must: slowly. The book

illustrates a bewildering bevy of warblers,
but the yellow one glimpsed just now

is, of course, idiosyncratic. The sun sits
atop a horizon of tree limbs, all the dusk-drawn

insects rising from the marsh. Back home,
a king snake reluctantly uncoils from the stoop.

JOHN REPP grew up along the Blackwater Branch of the Maurice River in the Pine Barrens region of southern New Jersey. In 2024, Seven Kitchens Press published his latest collection of poetry, *Star Shine in the Pines*.

Schrödinger's Poptart

September Woods Garland

Death devoured his beloved over the course of a waxing moon, blackness creeping up her fingers and toes like a morbid thermometer. He cried at her bedside, holding her hand and begging for a do-over. The town was far and the burden too great, so he moved her body into the walk-in cooler where they stored their bounty. Shelves of preserves that once signaled abundance now haunted him with a promise of finite servings of her love.

To pass those first nights without her, he hid from the world and baked obsessively, the kitchen his personal limbo between life with her and a flavorless future alone. Hands sticky with jam and confectioner's sugar, he hungered for the days he and his love foraged bulging flats of huckleberries and sold their love-pies at the local market.

It was at the height of the full buck moon when the idea entered his mind like a download from the cosmos. Surrounded by his culinary creations, he was consumed by this new inspiration. The berries of his belated, hand-plucked with love, would serve his vision now—a vision he scribbled on a scrap of parchment in a surge of grief-driven madness.

His was a generative madness, first tasted when she led him on a polar plunge in the peak of winter. Like that dip in the ocean, her attention had shocked him into his body after years of numb plodding. He'd watched her run naked into the surf, laughing and beckoning him near. He'd never run with such abandon. After all

he'd seen and done that he'd been sure had condemned him to a lonesome existence, she and her moon showed him hope.

It was this madness he channeled now as he placed his beloved among the *mise en place*, the star ingredient of his newest confection. Into the early morning, he worked on her. As he sliced through her epidermis, he bisected a tattoo of an eclipsing moon. The ink had faded through decades and death, yet the sigil pulled at him like an invitation to elemental intimacy.

That skin-moon glowed, echoing the lunar light they'd bathed beneath. Moon after moon he, the skeptic, had felt magic. In a world where he'd not been shown grace, she'd led him to the safety of moonlight and they'd poured each other out. Dissolved into the sea. Shivering, loving, alive.

Peeling back the penumbra, he half-expected moonlight to pour from the wound and illuminate a detour around his grief. Instead, her insides shone slick under the artificial light. Muscle, tendons, yellow bubbly fat. Ordinary and dead.

His hands stayed steady, his mind intent on preserving every ounce. Layers deep he cut, through flesh and to the bone. Digging for something he couldn't place. Searching, certain he'd discover a treasure. Something to cling to.

Her smell mingled with the fading scents of days-old scones and muffins and a compulsion to feel her insides arose in him, the onset a rush that nearly knocked him off his feet. To be close again, intimate. A yearning to be inside her pulled like the moon on the tides.

Just a quick touch, he bargained.

He recoiled at first, the cold of her parts an unsettling confirmation. There was no life in her. No blood pumping or lunar

magic flowing. Just cold death. But his heart refused and directed his hands to go deeper. Bare fingers searching. Tentative touch gave way to exploration—pulling and tearing. A rhythmic movement, urgent and frenetic. Soon enough, ragged filets lined the butcher’s block counters. Timers dinged. Flour and sinew coated his apron where he wiped his hands after the final fold and seal of each pastry. Batch after batch, he stuffed them with equal parts berry and beloved.

He wrapped the tarts in foil and scrawled the dates of a decade’s worth of full moons on each with a permanent marker. A vision began to form, fueled by love and lunacy. A vision of ritual and reunion, of consumer and consumed. His heart pounded at the thought, his mouth dry, an acrid taste creeping forth.

Where for weeks her body had lain in stasis, preserved by the power of electric cold, he now placed tray after tray of his love in her new, consumable form. Preserved. Here, not yet gone—not really. And maybe never, if he were to believe in consumption. And act upon that belief. If he could only bring himself to.

SEPTEMBER WOODS GARLAND hails from the Pacific Northwest where she enjoys long, romantic walks through haunted houses and feeding Bigfoot peanut butter & seaweed sandwiches. Her work has been supported by Hypatia in the Woods and has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Berlin Literary Review*, *The Stray Branch*, *Crow & Cross Keys*, and elsewhere. September serves as editor in chief at *Weird Lit Magazine*. She splits her time between Richmond Beach, WA and Fidalgo Island.

www.septemberwoodsgarland.com

haunting, a séance nijuin renku

Nicholas De Marino

chanting down Samhain

bare prayers and skin

strip spirit's veil

— Mme. Belle

sweaty hands transmit

Morse code and hot readings

— M. Belle

poker faces

frowning through

stale dairy air

— Mr. Gall

ectoplasmic message:

buy more cheesecloth

— Mrs. Wheeler

sunken seats

cradle ghostly curves

stiff as a board

— Mr. Wheeler

candles flicker
so does patience
— Dr. Gall

*

table rattles
as dropped pens tattle
footsie below
— M. Belle

she toes an inseam
capillaries swell
— Dr. Gall

croissant moon scatters
light crumbs
on dark fabric
— Mme. Belle

buckles and buttons strain
against tapas and vino
— Mr. Gall

colliding forces
her orbs on the table
oh so tacky
— Mrs. Wheeler

a glimpse of woman's virtue
through deep-cast fishnet
— Mr. Wheeler

legs cross
lovers double-cross
pheromone harvest
— M. Belle

earthly apparitions
bound not by vow or ether
— Dr. Gall

*

parlor games plied
by silver tongues
and spectral phallus
— M. Belle

stoking and stroking
spirited affections
— Mr. Wheeler

night bloom peels
perfume laces nostrils
plants peddle must
— Mme. Belle

taut nerves and skin strain
as clockwork keeps time
— Mr. Gall

sonar or later
empty skulls echo
childish adultery
— Dr. Gall

spirits yawn unroused
by desperate hands
— Mrs. Wheeler

NICHOLAS DE MARINO is a neurodivergent writer and poet. He's got several writing credits, degrees, and accolades that have nothing to do with cats, plus some that do. Read more at nicholasdemarino.com.

Sievers

William Bonfiglio

In cell after cell, he captures again
the gothic arch-barns in muted hues,
the correction houses near Göttingen.

Eight rows of two panels, a line, and then
another row of three panels, askew:
in cell after cell, he captures again.

Before, he wove warp and weft like a wren.
These slivers were barely combed when fed through
the correction houses near Göttingen.

Not once does he vary his scale or lens,
but holds his perspective, a hostage view.
In cell after cell he captures again

a world that gives nothing to violent men,
for their welfare and ours remanded to
the correction houses near Göttingen.

For what could it be if not violence when,
filling one sheet, he commences anew:
in cell after cell, he captures again
the correction houses near Göttingen.

WILLIAM BONFIGLIO's poetry has been awarded a Pearl Hogrefe Grant in Creative Writing Recognition Award, the Julia Fonville Smithson Memorial Prize, and has appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *New Letters*, *PRISM international*, and elsewhere. This is from a series of poems responding to visual art created by institutionalized patients and collected by German physician Hans Prinzhorn in the early 20th century. Prinzhorn designated such works "Artistry of the Mentally Ill."

late night at bungie's

Beatrice Bleakley

Dave is a: not paid enough and b: baked as hell, constantly.

That last one is the only good reason to work the late night shift at a Bungie's. Nobody here cares that he's baked as hell. They care that he punches in their midnight burger order. And he's perfected the *exact* amount of stoned he needs to be to still be able to do that. It's an art. No matter what his mom says, it's a fucking science. Dave is broke, living in a shitty apartment, and permanently dateless but he is also, basically, a scientist.

So tonight, around midnight, Dave is watching the light patterns the colors on the wall makes when a guy comes in. He looks a little more straitlaced than his normal midnight clientele. Dave's pretty sure he sees a priest's collar under the battered leather jacket he's wearing, although it doesn't seem to fit him well. But Dave's not here to judge. In addition to being broke, living in a shitty apartment, permanently dateless, and basically a scientist, Dave is very zen.

"Hi, welcome to Bungie's," he says, grateful for the script he will probably be able to run in his grave. "What can I get for you tonight?"

"Cheeseburgers," the man answers, a little gravelly, surveying the menu. "I have been informed that you have the best fast food burgers from a reliable source."

"Uh. Cool. Thank you."

"So provide me... with cheeseburgers."

"Like. Plural?"

“Yes.”

The man’s staring is freaking him out a little. “Cool. How many?”

“Seventy.”

Dave pauses. He’s *too* stoned, isn’t he? The day has come. Mom was right.

“Uh, sorry,” he says, trying to sound as unstoned as possible. His voice drops a couple octaves. “*How* many?”

“Seventy.”

“Like. Like seven zero?”

“Approximately.”

Man, this guy’s gotta stop staring at him like that. “Uh. Yeah. Sure, man.”

The man holds out a crisp bill. “Will one hundred money be appropriate?”

Oh, fuck. Math. Dave is *definitely* too high to do math off the top of his head. “...absolutely.” They won’t care, will they, his bosses? If he just sticks it in the register? Money’s money, right? “Do you... mind waiting?”

The man’s face twitches. It’s the most his expression has changed since he came in and it makes Dave jump. “Yes.”

Fuck. He is definitely, *definitely* too stoned for whatever this guy’s on. “Uh. Okay. I don’t... we don’t have seventy cheeseburgers... done. Is the thing. So if you want seventy, you gotta... you gotta give us a little time, man.”

The man’s face twitches again. “Very well.”

“What’s... what’s your name?”

The man’s eyes narrow. “Why?”

"For... the order." The man continues to stare. "So I can... I can tell you when the order's done." The man sighs, and says something Dave does not understand for the *life* of him. "Sorry?" He repeats himself, a little annoyed. Dave doesn't get it this time either so he just gives up, punching *seventy burger guy* into the machine. "Okay. Just, uh. Just wait."

"Dave," Mick hisses in the back. "Dave, c'mere."

Dave sidles into the back. Mick, who is seventeen, and no less stoned than he is, stares at him. "What?"

"Dude, you're too high."

Fear grips Dave. "Dude, how could you tell?"

"Dude, you put *seventy burgers* down."

"That's how many he asked for."

Mick looks floored. "He asked. He asked for *seven zero*?"

"Yeah, man."

"I gotta..." The color is draining from Mick's face. "I gotta do *seven zero burgers*?"

"Yeah. Sorry."

"Excuse me."

Mick and Dave crane their necks to see the man is leaning over the counter.

"I would take them as they come," he tells them.

"I." Mick looks just as lost as Dave feels. "I got seven ready? For starters?"

"Seven will be fine for now."

Mick looks at Dave. Dave looks at Mick.

"Fuck," Mick mumbles. "Okay." He grabs the seven and hands them off to Dave, who cradles them as best as he can. He returns to the counter, dumping them all in front of the man.

"Here you go, uh, Father." You call the ones with collar Father, don't you? Dave wouldn't know. He doesn't have much experience with any kind of father.

"Thank you." The man unwraps one and voraciously tears into it, like he's never eaten before.

"You, uh." Dave feels like he has to say something. As a scientist. "You good, Father?"

"Why are you calling me that?" The man asks, mouth full.

"The, uh. The collar."

"Ah. Yes. I suppose that makes sense."

"Are you... on something? Which, that's fine. Jesus, uh. Jesus probably gets it."

The man crumples up the foil on his burger and reaches for the second.

"What do you know about the heat death of the universe?"

"Uh. Nothing."

"How nothing?"

"Nothing nothing."

The man takes a bite.

"It is theorized," he tells him, through a mouthful of burger.

"That one day, the universe will reach a state of maximum entropy. All energy will move into spaces with less energy." He takes two more rapid bites. "Heat will no longer flow. No more energy can be produced." He takes a third, massive bite, and wads up the foil. "Once that happens, the universe dies. Once all that remains is heat, nothing that's left can survive."

Fuck. Dave is, officially, regretting the joint. "Oh, yeah?"

The man grabs the next burger. "Mmhm."

"When, uh. When's that gonna happen?"

“Unclear. This presupposes that the universe is infinitely expanding.”

“Is it?”

“Nobody knows.”

“Psychedelics, yeah? Gotta be. “Okay. So the heat death of the universe... means cheeseburger time?”

“In a strictly linear sense, perhaps.”

Dave tries to reevaluate the guy. His pants are scuffed. There’s dirt on the knees. “Did... did you fall? Maybe hit your head?”

“I hit nothing. But I see *very* clearly.”

“That’s... that’s good, I guess.” Dave watches him reach for another burger. “Did... did God tell you to order all those burgers? Cause, uh. Cause I don’t think He should be doing that.”

“There were no cheeseburgers in the Garden, you know.”

“Yeah. Makes... sense.”

The man leans in conspiratorially. “I always thought Eve got something of a raw deal.”

“Yeah. So does my mom.”

“I know.” The man is singleminded. He doesn’t fidget or shift. He just keeps eating. “She was in such pain during childbirth, you know. She didn’t know what was happening. Nobody explained it to her. She thought God was finishing the job. She kept begging *Lord, was my sin so great?*” The man finishes his burger. “It’s the sort of thing that stays with you, you see.”

“Right. Right.” God, does Dave wish Mick was out here with him. “I could see that.”

“It didn’t seem fair. Especially as I have always suspected that Eve passed the test.” The man bites into his burger. “It is unfair to rig a game.”

“What... does Eve have to do with the, uh. The heat death of the universe?”

“Everything, don’t you think?”

“I got six more burgers,” Mick says. Dave picks them up and brings them over to the counter.

“The same is true of Abraham and Isaac, of course,” the man continues, as if Dave never left. “In reverse. Abraham failed that test. I *know* he did. What would be the point, if he didn’t? What’s the point of any of it?”

“Um.” Dave’s sweating a little. “I don’t know, Father.”

The man licks a bit of ketchup off his thumb. “You seek a familiar term in an unfamiliar world.”

“Doesn’t everybody? I guess?”

He snags another burger. “It does become a habit, doesn’t it?”

Is he making a nun joke? Probably not. This guy doesn’t seem like a joker. “Yeah.”

“What do you think of games?”

“I, uh. I play a little LEGO Star Wars, sometimes.”

“I meant the sort that God plays.”

“I don’t... know what sort of games God plays. I’ve never... I’ve never even been in a church for services.”

“No. Me, neither.” Dave’s brow furrows and he opens his mouth. “Job, you know. Job was a game. Between him and Satan. *That’s* the sort of game God plays. He plays with lives.” The man nails him with that intense stare, biting into yet another burger.

“Do you believe that’s right?”

Dave swallows.

“I dunno that it’s my business to question God,” he answers, not entirely sure of what he’s saying.

"You don't think we must question everything?"

"I don't... question *everything*. I know that the sky's blue, most of the time. And grass is green, most of the time. So... why shouldn't I know that God knows His business?"

"You believe God has a plan, then."

"I dunno. I hope so, I guess."

"More burgers," Mick says. Dave takes an armful and returns to the counter.

"Hope," the man mumbles, chewing thoughtfully but not slowly. "I have seen much hinge on hope."

"Yeah. Sure."

"Hope... is not enough."

"I mean. It's gotta be, right?"

The man grabs another burger. "Do you believe in the heat death of the universe?"

Dave doesn't know what the right answer is here. "Yeah, I guess. It sounds plausible."

"Do you believe in God?"

"As much as anybody else, I guess."

"Then do you believe that when the heat death of the universe comes, it will kill God, as well as everything else?"

"I." Dave swallows again, taking a deep breath. "I don't think God's part of the universe."

"No?"

"No. I think... I think God's somewhere else."

"Hm."

Dave thinks about asking the man what he thinks, then decides he doesn't actually want to know. "Yeah." The man takes another burger. "Father, should you be eating all those?"

"I think we are all building cathedrals. I think we are all, even atheists, praying."

"...cool."

"Do you pray? Out loud?"

"No. Uh, no, sir."

"I have never understood the point, if you believe He's always listening. I have never seen the wisdom. Surely He already knows."

"More burgers," Mick says. Dave, mechanically, fetches them.

"Perhaps it comes down to peace," the man mumbles, through meat and cheese and bread. "Perhaps it is simply that I have never known peace." He looks up at Dave. "Have you known peace?"

"My mom's kitchen," Dave answers truthfully, because he is too frightened to do otherwise. "She likes to play Joni Mitchell while she cooks."

"Mm." The man grabs a burger. "I imagine it is good to know peace. I imagine it feels how an easy rain smells in the middle of the day."

"It doesn't rain much here," Dave says, because he doesn't know what else to say.

"As I understand it," the man agrees.

"Father, do you need me to... call someone?"

The man takes a final bite. "There is nobody to call."

"Your, um. Your parish? Or... or a hospital?"

"Dude," Mick hisses. "Dude."

Dave creeps up to the window. "Yeah?"

"Dude, are you keeping track of how many burgers I've made?"

"Am I—" Dave gives him an aghast look. "Dude, do you not know?"

"Dude, it is *so* many burgers."

"I have consumed twenty eight," the man says, seemingly unhindered by their volume. "You have forty two to go."

Mick gives him a despairing look. Helplessly, Dave shrugs. Muttering, Mick returns to the kitchen.

"These are very good," the man tells Dave.

"They're alright," Dave answers, a little winded. "For the price."

"No." The man balls up his foil. "They're very good, I assure you. I've never had anything like them."

"I'm... glad you like them."

"It is strange to like anything."

"Yeah. That's true."

"I liked the Judean Date Palm. Very much. But that's gone now, too."

"It... sucks when things are gone."

"It only means they mean more when they leave, I suspect." The man wads up his foil again. "So I've heard. I feel every wound as though it were raw."

"More burgers," Mick drones. Dave gathers them up, pauses. He stares down at them before making a sort of exhausted decision, even with weighing the chances that this guy's gonna deck him for saying it.

"Father," he says, not that he really believes he's a Father, at this point, only out of a lack of what to call him. "I don't... think this is good for you. I don't think any part of this is good for you."

And he drops them on the floor. The burgers, sloppily wrapped on account of the volume and the late hour, tumble across the grimy tile.

"Dude," Mick mumbles, appalled.

The man gives him a good, long look. Dave braces himself. It's fine. It's not the first time he's been punched.

The man leans across the counter, and crooks his finger. Against his better judgment, Dave leans in.

"David McCluskey," the man tells him, seriously. "Your mother loves you. Even when she fights with you, she loves you. You are her only son. Her only child. You know the sky is blue, most of the time. You know the grass is green, most of the time. Know that your mother loves you, always."

The man turns, leaving Dave frozen behind the counter, and walks out the door. The bell over the doorway rings, jarring in the abrupt silence.

Dave doesn't move a muscle.

"How many burgers did he eat?" Mick finally asks.

"Lots," David croaks.

"Christ."

Dave looks at all the little balls of tin foil on the counter, and swallows.

"Can you-" Dave clears his throat. "Uh. Sorry. I'll... I'll clear all those up, can you just- I'll be back in five."

"Yeah, man," Mick answers, looking a little bowled over.

Dave disappears out the back door into the parking lot. The fresh air is diluted by the smell of the dumpster and it's almost a relief. With shaking hands, he pulls out his phone. She picks up on the fourth ring.

"Baby?" Mom mumbles. "Aren't you at work?"

"Yeah." Dave's breathing heavy. "Yeah."

"Is everything okay?"

“Yeah.” Dave stares into the distance, into the woods out behind the Bungie’s, like maybe if he does long enough something’ll stare back. “Yeah. I, um. I love you, you know that?”

There’s quiet on Mom’s end.

“Do you want me to fly out?” She asks.

“No.” Dave rubs his eye furiously. “No.”

“I will.”

“I know.” He clears his throat again. “I’m fine. I’m just. It’s been a long night.”

“What can I do to help?”

“No, I just... I just needed to hear your voice.”

“Okay.”

“I can’t stay. I just... thank you. For picking up. For everything.”

“I want you to sleep in tomorrow, okay? I’ll send you a couple bucks for coffee.”

“Okay.”

“Call me when you wake up.”

“I will.”

“And I love you, too.” Her voice turns decidedly affectionate. “And lay off the reefer, a little.”

“Okay. I will. Bye, Mom.”

“Bye, baby.”

Dave hangs up the phone, because if he doesn’t right then, he never will. He looks up at the inky sky, at the glittering stars, at the constant moon.

And then, taking a deep breath, he walks back into the Bungie’s, closing the door behind him.

BEATRICE BLEAKLEY is a writer, and that's all these is to be said about that. She has previously been published in *Assignment Literary Magazine* and *Kennings Artistic and Literary Journal*. If you like her work and enjoy silly nonsense, you can find her @beableakley.bsky.social.

On the cover:

“Lost Crazy”

BIANCA BLAUT is a self-taught illustrator from Brazil. Her work is viewable on Instagram @blauth__.

